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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

# All My Relations

## A Process-Indigenous Study in Comparative Ontology

by

Christopher Paul Daniels

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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**Abstract**

Over the past few decades, issues associated with how to understand the diversity of religions and the religious 'other' have been at the forefront of Religious Studies. There have been numerous critiques of both the 'New Comparative Theology,' which advocates practical engagement in dialogue and/or textual comparison between traditions, and 'Theologies of Religions,' which is a more theoretical approach to how the diversity of religions are, or should be, understood. These critiques have centred around accusations of imperialistic hegemony, the use and reification of categories, and whether the variety of religions can, or should, be understood in a manner that acknowledges rough equality in epistemic and soteriological value.

This thesis argues that the particular theological perspective and methodology of John Cobb Jr., based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, manages to avoid most, if not all, such critiques by advocating a form of complementary, transformationist, pluralism. Cobb understands the diversity of religious perspectives as potentially complementary rather than contradictory, and argues for mutual transformation of the traditions involved, based on the understanding that each has something to be learned from the other.

The process approach and perspective presupposed by Cobb is not only uniquely suited to address the issues of religious diversity but also promotes equal openness to the religious 'other.' To illustrate this, I undertake a comparative experiment between a Whiteheadian metaphysic and Indigenous ontology to show that a process based, relational metaphysic is better capable of interpreting and accommodating Indigenous ontology/epistemology than the traditional Western, materialistic/mechanistic view. The experiment reveals how universal relationality and interconnectedness in process terms are exemplified through various Indigenous concepts, language structures, cultural and religious practices, and epistemology. I contend that process thought not only provides a

better understanding of religious pluralism but also meets the challenge posed by Indigenous scholars who call for a Western perspective that reconciles the contemporary worldview of science with the relational ontology of Indigenous cultures and facilitates a recognition of Indigenous peoples as equal partners in inter-religious and inter-cultural encounters and dialogue.

## Preface

This thesis would never have been undertaken were it not for two critical events that happened during my first class in the MA program in Religious Studies at the University of Calgary, which was conducted by Keith Ward, a visiting scholar from Oxford. I had enrolled in the program to investigate whether there was an adequate way to understand the diversity of religions while still accommodating the distinctive nature of each. At the time, I knew nothing of John Cobb Jr., Alfred North Whitehead, or Process Philosophy. The class was a study of 'Theology of Religions' and religious pluralism in general, that being one of Keith Ward's many specialities. I was struck by Ward's depth of knowledge and understanding but was left unsatisfied with his response to a particular issue. As a leading proponent of Comparative Theology, Ward promoted openness to other religious views based on the understanding that one person, or group of people, cannot possibly know all there is to know about the nature of God or reality. His favourite saying at the time, which he repeated in both public and class lectures, was that he realized he was at best 60% right and 40% wrong in his religious understanding—but he was not sure what comprised that 60%. When asked, however, about the divinity of Jesus and his death and resurrection, he replied that as a Christian he *knew* that was in the 60% he was right about.

After class one day while in conversation with a classmate, who was particularly involved in inter-religious dialogue between two major religious traditions, the topic of Native religion came up. The student's position was made clear when it was stated "Those people worship animals. That's crazy and I just don't get it." After a brief embarrassed pause I carefully pointed out that I did not believe this observation was true. Besides the point that 'worship' was a Western concept that did not necessarily apply in this context, I believed Native people had reverence for the divine as it was expressed through the natural world, which included animals. It was not, I thought, that 'animals' or

other aspects of the natural world were worshiped *per se*, but that the divine was present in all creation, so a relationship was possible *through* the natural world. After another pause, the response was: "It still sounds like animal worship to me. That's still crazy and I just don't get it."

What I came away with from that class, besides the excellent instruction of Keith Ward, was that Comparative Theologians were not completely open to the transformation of their own religion through dialogue without holding on to certain unassailable positions, and that when the epistemic distance between normative ontologies was too great it was difficult, if not impossible, to transcend that gulf, leave one's own baggage and presuppositions behind, and view the religious other as an equal and valid partner in dialogue. The other was just 'crazy.' Or As George Steiner says "To the baffled ear, the incomprehensible parley of neighboring peoples is gibberish…"[1] My naïve goal of finding a way to understand religions in a truly pluralistic way seemed very distant. That is, until I read John Cobb Jr. and Alfred North Whitehead!

[1] George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 56.

**Acknowledgements**

I would first like to acknowledge the contributions of my supervisor, Tinu Ruparell. Without his philosophical and academic expertise I would not have known how to undertake such a project and follow it through successfully. I can't count the number of times his insight put me back on track. I would also like to thank Virginia Tumasz for her detailed knowledge of Whiteheadian process philosophy, her endless patience and enthusiasm in sharing that knowledge, and the many hours of conversation that shaped and corrected my own understanding.

I would like to thank the numerous people that helped formulate this thesis, including the administrative staff and faculty at the University of Calgary Religious Studies Department, the directors and staff of The Center for Process Studies, and my friends and colleagues who listened to endless monologues on process thought that contributed so much to the clarification of my understanding of Whitehead.

I also want to thank my sons, Colin and Jonathon, and my wife Jaki, for the many years of challenging dinner conversations that both honed my critical thinking skills and kept my enthusiasm for lifelong learning high, something instilled in me from an early age by my parents, Paul and Eileen Daniels.

Thanks also go out to Pauline Johnson (Fishwoman), and my wife Jaki (One Who Walks With Eagle Mountain), for contributing so much to my sensitivity toward, and understanding of, the Indigenous path. One simply needs to observe their daily life to be inspired by their example.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my Uncle and Aunt, Rudy and Edith Daniels. Twenty four years ago, after a weekend of stimulating late night discussions at their farm in Clavet, Saskatchewan they said, "You are so keenly interested in religions and philosophy. Perhaps you should consider going to university and studying them formally." It all started there.

## Dedication

.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife and life-partner, Jaki Daniels. She is both my inspiration and support, not only for this thesis but all life's joys and challenges. Without her, none of this would have been possible.

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## Key to Whitehead References

This thesis will follow the standard reference method for Whitehead scholarship that uses in-text citation with the abbreviations below, with other sources referenced in standard Chicago style.

| Symbol | Definition |
|---|---|
| AI | *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Macmillan, 1956. |
| MT | *Modes of Thought*. New York, New York: The Free Press, 1968. |
| PR | *Process and Reality.* Edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherbourne. Vol. Corrected Edition. New York, New York: The Free Press, 1985. |
| RM | *Religion in the Making.* New York: Fordham University Press, 1996. |
| S | *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1927. |
| SMW | *Science in the Modern World*. New York: The Free Press, 1925. |

# Chapter One: **Introduction**

Religious and cultural diversity and plurality is a fact in all countries in the modern world, none more so than in multicultural countries like Canada. This fact can be a source of strength and growth, but also a point of contention and friction, exemplified by the current racial and religious difficulties facing society, both nationally and internationally. Coming to terms with the alterity of the religious 'other,' and their subsequent foreign worldviews, has become a major factor in promoting understanding, tolerance, and eventual acceptance. Some theologians, like Jacob Neusner, have stated that thinking through difference and accounting for the outsider is the single most important problem facing religion for the next hundred years.[1] Celebrated Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng has expressed his own concern that "There will be no peace among the peoples of this world without peace among the world religions."[2] Religious pluralists feel that understanding and accepting the possibility that the wide variety of religious sentiments may have legitimation and value in their own right would contribute to the sense of equality and toleration necessary for peaceful relations and authentic dialogue between cultures and religions in today's diverse society. John Hick has stated that much of the war and killing going on in the world is both validated and intensified by religion "because each faith has traditionally made an absolute claim to be the one and only true faith."[3] In Canada, there is, perhaps, no greater religious 'other' than that of our Indigenous peoples, yet given the historical track record, perhaps no other tradition demands and deserves, and has failed to receive, our tolerance and understanding more as a society.

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[1] Jacob Neusner, "Thinking About "The Other" In Religion: It Is Necessary, but Is It Possible?," *Modern Theology* 6(1990): 273.
[2] Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Continuum, 1993), xv.
[3] John Hick, "The Next Step Beyond Dialogue," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul Knitter, *Faith Meets Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 112.

In the last one hundred years there has been a growing trend toward a more ecumenical and pluralistic approach to understanding the diversity of religions which has resulted in numerous hypotheses on how best to approach such religious diversity. Yet few, if any, have included the spiritual understanding of North America's aboriginal peoples in their considerations. In the 1980's the discussion became particularly intense as 'theology of religions' scholars debated whether a more pluralistic perspective, one that saw religious value in other traditions, was more suited to authentic inter-religious dialogue and encounter than those with a more exclusivist perspective, which understood all religious value culminating in only one tradition—usually their own. By the mid 1990's the debate had largely abated, with no clear consensus. A few theologians, however, had decided that it was more important to *do* inter-religious theology than theorize about it, so scholars like Keith Ward, Francis X. Clooney, and James Fredericks pioneered a new approach to comparative theology that emphasized participation in dialogue with other traditions and/or detailed textual analysis and comparison in order to learn about and from other traditions. These 'New Comparative Theologians,' as they have come to be known, advocate openness to religious transformation of their own tradition in light of whatever truths and insights can be appropriated from the religious 'other,' while remaining fully committed to their home religion. However, these comparative investigations are still largely conducted only between Christianity and other major world religions, without regard for Indigenous traditions.

During the 1970's and 1980's John Cobb Jr. was deeply involved in inter-religious dialogue, particularly with Buddhism, with a goal toward *mutual* transformation between traditions.[4] Unlike many religious pluralists, Cobb understands each tradition,

[4] For the most comprehensive example of his theological method and perspective see John B. Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998).

even the nature-based religions of Indigenous peoples, as unique ways of discerning different aspects of the total matrix of reality in a complementary manner. However, unlike more exclusivist attitudes, he also views each tradition as having roughly equal potential for religious value. Similar to comparative theologians Cobb recognizes that reality is too vast and complex for any one tradition to know all there is to know, so is open to possible religious truths in the 'other.' Also similar to comparative theologians he is firmly committed to his own religion, Christianity, as he understands it. However, unlike others, Cobb's openness to the religious 'other' is completely unrestricted, and he continues to advocate *mutual* transformation of religious traditions through dialogue, not one-way appropriation of religious insights. These latter two characteristics set Cobb apart from other comparative theologians.

Cobb has no reservations about the fact that his particular theological perspective, towards both his own Christian understanding and that of other religious traditions, is informed by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, and the process theology of both Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.[5] It is Whitehead's metaphysic that is the basis of his pluralist ontology, which seeks to retain the distinctive uniqueness and alterity of the diversity of religious traditions, yet allows seemly contradictory religious views to coexist in a complementary manner. It is a process theology-informed Christology that allows for unrestricted openness to the religious 'other' while retaining a firm commitment to Christ. As far as Cobb is concerned, even traditional Indigenous traditions have much to teach about relating to the world and the divine, although that is a study

[5] Although Cobb's process perspective is evident in virtually all his scholarly works, for detailed examples of how process philosophy informs both his understanding of Christianity and other religious traditions such as Buddhism, see: John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, vol. Second Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007)., John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976)., and particularly Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*.

that has hitherto not been attempted from a process philosophical perspective.[6] It is within this context that I present the arguments that follow.

Before describing what this thesis will specifically address it is important to clarify what it will *not* be concerned with. Firstly, I will not be attempting an exposition of John Cobb Jr.'s theological position in its entirety. To do so would entail far more space than is appropriate, is not necessary for the point of this thesis, and is better represented by Cobb himself. The vast corpus of Cobb's work stands on its own and could not be improved here, largely due to the clarity and expansiveness of his thought, scholarship, and writing. I will, however, need to bring attention to key elements in his philosophical and theological thought that, if not entirely unique, are necessary for an understanding of the motives behind the current study.

Secondly, although I will need to contextualize this thesis within the 'Theology of Religions' and the 'New Comparative Theology' discourse, it is not meant to be an exhaustive historical study or critique of either. Because I am not a theologian embedded in a particular religious tradition, this thesis cannot be thought of as a form of 'inter-religious' dialogue or exercise in comparative theology. It is grounded in the academic discipline of Religious Studies in general and comparative philosophy of religion in particular, in that it is an experiment in comparative ontology. I will, however, point out common critiques of both Theology of Religions and the New Comparative Theology, which, I will argue, Cobb's process-based theological method largely avoids. The point of this thesis is to be a precursor to inter-religious and inter-cultural encounters, rather than an example of such.

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[6] John B. Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 137.

Third, it is not my intention to provide yet one more interpretation of Whitehead's metaphysical philosophy, or the Process Theology that has sprung from it. Chapter Four will provide a fairly technical explanation of many of Whitehead's concepts and terms. This is required because of their complexity and uniqueness, but it will be limited to those which are necessary to understand the subsequent comparative study. Because there are a variety of interpretations of his philosophy, it will also serve to qualify my particular Whiteheadian reading. The conclusion of that chapter will include a synopsis and generalization of the concepts presented, as well as an overview of the pertinent themes. For those not interested in the systematic aspects of Whitehead's philosophy, this section may prove enough to understand the rest of this thesis.

Finally, I will reiterate in key places throughout this thesis that, because I am not Native, I do not presume to represent the Native perspectives as if I were. This thesis is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous beliefs and practices and I will take care to clearly articulate my own perspective and limitations as a non-Indigenous scholar.

In general, this thesis is an experiment in comparative ontology between Whiteheadian process metaphysics and Indigenous worldviews. Initially I argue that achieving the 'openness to the other' that is important in Cobb's transformationist theology and the comparative theology currently advocated by many theologians, requires an initial antecedent step. That step involves learning and developing sufficient understanding about the 'other' so that when such encounters are engaged it is with the recognition of potential epistemic equality. Rather than mere sensitivity to the ontological differences between the parties involved, the worldview of the 'other' is recognized as a real possibility; or 'live hypothesis' in the terminology of William James.[7] To truly meet

[7] This concept, and how I am using it, will be explained and further developed in Chapter Two.

in encounter and dialogue as equal partners requires that the 'other' not be considered delusional or 'primitive' in a simplistic sense, which is a hegemonic perspective that many people have viewed as problematic in past encounters, especially in regards to Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, as Cobb and other comparative theologians stipulate, to be in authentic dialogue[8] requires the humility associated with acknowledging that no one party can know everything there is to know, and the 'other' has something to say from which to learn. Without this fundamental understanding any dialogue will prove fruitless because there is nothing the 'other' can add to one's own completed knowledge. If the epistemological basis of the 'other' is considered nonsensical, and therefore impossible, it is unlikely the 'other' will be thought to have anything of value to contribute. Thus, an unequal partnership is inevitable, which cannot help but distort the dialogue in favour of the dominant partner.

My position in this thesis is that Whitehead's process metaphysic is in a unique position to provide an interpretation of Indigenous ontology in light of a contemporary Euro-American philosophy. This position is necessary to promote the epistemic equality required for authentic inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. The experiment in comparative ontology herein will show this to be the case.

To expand further on the motives behind this study, and why I believe Whitehead's metaphysic, in the context of John Cobb Jr.'s transformationist attitude, is suitable for the task, will require further discussion on Cobb's particular theological perspective. To that end, Chapter Two: *Complementary Pluralism and Transformationist*

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[8] Paul Knitter offers a 'working definition' of dialogue which he feels would meet with general agreement: "dialogue is the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding." Authentic dialogue, then, occurs when each party is truly respectful and open to what the other has to say, with the underlying possibility that either or both could learn from the encounter. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 207.

*Theology,* situates this thesis in regard to its relationship to Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology. It discusses the various attitudes towards other religions that have been identified, the typologies which have been typically assigned to these attitudes, as well as their critiques. It identifies Cobb's particular perspective, the basis for his rather unique approach, and why his approach largely avoids many of the critiques that have been leveled against other positions. In particular, it illustrates how a process perspective is useful in avoiding some of the pitfalls associated with many other attitudes toward the diversity of religious belief. The reason why Cobb's particular approach appears to be in a better position to accomplish this task, I argue, is because of its foundation in Whiteheadian process philosophy. Although it initially appears fairly simple, it is only viable because a pluralistic, process-based metaphysic, such as Whitehead's, is assumed.

First, a process approach helps avoid the reification of categories of understanding which is prevalent in this particular academic field, and allows for a more pluralistic approach to the 'other' while still being committed to one's own tradition. Secondly, Whitehead's pluralistic ontology, according to Cobb's interpretation, allows for a plurality of discernments that can accommodate religious perspectives that originally appear contradictory but may in fact be complementary. Hence, it provides an interpretive basis for making the worldview of the 'other' in any inter-cultural encounter a 'live hypothesis.' This leads to a greater possibility of both partners entering into inter-cultural and inter-religious encounters on more equal epistemic terms. Seeing the worldview of the 'other' as a live hypothesis is, I suggest in this chapter, a necessary precursor to the dialogue advocated by Cobb and other comparative theologians. The experiment in comparative ontology at the heart of this thesis attempts to determine to what extent a Whiteheadian process metaphysic is capable of interpreting the Indigenous experience, thereby illustrating the efficacy of this assertion.

Any academic comparative study of a tradition other than one's own requires an explanation of terms, reflection on possible presuppositions and particular perspectives, and an explanation and justification of the theory and method used. This is especially true in the case of Indigenous cultures, and others who have suffered under colonialism, in order to avoid as much as possible the hegemony of which past scholarship has been accused. In Chapter Three: *Theory and Method*, I will focus on defining terms and establishing criteria for the approach that the subsequent experiment will take. In particular, I will not only explain my use of the term 'Euro-American,' but will also provide a working understanding of what it means to be 'Indigenous.' The requirement for such definitions is largely due to the variety of usages these terms have been subjected to and the diverse contexts in which they have operated. I will argue for a simplified, necessary and sufficient definition of 'Indigenous' in order to avoid much of the baggage this term has acquired in other contexts. Because I am not Indigenous, nor does this study involve personal ethnographic research involving particular Indigenous communities, my approach will involve a necessarily etic perspective which uses emic material derived from the writings of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. It is not possible in a study like this to completely avoid conceptual interpretation and translation, but this will be limited to interpreting what Indigenous scholars report about their own cultural beliefs, practices, and worldviews. Rather than focusing on the ontology of a particular Indigenous group, which would not provide the breadth of data required for this experiment to be useful on a broader scale, I will be cross-comparing a variety of sources that describe how Indigeneity, as I define it, is expressed in particular Native cultures in North America. In order to narrow the specific focus of this thesis, my general approach is: to identify a necessary and sufficient characteristic of the term Indigenous; investigate how this characteristic—a relational ontology—is expressed in particular Indigenous societies, as identified by Indigenous scholars; and investigate

whether, and to what extent, a Whiteheadian metaphysic is able to accommodate or help interpret this ontological understanding for a wider audience in the context of inter-religious dialogue. Chapter Three will also discuss the difficulties of such a cross-cultural study and the methodological strategy I use to respond to these difficulties and issues.

As much as a certain amount of interpretation of Indigenous ontology is unavoidable, so too is interpreting Whitehead's process philosophy. Therefore, an explanation and general introduction to Whiteheadian terms and concepts is also necessary. Whitehead is known for both the complexity of his metaphysic and the terminology he uses to describe it. Although it may be possible to engage in a superficial comparison of ontological concepts without using his terminology, the more systematic approach undertaken here requires a basic introduction to Whiteheadian concepts and terms. Although I certainly do not attempt to give a full exposition of Whitehead's thought, in Chapter Four: *Whitehead's Process Ontology* I introduce his basic metaphysic, the specific concepts that I use in the comparative study, and Whitehead's particular terminology. I hope to provide sufficient understanding of Whitehead's metaphysic for the purposes of the comparison. This chapter will also serve as a glossary of terms which will be frequently referenced in Chapters Five and Six. In addition, because there is no monolithic interpretation of Whiteheadian thought, Chapter Four will serve to identify the particular reading of Whitehead I use in the comparative exercise to follow.

Cobb has often, when speaking of the possibility of multiple 'Ultimates,' alluded to the possibility that a process understanding of the Indigenous experience may be fruitful, especially in regard to Native North Americans.[9] As far as I am aware, however, there has not been a systematic study to determine whether that is the case. Cobb has

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[9] For example see: Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 137; Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, 149.

suggested that dialogue with the 'primal' traditions of Indigenous people, in a Whiteheadian context, may well provide much wisdom that Euro-American traditions currently lack.[10] In the first part of Chapter Five: *All My Relations*, I focus on a general discussion of the relational ontology identified by Indigenous scholars as the basis for their own worldview, and how that could be understood in a Whiteheadian context. I consider, among other topics, universal relationality and interconnectedness and how these are exemplified through various Indigenous concepts, language structures, and cultural practices. I then focus more specifically on Indigeneity as expressed through relationship with the natural world, and how this facilitates relations with the greater universe and the divine. I explore the nature of 'life' and 'personhood' from both a Whiteheadian and Indigenous perspective, and how divine immanence contributes to that perspective, in order to better understand how nature is considered animated and 'alive' in each.

Although Indigenous epistemology is implied throughout Chapter Five, in Chapter Six: *Ontology Equals Epistemology* I discuss knowledge as a process of coming-to-know through both 'internal' and 'external' relationships.[11] Due to the notion of divine immanence, mentioned in Chapter Five, knowledge can also be considered sacred and an integral part of ritual and ceremony. Because of the 'internal' nature of how primary perception is understood from both a Whiteheadian and Indigenous perspective, creating 'alliances' or 'compacts' with the natural world, and actively promoting dreams and visions, are important for bringing internal perception into conscious awareness and understanding. These are the comparative topics detailed in Chapter Six in which I find

[10]Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 137.

[11] These two types of relationality will be further defined but 'internal' will refer to ontologically constitutive relationships, while 'external' will refer to spatiotemporal relations in the physical world.

important parallels between Indigenous and Whiteheadian thought, and how such an epistemology could be understood *as* ontology.

In addition to summarizing the findings of the comparative experiment, in my concluding chapter I will also review whether Cobb's 'multiple Ultimate' interpretation of the pluralistic nature of Whitehead's metaphysic fits the Indigenous perspective in quite the way he envisions it. I contend that it is not completely sufficient. Although Indigeneity does involve a reverence for, and focus on, the natural world, as Cobb suggests, it is the divine connection as achieved through relationship with the natural world that is considered of ultimate importance. In fact, the contemporary Indigenous worldview appears to emphasize all three 'Ultimates' proposed by Cobb.

In the spirit of Cobb's methodology, Chapter Seven will also include a discussion on areas of encounter between Indigenous cultures and the dominant society which may be mutually transformed through a process-informed approach to dialogue.[12] There are a number of topics of discussion that I suggest would benefit from a process understanding of Indigenous ontology. These include theological perspectives on divine immanence and relationship, deeper understanding of the consequences of colonialism and strategies for the future, Indigenous education, and land-claim and sacred site issues. I also suggest that perhaps the most universal and timely topic which could benefit from a detailed comparison between the Whiteheadian and Indigenous perspective is that of intrinsic and instrumental value, and how that relates to environmental concerns. All these themes,

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[12] While Cobb's theology of 'mutual transformation' is normally directed toward transformation of religious understanding and perspective, there are derivative applications. In light of the historical record, with its history of colonialism and oppression, it may be many years, if ever, before Euro-American society can offer something beneficial back to Indigenous peoples in that regard. Before the goal of 'mutual' transformation of religious insight may be appropriate the dominant society has much to answer for, as well as much learning about and acceptance of the Indigenous perspective. However, that does not mean that the encounter cannot be mutually transformative and beneficial in other spheres of encounter, something which is discussed more in the Conclusion.

however, would require the type of dialogue and encounter that I suggest this work precedes.

Finally, Chapter Seven will reflect on whether this study has been successful in rendering the Indigenous ontology a 'live hypothesis.' My conclusion is that not only is it successful, but by rendering it as such the study illustrates how a process-relational ontology, such as that found in Indigenous societies, can be taken one step further and is thus better understood as a 'genuine option.'[13]

[13] A 'live' hypothesis is just one criterion necessary for an option to be considered 'genuine' as defined by William James. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two: **Complementary Pluralism and Transformationist Theology**

> Now suppose that Christians, having reformulated our beliefs so as to take account of Buddhist insights, have the opportunity to interact extensively with Native Americans. They, too, have insights into human existence, for example, into the way it is related to the earth. Initially what is heard will seem very different from the Buddhist-Christian anthropology resulting from the previous encounter, even contradictory. But with sufficient patience and good will there is a real chance that ways will be found to do some measure of justice to the deepest insights of Native Americans without giving up either our Christian insights or the Buddhist ones.[1] (John Cobb Jr.)

While attending the 2007 conference in Claremont, California entitled *The Legacy and Lure of John Cobb Jr.* it became increasingly clear to me that John Cobb Jr.'s theological assumptions departed significantly from the norm. I was aware that his academic peers found it difficult to decisively categorize his position in regards to other religious traditions, but until then it had not been apparent why this was the case. Having a number of his accomplishments highlighted in such a short period of time brought home the depth of his philosophical and theological thought, as well as its flexibility and diversity.

Although he was largely considered a religious pluralist, he had made it clear in his article "Beyond Pluralism," which was originally included in the edited volume *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* that he did indeed think Christianity was unique.[2] However, he also considered other religious traditions unique in their own way and so did not believe that Christianity was *exclusively* unique. Cobb believes that Christianity is universalisable and holds truths and insights about God and the nature of reality that other traditions could benefit from, but

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[1] Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 137.

[2] John B. Cobb Jr., "Beyond Pluralism," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990). His article was in response to the collection of articles in the book *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* to which he had refrained from contributing.

also strongly believes that others hold truths and insights that his own Christian faith could incorporate, leading in turn to much needed transformation.[3] In fact, this perspective is at the heart of his own *transformationist* theological perspective and methodology. Cobb rejects the Hickian pluralist understanding that suggests there is an underlying object of worship to which *all* religious traditions point in different historical and cultural ways.[4] He believes that position does not take adequate account of the fundamental differences and uniqueness in each tradition. Yet he is clearly in the pluralist camp when it comes to a firm conviction that each tradition holds potential for religious truth and soteriological value. In that regard Christianity does not have a privileged position. Cobb also defies the critique that one cannot be both a fully realized pluralist, and yet be firmly committed to one's own tradition. If all traditions were equally valid, why bother being committed to any one in particular? A fully realized pluralist position appears to fall into the trap of debilitating relativism. Cobb, however, is obviously a deeply committed Christian, with a strongly held belief that "Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."[5] At the same time, he points out that others *also* believe their own religious path to be universally valid and applicable, and is the best way to achieve their own tradition's soteriological goals and the common good of humanity and the world—and so they should![6] An important goal of interreligious dialogue, as far as Cobb is concerned, is to glean what each could learn from the other to help transform both traditions, by

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[3] Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 137.

[4] This pluralist position will be further discussed later in this chapter but is most fully articulated in Hick's book: John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[5] Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 138.This article provides a full explanation of Cobb's position of affirming the universal validity of Christianity's insights while also affirming the same possibility in other religious traditions.

[6] Ibid., 137.

increasing overall understanding of the nature of reality and the divine, and learning better ways to move forward for the common good.[7]

Upon reflection, what is immediately apparent is that Cobb's position as an 'exclusivist,' 'inclusivist,' or 'pluralist' is largely dependent on which sphere of his religious perspective, or which realm of religious encounter, is under consideration. These terms had been suggested earlier by Alan Race as typologies that illustrate the various ways Christians view other religions.[8] Although Race, as a Christian theologian, made it clear he was not attempting to impose typologies on other traditions—he was leaving it up to them to develop their own approach—Gavin D'Costa rightly points out that they quickly became viewed as "logical types to analyse other religions' attitudes to religious pluralism."[9] For over a decade after being introduced, these typologies became central issues in any discussion on theology of religions, both Christian and non-Christian. In fact, in 1997 Jacques Dupuis titled a chapter "The Debate over Theology of Religions" in his seminal work *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism.* Unfortunately this chapter title was all too apt. What should have, perhaps, been merely a discussion on how to best understand the diversity of religions instead became an intensely polarizing debate. This debate was so pervasive during the decade or so following the publication of Race's book *Christians and Religious Pluralism,* that it had what Dupuis called "pride of place on the theological agenda," largely due to the sheer volume of literature written on the subject.[10]

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[7] John B. Cobb Jr., "Order out of Chaos," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativity*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third).
[8] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, Second ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993).
[9] Gavin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 223.
[10] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 180.

Race used the Roman Catholic axiom *'Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus'* (Outside the Church no Salvation), ascribed initially to Cyprian, Bishop of Cartage, in the third century, but reiterated by Pope Boniface VIII in the 14th century, as the typical example of exclusivism which had been the official position of the Roman Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council in 1964.[11] He goes on to describe Protestant Christian exclusivism as that which "counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated."[12] Christian exclusivism, then, could be described as the position that one's own understanding of the Christian message and its 'saving' ability is the one true religious reality from which all others are judged.

To be a Christian inclusivist, according to Race, is to believe that "all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from him."[13] He says that an inclusivist holds two equally binding convictions: the grace of God operates within all the great religious traditions of the world in a saving fashion, and that it manifests uniquely in Jesus Christ who is ultimately, and universally, the final way of salvation.[14] There are two variations traditionally attributed to Christian inclusivism. One is that God works in a saving way throughout the world's great traditions but ultimately, whether adherents know it or not, that salvation is accomplished through the grace of God through Christ. In addition to using passages from the New Testament to support this position, Race's main representative example is the theology of Karl Rahner.[15] By the Second Vatican Council, Rahner had developed a position, which was adopted by the church, that there may well be salvation in other religious traditions

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[11] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 10.
[12] Ibid., 11.
[13] Ibid., 38.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 38-47.

but that it still manifests through Christ, whether realized or not, thus it is possible to be what he called an "anonymous Christian."[16] Christ in his universality, then, was working through the other religions to bring them to salvation as the church understood it, but was disguised in whatever historical and cultural manifestations that were part of each tradition. The position 'no salvation outside the church' was retained but redefined in a way that could include other religions. Although a person could attain ordinary salvation through these traditions, they could not realize the extraordinary salvation that was offered through the Christian Church. Race also refers to a slight variation of inclusivism that he calls the 'fulfillment' theory, which contends that Christ fulfills the aspirations and quests of other religious traditions.[17] Although there may be true religious insight in other traditions, Christ is required for final fulfillment. Either way, all non-Christian religious belief and practice is seen as finally leading to and culminating in salvation through Jesus Christ.

Alan Race begins his discussion of Christian Pluralism with the notion of tolerance. He describes what he calls tolerant pluralism as the belief that knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, *including Christianity*.[18] To know the full truth about God, or at least for that truth to be available, we need all religious traditions. Christianity, therefore, is in the same position as all other religious traditions in that they have a roughly equal, but partial, grasp of religious truth, and a roughly equal capability of providing soteriological fulfillment. Because of this rough equality, tolerance toward other religions becomes a logical consequence of being a pluralist. Race does, however, distinguish between moral tolerance and theological tolerance and admits that most

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[16] Ibid., 49.
[17] Ibid., 57. A premier example of how Christianity is presented as the fulfillment or 'crown' of other religious traditions can be found in J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920).
[18] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 72.

theologians would advocate moral tolerance toward other religions but, in the case of non-pluralists, not necessarily theological tolerance. For example, most would not wish to force belief onto adherents of other traditions, but also would not want to suggest that any other had an equal grasp of absolute religious truth. Race's examples of theologians with a pluralist perspective include: Arnold Toynbee, Ernst Troeltsch, Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Cobb Jr., and John Hick.[19] The pluralist position, however, has since been most closely aligned with the Pluralist Hypothesis of John Hick.

Although first introduced in his 1973 book *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Hick's position was articulated in its Christianized form in his 1980 book *God Has Many Names* and fully realized and universalized in his 1989 book *An Interpretation of Religion.* Hick proposes that all religions are oriented in different ways toward the same transcendent ultimate reality.[20] In his early books he calls this reality God but by 1989 he simply refers to it as the 'Real.' Hick says that there is no way for us to understand or know the Real *an sich,* or 'as it is in itself,' but only as it appears to us through our various cultural, historical, social, and psychological contexts. Because the Real is ineffable, it cannot in itself be considered personal in a theistic sense, or impersonal in an Advaitan sense. These concepts are simply how the *noumenal* Real is understood and responded to in various *phenomenal* ways, to use the Kantian categories that Hick employs.[21] For his hypothesis to work as a Christian theology however, he proposes a 'Copernican Revolution.'[22] By this he means that to move toward the full pluralist perspective he advocates, Christianity must change its outlook from Christ-centeredness to God-centeredness.[23] Jesus can no longer be considered the center of the Christian

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[19] Ibid., 70ff.
[20] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982). His early Christian position was most fully articulated here.
[21] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 240ff.
[22] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: One World, 1994), 121-32.
[23] Ibid., 121-32.

universe and must be ontologically severed from his identification with God.[24] Jesus as the Christ, along with any other truth claims which conflict with his hypothesis, must be mythologized. No literal meaning can be attached to this type of doctrine because it can only be understood as mythological language conveying religious understanding.[25] Once Hick universalized his hypothesis he proposed that all religions move away from a Ptolemaic 'self-centered' model of religion to a 'Reality-centered' Copernican model that places the Real at the center of religious thought.[26] As in Christianity, all truth claims that conflict with this model must be mythologized.[27] Religious people must come to the realization that what they currently consider a true or false factual assertion may actually be a true or false myth.[28] A truth claim of unique soteriological effectiveness, however, *must* be mythologized for the hypothesis to work.[29] For Hick, the criteria for judging a tradition's validity and soteriological effectiveness is how successful they are in promoting this transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.[30]

Once universalised to all religions, then, religious exclusivism became known as any position which stated that a single religion held all absolute religious truth and soteriological value. Inclusivism was understood as any position which acknowledges that other religions may indeed have both religious truth and salvific/liberative value but ultimately only in so far as it agrees with, or is fulfilled by, the position of the 'Ultimate" tradition. Pluralism has become largely understood as the rejection of religious absolutism and the allowance for the roughly equal potential of each tradition to supply religious truth and soteriological efficacy.

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[24] Ibid., 165-79.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 164.
[27] Ibid., 343-59.
[28] Ibid., 371.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 164, 299-337. In Part Five of his book, Hick discusses the ethical and soteriological criteria of his Pluralist Hypothesis.

Over the decades since this debate began there have been numerous objections to Race's classifications, both to the viability of pluralism in particular, and the adequacy of the tripartite typology in general.[31] These have included, among others, questions of logical possibility by Gavin D'Costa; Milbank's accusations of the imperialistic imposition of Western terms and categories in what has become a global concern; the inability of the typology to do justice to the diversity of religions; and the concern that three options is not enough to adequately identify the wide variety of perspectives.[32] What these critiques have shown, at the very least, is that even if the types can prove useful in identifying the diverse variety of theological attitudes, care must be taken to avoid overt Western imperialism, hegemonic tendencies, and the reification of the types into strict categories. Any Western theological outlook toward the religious 'other' is susceptible to the first two considerations, and the third would be an example of what Alfred North Whitehead calls 'The fallacy of misplaced concreteness', which mistakes abstract concepts for concrete reality (SMW 51).

If the tripartite scheme is to be used, even as merely a heuristic device, I would suggest two slight alterations in its conception. The first is the acknowledgement that there is a gradational scale between one extreme, of religious absolutism, and the other of relativistic pluralism, rather than the three concrete categories Race proposed. Any particular perspective toward the 'other' could be situated anywhere along this scale

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[31] Perry Schmidt-Leukel has identified and responded to eight distinct objections to Race's typology. In reaffirming the usefulness of the scheme, with some clarification and reinterpretation, he identifies the various scholars over the last two decades who have raised concerns about, or suggested alternatives. These include scholars such as Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter, Richard Plantinga, Ian Markham, Joseph DiNoia, and James Fredericks, among others. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).

[32] D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions."; John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990). For an alternative to Race's typologies see Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

thereby making it more or less exclusivist, or more or less pluralist. My second suggestion is that no one type need monolithically represent a person's or tradition's perspective toward the religious 'other' in all spheres of religious consideration or encounter. For example, it is conceivable that one might recognize a pluralist ontology, yet be an epistemological exclusivist and/or an eschatological inclusivist.

These suggestions are complementary and based on the observation that in addition to the existence of various sub-categories of each position, such as hard and soft exclusivism, open and closed inclusivism, or identist and differential pluralism, it is clear that theologians often identify themselves as some combination of the three types.[33] For instance, although S. Mark Heim primarily identifies himself as an inclusivist, he considers his particular 'multiple ultimate' hypothesis as more pluralistic than standard pluralism, so concludes he is actually advocating a 'pluralistic inclusivism.'[34] Heim promotes an orientational pluralism while still making exclusivist claims of the superiority of the Christian ultimate soteriology.[35]

Wolfhart Pannenberg, while acknowledging the fact of religious diversity and the need for dialogue to learn more about the divine reality, also believes that exclusivist

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[33] This inclusivist distinction is described by Kristin Kiblinger in Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis Xavier Clooney (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 28. The distinction between 'identist' and 'differential' pluralism is formulated by David Ray Griffin. See David Ray Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep," in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[34] S. Mark Heim, "Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis," *Modern Theology* 10(1994): 355.

[35] Griffin has found Heim's use of the typologies quite confusing, with his combination of a pluralist ontology and an inclusivist epistemology. However, I suggest this is largely due to a tendency toward a reification of the language and the categories themselves. See Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep," 35. Heim borrows the concept of 'orientational pluralism' from Nicholas Rescher as described in: Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985). Heim incorporates orientational pluralism into his hypothesis to argue that the various conflicting religious claims, and their subsequent soteriological end goals, can all be valid and true because each comes from a particular perspective or orientation. The truth of any religious position, therefore, is rooted in one's orientation. See Heim, "Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis," 134.

commitment to one's faith is essential in combination with an understanding that God works though all humanity. He says:

> The elements of exclusivism in the Christian truth claim, the inclusivism of the Christian faith in the revelation of the one God of all human beings, and the acknowledgement of a factual pluralism of different belief systems and conflicting truth claims belong together in the Christian self-understanding.[36]

Pannenberg argues for keeping exclusivist truth claims while still promoting a more inclusivist attitude towards other religions:

> As long as Christians take their faith in the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus Christ seriously, they will also stick to the exclusivism in Jesus' challenge to confessing him and to the sentence of Peter that salvation is accessible to human beings in no one else but in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Christians will also identify with the inclusivism of their faith in God's creation which implies that no human being as creature of God can exist without any relationship to the creator. Therefore, the revelation of God in his Son also extends to all human beings.[37]

Pannenberg admits that if Christians could not learn anything about divine reality from inter-religious dialogue then there would be very limited purpose to the endeavor. Dialogue would be limited to discussion of possible similarities between the religions, clarifying mutual misunderstandings, and addressing mutual social concerns.[38] Christians must, therefore, be open to the possibility of learning something new in each encounter. Until the eschaton, when we will finally know the full extent of divine truth, our understanding of God's revelation is provisional. Intolerance of other religions, and whatever insight they may provide, is the result of "mistaking the provisional form of our

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[36] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Religions from the Perspective of Christian Theology and the Self-Interpretation of Christianity in Relation to the Non-Christian Traditions," *Modern Theology* 9, no. 3 (1993): 297.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.: 295.

knowledge of God's revelation for its ultimate truth."[39]

> The awareness of the provisional status of all present knowledge, including our formulations of the truth of God's revelation, entails tolerance regarding other forms of their formulation. This tolerance applies first to quarrels among Christians concerning their formulations of their faith, but it must also extend to other people who live out of different religious traditions.[40]

Pannenberg wants to take other religious traditions, and possible truths they may have, seriously while maintaining exclusivist claims of Christian superiority and fulfilling nature. Gavin D'Costa also feels that Christian doctrine, specifically Trinitarianism, demands that other religious traditions be taken seriously. He says, "I suggest that at the heart of Trinitarian doctrine of God, the multiplicity of religions takes on a special theological significance that cannot be ignored by Christians who worship a Trinitarian God."[41] Like Pannenberg, D'Costa states that the 'Father' is never fully and exhaustively known until the 'beatific vision' of the eschaton. However, the universality of the Christian message demands that God's redeeming activity be present throughout humanity in the form of the Holy Spirit.[42] The Trinitarian God, however, is fully encountered in Christianity through Jesus Christ:

> [God] makes herself known as she is: an utter and gracious mystery (God the Father), in the Word incarnate (the Son), and in God's indwelling sanctifying and prophetic presence (the Spirit). Such a Christocentric Trinitarianism thereby facilitates an openness to the world religions, for the activity of the Spirit cannot be confined to Christianity.[43]

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Gavin D'Costa, "Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 16.
[42] Ibid., 17.
[43] Ibid.

Although D'Costa originally identified himself as an inclusivist because of his particular Trinitarian formulation, he later recognized the exclusivist logic that he embraced, and concluded that exclusivism is the only viable type. According to D'Costa all three types conflate to exclusivism because they are based on the same logic.[44]

In agreement with my suggestion that different types of attitudes may be appropriate for different spheres of encounter, Robison B. James suggests re-thinking Race's typologies in light of the different depths of experience and encounter suggested by Paul Tillich.[45] After all, James points out, even Tillich himself was considered a pluralist by Race, an inclusivist by D'Costa, and an exclusivist by Knitter, illustrating a need for such reconsideration.[46] He says one may be pluralist at the "detached level of observation, comparison, analysis, and evaluation;" inclusivist at the level of "empathetic participation," in that we find analogies elsewhere for the norms of our own tradition; yet exclusivist at the "properly religious level—where the concern is not with explanation or appreciation but with being healed or made whole, both as individuals and groups."[47] Each of these categories, then, need not be descriptive of a person's, or tradition's, outlook as a whole, but rather merely describe different attitudes in different spheres and depths of encounter.

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[44] D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions."

[45] Robison B. James, "La Recontre Interreligieuse D'après Paul Tillich: Pour Une Nouvelle Conception De L'exclusivism, De L'inclusivism Et Du Pluralisme," *Laval Thèologique et Philosophique* 58, no. 1 (2002).

[46] Ibid.: 44. James points out that Race identified Tillich as a pluralist in Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 71. Knitter disagrees with Race's reading of Tillich and states that Tillich did indeed believe that the central event of the spirit took place in Jesus the Christ, which James understands as an exclusivist statement. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions*, 245 (n 47). Gavin D'Costa places Tillich in the inclusivist camp in his book: Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 12,16,46 (n 1).

[47] James, "La Recontre Interreligieuse D'après Paul Tillich: Pour Une Nouvelle Conception De L'exclusivism, De L'inclusivism Et Du Pluralisme," 43-44.

Diane Eck acknowledges in *Encountering God* that because the tripartite scheme represents attitudes, "the move from one position to another is often more of a sliding step than a giant leap."[48] She rejects thinking of 'exclusivists,' 'inclusivists,' and 'pluralists,' as entirely different groups of people, and consequently recognizes shifts in her own thinking and writing as she moves from her typically pluralist attitude to more inclusive language in some contexts.[49] This is not, she states, a dilemma she can solve—just recognize and contemplate. James calls this "le dilemma de Diana Eck."[50]

Perry Schmidt-Leukel has suggested that such inconsistency may reflect ambiguities or unclarity in the respective theologian's work.[51] He states:

> But what if a theologian takes different options with regard to different aspects; for example, if the theologian takes a pluralistic viewpoint with regard to soteriology but an exclusivistic or inclusivistic one with regard to epistemology? In that case—I suggest—one has to see whether in the end this does not amount to an overall assessment that is either pluralist, or inclusivist, or exclusivist—or whether the different choices may eventually lead to inconsistent conclusions.[52]

This response, however, seems overly restrictive in not allowing for various spheres of encounter or understanding to evoke, or even demand, different responses in a dynamic way. In any event, Schmidt-Leukels assessment certainly seems to treat these attitudinal types as concrete boxes, placing everyone strictly in one or another. Even Paul Knitter, a well-known religious pluralist, has stated that in the end we are all inclusivists because no matter how we try to think or act differently, we are always committed to viewing other religions from our own religious perspective.[53] By doing so Knitter

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[48] Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 170.
[49] Ibid.
[50] James, "La Recontre Interreligieuse D'après Paul Tillich: Pour Une Nouvelle Conception De L'exclusivism, De L'inclusivism Et Du Pluralisme," 45.
[51] Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed," 25.
[52] Ibid., 25-26.
[53] Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 217.

recognizes both the ambiguity and limitations of the scheme.

Similarly, in the introduction to the collection of John Cobb Jr.'s essays entitled *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism* Knitter states that Cobb's perspectives on understanding other religions "cannot be neatly categorized and are asking questions that others seem to miss."[54] He goes on to point out that Cobb has "tantalizingly fallen through the cracks of the often-used models for dealing with the reality of many other religions."[55] Cobb, according to Knitter, is certainly not an exclusivist, nor is he an inclusivist or a typical pluralist, categories which he somehow "wiggles between" or "slips beyond."[56] Although, as Knitter also points out, this seems to point to the inadequacies of these categories, it also says something about the particular, and somewhat unique, way in which Cobb understands diverse religious differences. Cobb makes exclusivist-type claims about the uniqueness of the Christ event and the universal efficacy and adequacy of Christianity. He is also quite inclusivist in how he understands 'Christ' as the creatively transforming principle that pervades the world yet is most fully embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet Cobb holds to a pluralist ontology of multiple Ultimates.[57] David Ray Griffin has most aptly described

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[54] Paul Knitter, "Introduction," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 2.

[55] Ibid., 3.

[56] Ibid.

[57] John B. Cobb Jr., "Toward a Christocentric Catholic Theology," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 79-80. Cobb's particular Christology understands 'Christ' as the 'Wisdom,' or 'Sophia,' that pervades the world and was embodied by Jesus. For Cobb this does not mean Jesus was the only channel for Wisdom in the world: "On the contrary, the Wisdom we meet in Jesus is precisely the Wisdom that is already known by all" (Cobb, 2004, p 80). He has also referred to Christ as the principle of 'creative transformation' in the world, a concept process theologians borrow from Henry Nelson Wieman. See Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008). Cobb's use is discussed by Monica Coleman which she describes as "a certain type of change and growth that occurs as a result of God's introduction of novelty." Monica A. Coleman, "An Exchange of Gifts: Process and Womanist Theologies," in *Handbook of Process Theology*, ed. Jay McDaniels and Donna Bowman (St. Louis: Chalis Press, 2006). For Cobb, Christ is the divine 'call forward' that "breaks the bonds of determinism and introduces new possibilities into the world." John B. Cobb Jr., *God and the World* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 49-50.

Cobb's particular perspective as 'Complementary Pluralism.'[58]

## 2.1 Complementary Pluralism

Contrary to the 'identist'[59] pluralist hypotheses' proposed by John Hick, Paul Knitter, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others who propose a common core or focus of all religions, John Cobb Jr.'s complementary pluralism understands many different religious expressions as radically different *types* of experiences which may be complementary rather than contradictory.[60] By doing so, Cobb bases his theology on the pluralist possibility that the different ontological worldviews of diverse traditions could indeed hold roughly equal possibilities for religious truth. For instance, according to Cobb, the Buddhist understanding of ś*ūnyatā,* or 'Emptying,' "identifies one truly important aspect [of the totality of reality], and 'God' another."[61] Cobb bases his hypothesis on the proposal that "diverse cultural practices and languages have selected differing features of the inexhaustible matrix for attention and emphasis. Each in this sense constructs its own world."[62] This construction of worlds, however, is a result of discernments of this infinitely complex matrix of the totality of reality. Some discernments may be of similar aspects of the total matrix, but it is also likely the case that they may be completely different features of the totality.[63] In order for his hypothesis to work, however, it must presuppose a metaphysic which can accommodate the variety of human experience, in all

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[58] David Ray Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).
[59] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep," 24. Identist forms of religious pluralism, a term coined by David Ray Griffin, are those most often critiqued and most commonly represented by Hick's Pluralist Hypothesis, which postulates that all religions are oriented in different ways toward the same identical transcendent ultimate reality.
[60] Cobb Jr., "Beyond Pluralism," 81ff.
[61] Ibid., 93,94.
[62] John B. Cobb Jr., "A Process Approach to Pluralism," in *Readings in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andrew Eshleman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 390.
[63] Ibid., 391.

its secular and religious forms, in a complementary manner. For Cobb's complementary religious pluralism, the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead provides a metaphysic that allows for such accommodation.

In process thought, as will be more fully and systematically articulated in Chapter Four, reality is not constituted by material substances that endure through time and space in the Newtonian sense, but rather is composed of a series of events or 'actual occasions,' which 'come-to-be' rather than endure as substances. In order for there to be serial continuity each becoming occasion must subjectively take account of, or include, its own entire past actual world while incorporating novel possibilities as it becomes a unified entity. Once fully unified and determined, each entity is an object available for inclusion in subsequent becoming subjects. The principle that is inherent in the process of unifying the multiplicity of past occasions and subsequently contributing to future instances of coming-to-be, is called 'Creativity' by Whitehead. It is the ultimate principle on which reality is based. 'Creativity' does not exist as an actuality in itself, except in how it is embodied in any and all particular instances of the creative process that bring about both God and the world of finite actualities (PR 21ff). Creativity has been equated by process philosophers with the 'Ground of Being' or 'Being itself,' and compared to Aristotle's prime matter as a power to exert efficient and final causation.[64]

Creativity is the ultimate meta-concept of how things come-to-be, but for Cobb, God is the supreme instance of 'Being.'[65] Therefore, although Whitehead's 'Category of the Ultimate' consists only of Creativity (PR 21), for Cobb Creativity and God are two distinct 'Ultimates,' which rely on each other for their own actuality. God embodies Creativity, but the concept of Creativity is empty unless there are instances of it, the most supreme of which is God. Neither can exist without the other. As the supreme actuality of

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[64] Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," 44.
[65] Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 116-17.

Creativity, the two Ultimates are totally interdependent, yet distinct from each other. In Whitehead's metaphysic there could be no Creativity without the actualization of the creative advance, and there could be no Supreme Being without Creativity.[66] Neither one can be said to be *more* ultimate than the other, nor can either exist without the other. Each is a necessary and interdependent, yet distinct, aspect of the totality of all that is.[67]

Thus Cobb's complementary pluralism is rooted in Whitehead's distinction between 'God' and 'Creativity,' which Cobb understands as two separate and distinct 'Ultimates,' with a possible third that constitutes the entirety of the cosmos—or The World as the totality of all finite beings.[68] Rather than being construed as the absolute totality of all things, then, 'Ultimate' in this sense is better served by asking the question "Ultimate what?" In that way multiple Ultimates can be identified such that Creativity is the ultimate conception of the process of creative advance which is discerned, focused, and oriented on in varying degrees by a variety of traditions, but most prominently in certain forms of Buddhism and Advaita Hinduism.[69] Theistic traditions, however, can be primarily oriented to, or discern, the Ultimate supreme instance, or Being, of that creative advance. The third Ultimate proposed by Cobb, The World, is given priority by nature-based traditional ways, such as Taoism, and Indigenous traditions.[70] Cobb has also recognized that perhaps the term 'Ultimate' is too tied to the idea of a single absolute ultimate for this language to be useful for this type of discourse. He suggests that perhaps his view would be better expressed if he said that "there is no one ultimate but that

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[66] Ibid., 119.
[67] Ibid., 219. See also (PR 225).
[68] John B. Cobb Jr., "Concluding Reflections," in *Transforming Christianity and the World; a Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 185.Because in Whiteheadian process thought the world of finite actual entities is dependent on God, as well as embodying Creativity, and the World is necessary for God's ongoing actuality, it is also appropriate, according to Cobb, to understand the World as an Ultimate.
[69] Ibid., 184-85.
[70] Ibid.

different features of the totality have been viewed as of supreme importance in the several traditions and subtraditions."[71] Although Cobb has decided to not change his use of the term, I agree that thinking of them as such, or as 'ultimate foci of discernment,' better serves the intention of Cobb's pluralistic hypothesis without the absolutist connotation that accompanies the term Ultimate, making it easier to understand how there could be multiple Ultimates without lessening the importance or ultimacy of any one in particular.

Although Cobb reserves the possibility that there may be more, it is the distinction between these three Ultimates that helps him understand the plurality and diversity of religions.[72] By asserting distinct Ultimates, along with an assumption of realism, Cobb is able to explain and accept the diverse types of religious experiences and religious end goals as possible true experiences of a real ultimate reality.[73] In addition, he says that although traditions usually focus on one particular aspect, it is not uncommon for religions to refer to more than one of these Ultimates at any given time. Hence you can have the devout Christian mystic who not only has a personal relationship with God through Christ, but can speak of the Godhead that is distinct from, but underlies the Divine Being.[74] Part of the purpose of the ontological experiment in this thesis will be to determine if Cobb is accurate in his assertion that Indigenous traditions primarily focus on the third Ultimate, or whether the focus is on another, or a mix of all.

A process metaphysical understanding, therefore, can make intelligible how different traditions can be oriented toward different aspects of the totality of reality. In complementary pluralism, it provides the ability to translate a foreign religious

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[71] Ibid., 184.
[72] Ibid., 185.
[73] As will be more clearly discussed shortly, this does not mean that interpretations and statements about such experiences are necessarily true or need to be believed.
[74] John B. Cobb Jr., "Buddhist Emptiness and the Christian God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, no. 1 (1977): 13ff.

worldview into process terms while keeping intact the fundamental experiential ontology of each, thereby helping to reduce hegemonic tendencies.[75] For instance, from Cobb's process perspective 'Creativity' points to what Buddhist's would call: *śūnyatā* or *Dharmakāya;* what Advaita Vedantists would call *Nirguṇa Brahman;* what mystics such as Meister Ekhart would call the 'Godhead'; and what many contemporary philosophers call 'Being Itself'.[76] The Supreme 'Being', or God, Cobb states "…is in-formed and the source of forms (such as truth, beauty, and justice). It has been called "Amida Buddha," "Sambhogakaya," "Saguna Brahman," Ishvara," "Yahweh," "Christ," and "Allah.""[77] In Whitehead's philosophy there is Being and there are beings, and there can be no Being without beings, and no beings without Being.[78] Because of their absolute interdependency it makes no sense to suggest one is more ultimate than the other, even if it is postulated that one particular Being is supreme.[79]

Once one's own ontological perspective has been translated into process categories, diverse worldviews that at first may have appeared incommensurable with one's own also become understandable and possibly complementary. For instance, a possibility of having a relationship with a personal creator god can co-exist with the understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda,* or dependent co-origination, as the fundamental

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[75] According to Paul Ricoeur, because there is no possibility of a perfect translation, a good interpretation can only aim for an equivalence of meaning, not identity. The most we can expect from process thought as a vehicle of interpretation, under this criterion, is that it could provide transference of equivalent, not identical, meaning between traditions. It is not required to provide identical meaning concept by concept, but rather an overall equivalence that results in the fundamental ontological understanding becoming intelligible from the other's perspective. This fulfills not only the initial goal of making the foreign hypothesis, or worldview, 'live,' but can also provide a basis for understanding the potential for equal and complementary truth in diverse ontological views. Something which, through interreligious engagement and dialogue, could then be accessed and utilized for the mutual transformation of each tradition, which is, of course, the stated goal for all comparative theologians. Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 22.

[76] Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," 47.

[77] Ibid. See also Cobb Jr., "Concluding Reflections," 184,85. and Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, 124-25.

[78] John B. Cobb Jr., "[Different Paths, Different Summits]," *Philosophy East & West* 55, no. 2 (2005): 15.

[79] Ibid.

nature of existence.[80] The interconnected relationality of the universe in the Indigenous view becomes intelligible and possibly enlightening to the Western scientific mind. In addition, unlike comparative theological methods which may preclude the logical possibility of the equal truth of alternative religious worldviews, it becomes possible to understand the religious 'other' as simply a different, but potentially equally true, discernment of an aspect of the totality of reality. No particular truth claim need be rejected *a priori* based on a prematurely perceived assumption of incommensurability with one's own understanding.

This does, of course, raise the spectre of debilitating relativity that has a tendency to dog many pluralist philosophies and theologies. If no religious truth claim can be rejected outright, and the onus is on a process metaphysic to accommodate and translate all legitimate human experiences of the world, by what criteria *can* we judge the legitimacy and the illuminating capability of the diverse claims, especially those that insist on universality? Must we accept them all equally, no matter what the claim? Although a thorough examination of all ways the accusation of relativity has been addressed by pluralists and process theologians is beyond the scope of this work, it is relevant to note at least one argument that is used against the charge of relativity. Cobb considers himself a relativist if understood as someone who affirms "that every event, every assertion, every belief is conditioned by a multitude of factors: physical, social, historical, psychological, biographical, and so forth."[81] This, of course, includes the

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[80] Cobb's position is that the negative part of the statement: "Reality is ultimately *śūnyatā* therefore a personal God does not exist" is problematic. These are, according to Cobb, referring to two different things; one the nature of reality and the other an Ultimate being. One need not presuppose the non-existence of the other. This is especially true if it is acceptable to understand even God as *śūnyatā.* See: Cobb Jr., "Beyond Pluralism." John B. Cobb Jr., "Proclaiming Christ in a Pluralistic World," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 257.

[81] John B. Cobb Jr., "Responses to Relativism: Common Ground, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction," in *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 96.

understanding that his own assertions and beliefs are also conditioned. But although Cobb affirms this type of relativism, his opposition to other types "lies in the conclusions drawn from the conditionedness of all thought."[82] He says that:

> [A]ll apprehensions of the world [are] perspectival, fragmentary, and in some measure distorted. To me this means that the first step in the improvement of thinking is awareness of these limitations, the examination of some of the conditions shaping thought, and attention to what others see from different standpoints. This makes possible revision of the initial apprehension. Of course, the revising is also conditioned. There is no overcoming of conditionedness, but there is a movement toward less fragmentary and less distorted perceptions.[83]

To David Ray Griffin the crucial point of Cobb's response to relativism is that each tradition, or person, can commit to the universal validity of their own but "What we cannot do, without lapsing back into unjustified arrogance, is to deny that the insights of other traditions are also universally valid."[84] This is in addition to the acknowledgement that there is no, and will never be, a final revision, or the perfect awareness of all that there is. No particular interpretation, then, need necessarily be accepted or considered beyond criticism.[85]

Cobb acknowledges eight 'Whiteheadian Assumptions' in his particular perspective about religion and religious pluralism, some of which are implied above.[86] It is not that Whitehead himself voiced these assumptions, but rather these are logical assumptions inherent in a Whiteheadian process perspective. Cobb understands these

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[82] Ibid., 97.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," 63. Griffin is quoting from John B. Cobb Jr., *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third), 137.
[85] Possible criteria for analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[86] John B. Cobb Jr., "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions About Religion and Pluralism," in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

assumptions as those that some, but not all, religious scholars seem to share but are specifically implied in a Whiteheadian metaphysic:

1) "We should avoid reifying "religion."[87] This is, of course, a common post-modern position advocated by many current scholars of religion, including Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Jonathan Z. Smith, Sam Gill, Timothy Fitzgerald, Bruce Lincoln, and Russell McCutcheon.[88] Because of the many issues in using the term religion, Cobb would prefer to understand it as 'Traditional Ways' but feels that it would not be practical to replace the term at this time.[89] An ontological perspective that privileges relational process over mechanistic substance typically resists reification of this kind.
2) "There is no common goal."[90] For the most part this is a rejection of the common pluralist position that there is some common goal of all religions which is understood or expressed in different cultural-historical ways. Cobb's point is that "any statement of *the* goal of all the religions, even of all that one judges to be "higher" religions, involves imposing personal judgements."[91] No presentation of a particular argument for a 'theology of religions' can be thought of as objective.
3) "Seeking to identify an essence of Christianity is unwise." Again, a common

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[87] Ibid., 243.
[88] For discussions on the issues of defining and studying 'religion' see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978)., Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)., Sam Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62(1994).,Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)., Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2005)., Russell T. McCutcheon, "Introduction," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2005).
[89] Cobb Jr., "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions About Religion and Pluralism," 246.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 248.

but still sometimes overlooked fact accepted by many contemporary religious scholars is that there is no monolithic definition of Christianity, or any other religion, that would be acceptable to *everyone* as true, even *within* a given tradition, but should rather be thought of as *"*more or less helpful or useful."[92] Although in Christianity there may be some commonality in finding the 'Christ event' normative, what that entails could be understood in a variety of ways. Therefore, any talk of the 'essence' of Christianity, or any religion, should be avoided.

4) "There is no neutral position."[93] Although this is, once again, a commonly accepted perspective in religious scholarship, it is often overlooked in an attempt to operate from a putatively unbiased standpoint. This is especially true for many 'scientific atheist' perspectives which often make a claim to neutrality.[94]
5) "The world is vastly more complex than our thoughts can grasp."[95] This seemingly simple statement is the basis for the position that other understandings of the nature of the world should not necessarily be considered false merely because they conflict with one's own, so there will always be much to learn from diverse, differing perspectives. The orientation one has toward the nature of things largely determines one's perspective. Cobb states that although he expects that further advances in physics and cosmology will continue to reveal astonishing aspects of reality, "the purely objectifying mode of modern Western science will neglect or omit other dimensions of the

[92] Ibid., 249.
[93] Ibid., 251.
[94] Ibid., 253. Cobb states that, "The "scientific study of religion" is just as perspectival as the philosophical or theological, or Buddhist approach."
[95] Ibid., 254.

totality of reality apart from which the fullness of reality is not understood."[96]

6) "Our language refers beyond itself to a real world."[97] Cobb says the idea that language refers to a real non-linguistic world is a practical assumption of everyday life.[98] It is something we all assume in order to exist and operate in the world. Although in Whiteheadian terms this does not imply that 'real' means "the objective existence of enduring substances," it does reject pure idealism and advocate a phenomenological realism.[99]
7) "Religious experience also has a realistic dimension."[100] Cobb assumes that the experiences talked about in the great religious traditions have a realistic element.[101] This does not mean that all interpretations and statements about these experiences are necessarily true or require belief, just that the "great religious thinkers of West and East have apprehended real features of a real world."[102]
8) "Believers from diverse traditions can communicate with one another."[103] Although Cobb is well aware of the difficulties in communicating across cultural and linguistic boundaries, he also recognizes that words refer to similar features of a shared world of which different communities have very different experiences, and have "ordered their world in quite distinct ways."[104] Communication, however imperfect, is still possible because words refer to a non-linguistic reality which we all share.[105]

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[96] Ibid., 256.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 256-57.
[100] Ibid., 257.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 258.
[103] Ibid., 260.
[104] Ibid., 261.
[105] Ibid., 262.

Although these assumptions, as stated earlier, are certainly not exclusive to Cobb, or to a Whiteheadian perspective, when combined with a process-based pluralist ontology of multiple 'Ultimates,' they contribute to Cobb's particular understanding of religious pluralism. Although it may not be useful, or possible, to show precisely which Whiteheadian concept each assumption is directly derived from, links should become increasingly clear as Whitehead's philosophy is more systematically described later in this thesis. For instance, process thought rejects the idea that anything, whether conceptual or physical, has substantial existence that endures through time. To reify terms and concepts by mistaking something abstract as concrete reality is an example of Whitehead's 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (SMW 51). Process thought is also perspectival in that all entities come-to-be from a particular perspective constituted by their relationship with their own past actual world and the divine, making no one position neutral and devoid of diverse inter-relational variables. Whitehead also stresses experience as the starting point of any philosophical enquiry but warns that although perception itself is beyond judgments regarding truth and falsity, interpretations and propositions derived from such, are not (PR 262-263). He also accepts that we live in a shared world, which he defines as our particular 'cosmic epoch' (PR 91). Possibly the most influential and important concept for such assumptions is Whitehead`s notion of 'prehension,' which could be thought of as the flow of experience from the past that, along with novel choices, constitutes newly becoming events.[106] These are just a few examples of what could be considered the process basis for Cobb's 'Whiteheadian assumptions,' some of which I will clarify further in subsequent chapters, but they serve to illustrate the extent to which Whitehead's thought informs his theology.

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[106] This concept will be more fully explored in Chapter Four, but Cobb feels Whitehead`s 'prehension' "makes possible views of the relations among religious traditions that are largely excluded from the academy because of its lack of this concept" Ibid.

## 2.2 'Transformationist' Comparative Theology

It is not just Cobb's theoretical attitude toward other religions and the fact of religious plurality, or 'theology of religions' which is so fundamentally indebted to process thought, it also pragmatically informs his comparative and dialogical encounters with other traditions. In this sense what Cobb calls 'transformationism' could be considered an inter-religious methodology in itself, or a 'transformationist theology.' Cobb has considered transformationism a fourth alternative to the Race's tripartite typology which shares some characteristics of pluralism, such as "respect and admiration for the wisdom and goodness in all the great religious traditions."[107] He goes on, however, to describe what he feels is the point of departure for transformationism:

> But instead [like pluralism] of concluding that we should exist side by side as different means to the same end, it affirms that it is incumbent upon us as Christians to transform ourselves by being open to this wisdom and goodness and learning all we can from it.[108]

He goes on to say:

> It is also incumbent upon Christians to share the saving wisdom that we have derived from our own tradition. Listening to others and witnessing to them are not in conflict; in fact, as we are transformed by what we learn from others, our witnessing may become far more convincing to them.[109]

Although there are many parallels between Cobb's transformationist theology and what has been termed 'The New Comparative Theology,'[110] there are also subtle but striking differences which distinguish it. In particular: Cobb's emphasis on, and hope for,

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[107] John B. Cobb Jr., "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic World," *Christian Century* 111, no. 23 (1994): 750.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] The designation 'New' primarily refers to the comparative method advocated and developed over the last few decades by theologians like Francis X. Clooney, and James Frederick, in opposition to comparative theology as it was first introduced in the nineteenth century, and since practiced. This will be further developed later in this chapter, but from this point on will just be referred to as 'comparative theology.'

*mutual* transformation of both traditions in the dialogical and comparative encounter; his *total* openness to the 'other' in terms of both learning and transformative potential; [111] and his grounding in a complementary theology of religious pluralism rather than the more typical 'inclusivist' perspective. It is these particularities which I will show have roots in Whitehead's process thought.

At first glance Cobb's transformational theology, along with his own complementary attitude toward the plurality of religions, appears deceptively simple. To summarize: as a 'transformationist' Cobb advocates going into authentic dialogue with the religious 'other' in a sincere attempt to mutually learn as much as possible about what the other has discerned about the nature of divine reality, in order that each may bring new insight back to their own tradition. In this way both traditions may be mutually transformed in light of the different understanding and discernments the other has shared. Cobb's transformationist comparative theology, which emphasizes inter-religious dialogue, acknowledges many of the same criteria as other forms of comparative theology, such as the premise that no one tradition can possibly know the entirety of all there is to know about reality and the divine, and therefore other traditions and worldviews have something important to teach. [112] Also like other forms, Cobb's transformationist approach to comparative theology affirms approaching the religious

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[111] Alan Race acknowledges that Cobb's contribution to religious pluralism is that "he combines fidelity to Christ with unqualified openness to other faiths." Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 98.

[112] Parallels between Cobb's assumptions discussed herein and those of The New Comparative Theology are most clearly seen in the criteria, or 'virtues,' of comparative theology suggested by Catherine Cornille. In her book *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* Cornille lists Humility, Commitment, Interconnectedness, Empathy, and Hospitality as necessary virtues for comparative theological reflection. Humility is based on the presupposition that religions have something to learn from one another; Commitment, the necessity to stay rooted in a particular religious tradition; Interconnection, the idea that religions do in fact have something of relevance to say to each other; Empathy, the position that there should be some understanding and empathy for the religious self-understanding of the members within the tradition being compared; and Hospitality the general openness to the possible presence of truth in other religions. Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

'other' in a manner that does not reduce or disavow its distinctiveness. James Fredericks describes this objective as far as comparative theologians are concerned as "the need to understand the Other in a way that does not annul the Other's alterity."[113] Fredericks says that comparative theologians strive to understand the religious 'other' in their own terms, rather than reformulating the teaching into a foreign idiom.[114] As was stated earlier, from Cobb's point of view, with the openness to possible truths in other worldviews, and the humility that admits to not possessing all there is to know about the nature of reality and the divine, one can enter into authentic dialogue and/or comparative encounter with a view towards creative transformation of one's own life and tradition, as well as that of the other.

This hope towards *mutual* transformation is not as explicit in other forms of comparative theology.[115] In fact, I suggest it is particular to Cobb due largely to his grounding in Whiteheadian philosophy. As will be made clear later in this thesis, process metaphysics is primarily a relational ontology. In fact, the entities which make up the world as we know it are largely constituted by their relationship to the world and the divine.[116] But all relationships are reciprocal; they are never a one-way street. Therefore, for any relationship to be healthy and beneficial for either party requires reciprocity and

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[113] James L. Fredericks, "Introduction," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis Xavier Clooney (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), xiii.

[114] James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 168.

[115] Although I would not argue that other forms of comparative theology are implicitly or explicitly imperialistic, there is a tendency toward language of appropriation that needs to be guarded against. For instance, throughout *Comparative Theology,* Francis Clooney refers to the appropriation of various aspects of Hinduism. Although he certainly appears to consciously attempt to avoid the imperialism of the past in his own work, there is little to no reference to any reciprocal offering. Cobb too speaks in the language of appropriation in *Beyond Dialogue* but, as is always the case, is concerned with *mutual* appropriation and the necessity for entering into such dialogue as equal partners, which tends to avoid hegemonic and imperialistic tendencies. For examples see: Francis Xavier Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 85.; and throughout Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*.

[116] As well as their own self-determining choices.

accountability between both. This is most clearly recognized in human familial and communal social settings, but in a relational ontology, as this thesis will illustrate, it extends far beyond that to the world at large, including the divine. By promoting an attitude toward *mutual* transformation, I suggest, Cobb recognizes the importance of what the Indigenous scholars I will be later discussing call 'reciprocal relational accountability.'[117] This is not only in keeping with a relational ontology, it also helps resist imperialist tendencies towards one-way appropriation of knowledge and value.

I suggested earlier that in addition to Cobb's hope for mutual transformation, what sets his transformationist theology apart from other comparative theological methods, is his complete, unrestricted openness to the possible truths present in the traditional ways of the 'other,' as well as his complementary pluralist theology of religions. There is an acknowledged tension in comparative theology between being open to truths in other religious perspectives, yet firmly committed to one's own tradition. Cornille calls this virtue 'Hospitality' and describes it as the general openness to what others have to say.[118] Clooney says that the tension between openness and faith, diversity and commitment to one's tradition, is a "defining feature of our era" and has no simple answers.[119] Such openness, with its inherent tension, is built into the self-understanding of what it means to do comparative theology in the modern context. Nicholson, for instance, sums up the necessary characteristics of Christian comparative theology as a serious engagement with non-Christian faiths, a resistance to generalizations about religion, and a willingness to revise theological judgments in light of the teachings of other traditions.[120]

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[117] See Section 3.3.2.
[118] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 177.
[119] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, 7.
[120] Hugh Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 3 (2009): 619.

This tension between openness to the religious 'other' and commitment to one's own tradition is clearly seen in Catherine Cornille's book *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue.* Cornille believes that the type of commitment to a particular tradition necessary for comparative theology involves an explicit assent to a particular worldview that would "logically preclude affirmation of the equal truth of alternative religious worldviews and teachings…" and "the very claim to ultimacy of one religion necessarily precludes the truth of the claims of others."[121] At the same time, like Fredericks and Clooney, Cornille appears committed to openness towards the possibility of religious truth in other traditions which could result in reflection and possible revision of one's own theological standpoint. While arguing that the virtue of humility must include a certain "abandonment of all preconceived knowledge of God and of all theological and doctrinal pride" she also states that all religions presuppose that the fullness of truth is present in their own conception of reality which prevents even listening to or learning from others.[122] This position does not seem to take into account the epistemic fallibilism that is implied in the anti-idolatry statements present in many major religious traditions, not to mention the Sikh allowance for the 'many names of God,' or the understanding of reality as plural in Jainism. Such statements denounce the idea that the fullness of the divine, or knowledge of the divine, can be grasped in its entirety by finite and fallible humans. Although Cornille recognizes the tension between these two positions, that of openness to the religious 'other' and one's own commitment to a particular tradition, she does not seem to fully recognize the severity of the seemingly incommensurable contradictions in the way she presents them. Paul Knitter seems to agree with this conclusion and has wondered how one can be doctrinally humble and doctrinally full or final at the same time, or how a person can be open to revision if

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[121] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 86.
[122] Ibid., 127,10,26.

they feel they already have it all, positions which seem contradictory yet are presumed in Cornille's formulation.[123] However, despite the fact that she acknowledges her own position that commitment to one religious worldview logically precludes the acceptance of the equal validity of another, thereby limiting what aspects are up for revision, she states:

> Any a priori rejection of truth in other religions in general, or in certain religions in particular severely limits and perhaps even aborts any chance of productive dialogue such as I have defined it. Whereas the actual presence of truth need not—and in most cases cannot—be determined beforehand, only a belief in the possibility of discovering distinctive truth in the other religion renders dialogue not only possible, but also necessary.[124]

Other religions may include possible truths, therefore, as long as that truth does not contradict fundamental truths that are essential to the worldview of one's own particular tradition, however that is conceived. This conflict between insisting on openness to theological revision based on possible truths found in the religious 'other,' while limiting the possibility of what could be considered true to those concepts that do not conflict with one's own, implies a decidedly inclusivist attitude whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged.

Rather than focussing on questions and general judgements of religious truth claims, Clooney studies the particularities of other religions, usually involving a detailed study of religious texts, in order to see what insights can be appropriated into his own tradition. Typically these involve methodological changes such as how Hindu methods of reflection could inform Christian reflection, or how an understanding of Hindu Goddess

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[123] Paul Knitter, "Virtuous Comparativists Are Practicing Pluralists," in *American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting* (Montreal2009), 5,2.
[124] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 5.

devotion could change how a Christian understands the importance of Saint Mary.[125] As an inclusivist Christian, however, Clooney is not willing to entertain the possibility of the existence of a Goddess, but is quite willing to appropriate methods of engagement with the divine feminine that are revealed by his comparative study.[126] What seems to be important to Clooney is how other religions engage and participate in their traditions, and whether as a Christian he can transform his own engagement in Christianity, not the reconciliation of truth claims that contradict his own.

The tension between openness and commitment to the doctrines of one's home tradition does not exist in the same way for Cobb. He states that it is precisely his commitment to Christ which allows him to be completely open to the religious 'other.' There are no doctrines or beliefs that are not open to revision or transformation, even if that would mean total conversion to the other tradition.[127] For Cobb, his commitment to Christ demands no less.[128] His particular Christology, however, is once again grounded in process thought. The concept of Christ, understood as the principle of creative transformation active throughout the world, combined with the Whiteheadian assumptions described above, requires that a commitment to Christ exceed a commitment to any one expression of it, even Jesus. Although he is convinced that Jesus is the greatest embodiment of the Christ principle, and that Christianity has the best chance of achieving creative transformation in the world, in spite of its less-than-exemplary history, for Cobb, being a Christian requires being completely open to truths, and their transforming capability, present in all traditions. That is not to say one need believe everything one learns from all traditions. In fact, Cobb states that "none of the central claims made by

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[125] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*. This book is a description of how to do comparative theology using Clooney's preferred method—methodical and detailed comparative study of texts from different traditions.
[126] Ibid., 93ff.
[127] Cobb Jr., "Toward a Christocentric Catholic Theology," 83.
[128] Ibid.

any of the traditions are likely to be literally and exactly correct."[129] He recognizes that it is not possible that everything that has been said about God, the natural world, and human nature can be true, considering some are obviously conflicting.[130] But he also thinks that identifying and developing arguments for and against such truth claims is a questionable pursuit. Rather, Cobb wants to "listen to the deep, even ultimate, concerns that are being expressed in these diverse statements."[131] The goal of complementary pluralism, as a transformationist, is to "transform contradictory statements into different but not contradictory ones."[132] Here again we see the dynamic character of Cobb's process attitude toward alternative traditional ways. He espouses a typical inclusivist position that universalizes his particular Christology, while maintaining a pluralist ontology that acknowledges the distinct alterity between traditions.

For Cobb, then, his attitude toward other religions—his theology of religions—is intertwined and inseparable from his transformationist method of comparative theology. Dialogue and comparative study are not only a move toward mutual transformation of *how* to engage with the divine but also a greater understanding of *what* is being engaged. For instance, serious engagement with Islam by a Christian may result in a greater understanding of the importance of totally submitting to God. Or, similar to Clooney's method, dialogue about Goddess worship with *Kali* devotees may increase gender sensitivity, how to relate to the divine feminine, and better ways to incorporate that understanding into Christianity. But Cobb's own work in encountering Buddhism goes a step further in that it led him to the conclusion that Amida Buddha and Christ are one and the same expression, yet the Buddhist 'Ultimate' of *pratītyasamutpāda* and the Christian 'Ultimate' of God are distinctly different discernments of the totality of our shared reality

[129]Cobb Jr., "Beyond Pluralism," 93. He would include his own Christianity in that statement.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

and cannot be conflated, but can co-exist in a complementary fashion.[133] These are very different results, one being practical and the other ontological, and can be thought of as both an exercise in comparative theology and a practical application of a theology of religions. This notion highlights Knitter's conclusion regarding Cornille's criteria for comparative theology that 'virtuous' comparativists, are, in fact, practicing religious pluralism to a large degree.[134]

Unlike Cobb, however, contemporary comparative theology understands itself as an alternative discourse to that of the theology of religions.[135] Hugh Nicholson says comparative theologians define their method specifically against religious pluralism and what they perceive as a "pretension to transcend any particular religious perspective."[136] James Fredericks maintains that comparative theology is an alternative to theologies of religions because such theories are not adequate to the purposes and practices of doing theology.[137] He says that unlike theologies of religions, comparative theology is a process or practice of inquiry rather than a theoretical approach to the diversity of religions which often posits a "grand theory of religion in general that claims to account for all religions."[138] Similar to other comparative theologians such as David Tracey, Fredericks

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[133] See Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, 123ff., and Cobb Jr., "Buddhist Emptiness and the Christian God." Cobb has concluded that the creatively transformative principle in the world that he, as a Christian, understands and names as 'Christ,' is the same as that which some Buddhists understand and name as 'Amida Buddha.'

[134] Knitter, "Virtuous Comparativists Are Practicing Pluralists."

[135] Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," 622.

[136] Ibid.: 621.

[137] Fredericks, "Introduction," xiv. Fredericks argues several reasons for the inadequacy of theologies of religions. They are that: the detailed study of religions has become secondary to comprehensive theological interpretations; none of Race's typologies are adequate to the hermeneutical requirement of doing theology comparatively (even while admitting he is an inclusivist); that a preoccupation with a theology of religions is not helpful to Christians in response to religious pluralism; and that theologies of religions remains hegemonic in their discourse.

[138] Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, 9,167.

says that a theological attitude toward the 'other' should come *after* a detailed study of a tradition, not before.[139] Clooney agrees and describes comparative theology as:

> ...distinguished by its sources and ways of proceeding, by its foundation in more than one tradition (although the comparativist remains rooted in one tradition), and by reflection which builds on that foundation, rather than simply on themes or by methods already articulated prior to the comparative practice. Comparative theology in this third sense is a theology deeply changed by its attention to the details of multiple religious and theological traditions; it is a theology that occurs truly only *after* comparison.[140]

Kristin Kiblinger argues, however, that it is impossible to "deeply engage others on theological matters without having some preliminary theological presuppositions about those others," and it is better to disclose those presuppositions rather than leaving them implicit.[141] There is, in this sense, no 'positionless position.' She says that much of the problem comparative theologians like Fredericks and Clooney have with 'traditional' theology of religions are based on outdated formulations which have since been nuanced and revised.[142] Rather than the hard categories that Race originally proposed, the variations and gradations between the types that have since been identified and developed by scholars like S.Mark Heim, Joseph A. DiNoia, Paul Griffiths, Schubert M. Ogden, Paul Knitter, and David Ray Griffin, address many of the concerns of comparative

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[139] Fredericks, "Introduction," xiv.
[140] Francis Xavier Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989-1995)," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 3 (1995): 522.
[141] Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," 22.
[142] Ibid., 21.

theologians, including being more sensitive to hegemonic imperialism.[143] Kiblinger suggests that comparative theologians gave up on theology of religions prematurely, especially in light of their own hegemonic tendencies, and should revisit this missed opportunity to situate their own perspective.[144] Nicholson also states that the more comparative theology argues against the importance of a theology of religions in comparative study, the more it perpetuates hegemonic attitudes:

> My basic point is that comparative theology's criticism of its predecessors neither exempts it from ambiguity nor removes it from a history of interreligious theological encounter that has been deeply implicated in colonialism and neo-colonialism. Paradoxically, the new discipline is more likely to perpetuate that history the more it attempts to deny it.[145]

### 2.3 Concluding Remarks and Contextualization

Along with Kiblinger, I suggest that it is impossible *not* to have a theological attitude toward other religions during all phases of encounter, even though it may be premature and open to revision through the act of comparison or dialogue itself. I would also argue that a more pluralist theology, while recognizing the gradational and dynamic characteristic of attitudes that can vary in different spheres, allows for a greater level of openness, engagement, and potential for mutual religious transformation, than does comparative theology practiced from a more inclusivist perspective. I have also pointed

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[143] Ibid., 26.The sources that illustrate the various subtypes and variations that Kiblinger attributes to these scholars are: Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*., S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001)., S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995)., Joseph A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Dallas: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992)., Schubert M. Ogden, *Is There One Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992)., Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, ed. Michael J. Peterson, Exploring the Philosophy of Relgion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001)., Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep.", and her own Kristin Beise Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusvism: Attitudes toward Religious Others* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

[144] Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," 42.

[145] Nicholson, "The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology," 628.

out that because Cobb's particular, yet elusive, theology of religions, and his transformationist perspective, are fundamentally based in a Whiteheadian process perspective, they are uniquely situated to avoid many of the critiques typically leveled against both the enterprises of theologies of religions and comparative theology, as will become clear in the body of this thesis.

Despite variations in methodology, it is clear that a shared condition of comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue is the importance of deeply learning about and understanding the religious 'other.' Without learning *about* non-Christians, says Fredericks, we could not learn *from* them.[146] Cornille says that proper understanding of the 'other' and the exchange of information is one of the basic requirements for dialogue that is aimed at mutual understanding and tolerance.[147] Clooney's book *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* is itself a description of how to best practice comparative theology, which he sees as a deep involvement with, and study of, religious texts, to get a thorough and detailed knowledge of both traditional ways under comparison.[148] Although Cobb feels the questions and issues surrounding dialogue should not be preconceived before dialogue commences, but should evolve out of the dialogue itself, he certainly acknowledges the benefit in learning about the religious other in order to more effectively engage in dialogue.[149]

I suggest that whether it is a precursor to, or an integral part of the encounter itself, in addition to merely learning about alternative religions, they should have the status of what William James calls a 'live hypothesis,' or one which "appeals as a real

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[146] Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, 9.
[147] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 137,3.
[148] This emphasis on text may, to a certain extent, be a Jesuit Christian imposition on the method. Such a textual emphasis may become problematic when applied to traditions that do not place such priority on text, or are primarily an oral tradition, such as most Indigenous societies.
[149] Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, x-xi.

possibility to him to whom it is proposed."[150] What is learned about other religions, and in particular the worldviews that underlie beliefs and practices, must present a real possibility of being true. Without an assumption of possibility at this level the likelihood of complete fulfillment of what Cornille lists as criteria for comparative theology seems limited.[151] As a 'dead hypothesis' there is limited motive for undertaking such an enterprise; limited possibility of recognition of commonality (Hospitality); limited possibility of the recognition of truth in viewpoints other than one's own (Humility); limited recognition of possible relevance (Interconnection); and certainly limited ability to understand, or have empathy for, the self-understanding of the religious 'other.' To paraphrase Pannenberg, the inter-religious encounter would serve little theological purpose and be limited to discussion of possible similarities, clarifying mutual misunderstandings, and addressing mutual social concerns.[152] Certainly these are admirable goals in themselves, but do not necessarily facilitate the acceptance as equals that authentic encounter calls for. To be fully open to possible truths in alternate traditional ways— transforming both *how* to relate to the divine reality and one's understanding of *what* that reality consists of—I submit, requires the possibility of

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[150] William James, *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York, New York: Hafner Press, 1948), 89. Rather than a comprehensive analysis using James' notions, I use the 'live hypothesis' and 'genuine option' concepts simply as heuristic devices to represent the openness to the 'other' as equal partners in any encounter. If the worldview of the 'other,' religious or not, is a 'dead hypothesis' in this sense, I fail to see how the exchange can be anything but hegemonic. James uses the example of belief in the Mahdi (prophesied Islamic redeemer) as a dead hypothesis for his readers, who likely had little to no exposure to Islam, but a live hypothesis to Arabs. To be a 'live hypothesis' is one requirement for an option being 'genuine;' the other two being that the option be 'forced' and 'momentous.' James uses the example of "be theosophist or be a Mohammedan" as a dead option because in his day both theosophy and Islam were either obscure or virtually unknown. Neither, he felt, were appealing and likely to be believed. However the choice between being an agnostic or a Christian was 'live' because each makes some appeal to belief that was within the realm of possibility (as well as being momentous and rather forced because you were either a Christian or not and in either case it affected your whole life).

[151] A previous footnote lists Cornille's 'virtues.' as Humility, Commitment, Interconnectedness, Empathy, and Hospitality.

[152] Pannenberg, "The Religions from the Perspective of Christian Theology and the Self-Interpretation of Christianity in Relation to the Non-Christian Traditions," 295.

partnership equivalency that is best achieved if the worldview hypothesis of the other is 'live.'

To that end, I suggest that allowing for an alternate worldview to become a 'live hypothesis,' and therefore subject to the kind of theological reflection that contemporary comparative theology advocates**,** is best accomplished with a complementary pluralist attitude and at least a minimal understanding of the ontology of the tradition in question. The fundamental ontology of the religious 'other' requires translation into concepts and terms that somehow relate to, or are intelligible through, an accepted metaphysical outlook, hopefully without collapsing into theological hegemony, something both contemporary comparative theology and pluralist theologies of religion hope to avoid. Without such interpretation, the alternate tradition remains unintelligible and therefore difficult to take seriously as a possible source of illuminating truth, with no appeal as a real possibility. As George Steiner says "To the baffled ear, the incomprehensible parley of neighboring peoples is gibberish…"[153] This ontological emphasis makes it comprehensible and 'live,' I argue, and is a productive role process philosophy plays in Cobb's complementary religious pluralism and transformationist theology.

I acknowledge that translating a worldview into foreign concepts is far from ideal, has limitations, and has potential for hegemonic and imperialist bias. However, if one is doing comparison or study of a foreign ontology, interpretation into familiar, hence understandable, concepts is unavoidable, and is in fact part of the comparative process. As Cobb's method illustrates, overt hegemonic tendencies need not predominate, or make the encounter unproductive. I will argue that process philosophy in particular leaves open the possibility of such non-coercive translation. Cobb's process-informed view of reality, I suggest, allows him to approach alternate ontologies as *a priori* 'live.' Because he

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[153] Steiner, *After Babel*, 56.

allows for a complementary pluralistic vision integrated with his transformationist methodology, contradictions become a source of investigation rather than *a priori* rejection. This total openness to possible complementary truths in alternative views of reality means that acceptance or rejection of any particular interpretation is an *a posteriori* result of such investigation, not an *a priori* presupposition. This thesis, then, is an investigation into whether Whiteheadian process philosophy, particularly as understood by Cobb, can be successful in rendering the Indigenous ontology 'live' so that further investigation with a view toward mutual understanding, whether through inter-religious dialogue or other forms of inter-cultural encounter, can be undertaken in a more equal partnership than what has occurred in the past. In particular it is intended to investigate the efficacy of Whitehead's metaphysic as a precursor step to a transformationist encounter, whether religious or secular, in interpreting, or at least supplying the epistemological tools required to better understand the Indigenous ontology. If Whitehead's philosophy succeeds in transforming the Indigenous worldview into a 'live hypothesis' for non-Indigenous people, it could provide the basis for a more equal partnership in future dialogue and interaction.

Before such comparative investigation can take place a review of the methodological difficulties inherent in this particular comparative experiment, as well as the strategies to avoid those difficulties, is in order. The following chapter addresses these fundamental issues.

# Chapter Three: **Theory and Method**

As the research material for this comparative experiment was being assembled it became clear that a typical academic methodology and approach to presenting the data would not be appropriate as it would not be consistent with either the Indigenous or 'process-based' method. Any separation of the information into strict categories would tend to reify these categories and promote the same bias and limitations I have critiqued. If categories were strictly labelled with terms associated with process philosophy it would forcibly translate the Indigenous ontological understanding into such categories, thereby not letting the data speak first on its own terms, but rather those of Process. If Indigenous terms and categories were used, the reverse would be true. In either case the dynamic and interrelated character of the various aspects of the experiment, which is to better understand both the Indigenous and Process ontology in light of each other, would be lost and the exercise compromised. Therefore a different strategy, more in keeping with the Indigenous and Process methodology, must be utilized. Before describing the format I will be using for the comparative experiment a brief overview of the issues surrounding comparative studies, and Indigenous comparative studies in particular, is required.

Cross-cultural religious comparisons have issues uniquely associated with the comparative process itself but also issues arising directly from the study of the particular cultures involved. These issues are not, moreover, limited to overt comparative exercises. According to Sam Gill, the methods of any academic study of religion are necessarily comparative in nature.[1] Before a comparative process can take place information and knowledge *about* the traditions in question must be acquired. Within this antecedent academic study lie many important questions and problems surrounding identity, authenticity, authority, translation, representation, and meaningfulness, as well as moral

[1] Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," 965.

issues surrounding intention and motivation. As I will elaborate below, I would suggest this is especially true when the study is of a colonialized and oppressed culture by a dominant society—as is the case in any study of Native North Americans by Euro-Americans.

### 3.1 Definition of Terms—Nuancing 'Indigenous'

The term I most commonly found used by Indigenous scholars to designate the dominant Western society in North American is 'Euro-American.' Therefore, I keep to this convention and use other terms only when the source author does so. I recognize, however, that the use of this term generalizes and universalizes concepts and attitudes that are not necessarily shared by all North American non-Indigenous people. The use of this term also suggests a 'modern' worldview, largely inherited from Cartesian and Newtonian perspectives, which could be described as 'substantist,' 'materialist,' and 'mechanistic.' These denote an understanding of reality as consisting of inert material objects which endure through time and space. Although common, this view is not universally shared and is, in fact, contested by advances in scientific understanding, such as recent theories in quantum physics, which describe the nature of reality as (wave) energy-events as much as 'particle' events. This suggests a more relational and processual metaphysic may be more adequate. Whitehead's Process Philosophy is itself a Western Euro-American metaphysic which does not adhere to the dominant substantive/mechanistic view and is therefore often considered 'postmodern.'[2]

When not referring to specific cultures or communities in this thesis, I use the terms 'Native,' 'Native North American,' and 'First Nations,' interchangeably with

[2] David Ray Griffin has written many books and articles suggesting Process Philosophy as postmodern including David Ray Griffin, *Whitehead's Radically Different Postmodern Philsophy: An Argument for Its Contemporary Relevance*, ed. George R. Lucas, Suny Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York, 2007).

'Indigenous' to synonymously denote the first inhabitants of North America, or those who identify their ancestry as such, including Inuit and Metis and other mixed heritage peoples who identify themselves as Native. I will only use Native American, American Indian, and Indian, when the source authors themselves use these terms.

The definition of the term 'Indigenous' is somewhat difficult to determine due to the diversity of usage which varies according to context and agenda, and is often associated with colonialism.[3] The use of the word 'indigenous' as meaning 'born in a country,' or 'native' dates from the 1600's Latin *indigenus.*[4] However, it originally comes from the Latin root *indigena* meaning 'sprung from the land,' and derives from Old Latin *indu* meaning 'in,' and *gene*, (root of *gignere) meaning* 'beget,' or from *gen meaning* 'produce.'[5] In other words, the etymology of the word identifies it as originally meaning 'sprung, produced, or begot from the land.' Currently, when speaking of people who are Indigenous, the term is usually associated with original or first inhabitants of a land, or those who have inhabited a particular area for a long period of time before colonialism. However, additional characteristics are frequently added depending on usage. My own contention, in keeping with its earliest meaning, is that although all Native peoples and original or 'first' inhabitants of any particular land base could be considered Indigenous, it is less accurate to limit the term to that; or that all beliefs and practices that could be considered Indigenous are necessarily only those of Native peoples. In his book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods,* however,

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[3] Both Shawn Wilson and Graham Harvey want to link Indigeneity to oppression and colonialism as a necessary part of its definition. Wilson argues that 'Indigenous' as a proper noun is being reclaimed by aboriginal people worldwide who have oppression and colonialism as a common identifying characteristic. Harvey suggests such a move is warranted because the history of colonialism is integral to the ongoing experience of Indigenous people. Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 16., Graham Harvey, "Introduction," in *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, ed. Graham Harvey (New York: Cassell, 2000), 12.

[4] Douglas Harper, in *Online Etymology Dictionary* (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=indigenous accessed May 4, 2012).

[5] Ibid.

Shawn Wilson does just that. He considers 'Indigenous' to refer to the "people and peoples who identify their ancestry with the original inhabitants of Australia, Canada, and other countries worldwide," and as an adjective to "describe things that belong to these peoples (like Indigenous knowledge)."[6]

In a report to the *Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics* entitled "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," Willie Ermine and his team of researchers identify 'Indigenous' as meaning particular tribal peoples, but refrain from adding either 'colonialism' or connection to the land to what it actually means to *be* Indigenous, except as a temporal indicator as being 'pre-colonial' inhabitants. The report states:

> Indigenous Peoples are the tribal peoples in independent countries whose distinctive identity, values, and history distinguishes them from other sections of the national community. Indigenous Peoples are the descendants of the original or pre-colonial inhabitants of a territory or geographical area and despite their legal status, retain some or all of their social, economic, cultural and political institutions.[7]

This particular definition appears designed to politically and legally address what it means to be Indigenous under the 'Indian Act' in Canada and other similar governmental agencies, as well as to suit the purposes and goals of the specific study of the report. Although adequate for their purpose, it serves to illustrate the diversity of definitions, the particularity of each definition, and the difficulty of determining what it means to be 'Indigenous' in a more general sense.

In contrast are those who want to define the term closer to the original meaning of being connected to, or related to, the land. That concept does, however, seem to be included in most, although obviously not all, definitions. There appears to be a general

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[6] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 34.
[7] Willie Ermine, Raven Sinclair, and Bonnie Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," (Saskatoon, Saskachewan: Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre, 2004), 5.

acceptance for the idea that there is a common characteristic shared between peoples around the world that identifies them as 'Indigenous.' This seems to be the case for non-Native academic scholars such as Graham Harvey, James Cox, and F. David Peat, as well as Native scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr., Betty Bastien, E. Richard Atleo, Anne Waters, Shawn Wilson, Stan Wilson, and others. Although they all recognize that the term encompasses a huge variety of cultures, beliefs, and practices—none of which are essentially the same, and many of which are contradictory in nature—there is something that links them both in how these people are identified and how they self-identify. As Robert Segal has pointed out, generalizations of this sort, in which common characteristics or traits are universalized, are not bad in themselves because they do not necessarily equate to essentialism.[8] In fact, they are necessary to formulate any type of theory. Theories *are* generalizations which can easily recognize differences while maintaining recognition of commonality.[9] In this case, both the non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars recognize common defining traits which they identify as Indigenous, although there is not always a consensus on what should be included. In his book *Primitive to Indigenous,* James Cox, while working towards an adequate definition of the term 'Indigenous,' discusses the evolutionary history of the academic movement of the use of the term 'primitive', to 'primal,' to finally 'Indigenous,' as describing 'original' peoples and their practices.[10] He points out the variety of hegemonic religious presuppositions, as well as the overt and covert essentialisms, that are associated with the earlier terms and argues that 'Indigenous' is a term that largely avoids these pitfalls, accurately describes the common defining traits of indigeneity, while acknowledging the

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[8] Robert A. Segal, "All Generalizations Are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 159.
[9] Ibid.: 158.
[10] James L. Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions*, ed. Graham Harvey, et al., Vitality of Indigenous Religions (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007).

diversity of how these traits are expressed in cultures around the world. Although Cox feels that 'Indigenous Religions' as a category of religions is no more problematic than any of the other so called 'World Religions,' he sets out to replace the whole 'World Religions' paradigm with a model of his own and then places 'Indigenous Religions' alongside the others as an equally valid descriptor. How successful he is at accomplishing this task is not important for this work but what *is* applicable is how he chooses to define 'Indigenous' after his thorough historical analysis of how the terminology was derived and accepted into academic use. In the end he acknowledges that the primary trait of Indigeneity, which he says "isolates the one central belief found among Indigenous societies everywhere" is that Indigenous people are "bound to a location," are "native to a place" or "belong to it."[11] The central overriding belief of all Indigenous people, according to Cox:

> …derives from a kinship-based world-view in which attention is directed towards ancestor spirits as the central figure in religious life and practice. As such, Indigenous Religions are restricted cosmologically because their spirit world is organized around a system of lineage. Ancestors are known by name; they belong to a place just as their descendants do, and they relate to living communities as spirit conveyors of ancestral traditions. In this sense, (Jan) Platvoet is right: amongst indigenous peoples, kinship rules religion: it defines its fundamental characteristic and dictates the one belief all Indigenous Religions share in common.[12]

For Cox, then, Indigenous people are—or identify themselves as—bound or belonging to a location or place. This fundamental defining characteristic generates the central, overriding religious belief of ancestor veneration, a practice which is also associated with and tied to a particular location. He goes on to say: "It would seem, therefore, that an indigenous religion is not characterized by its means of production, but

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[11] Ibid., 69.
[12] Ibid.

by the location and kinship system."[13] These two characteristics of being connected to a particular location and strong kinship relations are not uncommon in descriptions of what it means to be Indigenous and would likely be familiar and acceptable to Indigenous people themselves. However, the way many Indigenous scholars describe these characteristics provides a subtle but important difference in how this definition is understood.

Many Indigenous scholars do not necessarily set out to define Indigenous as such, but they often express what it means to be Indigenous.[14] For instance Nomalungelo Goduka states that "although Indigenous peoples around the world vary widely in their customs, traditions, rituals, languages, and so on, land is considered by all as the center of the universe, a parent, a giver of life."[15] She also says: "from the land originates their identity, art, history, and a foundation of *ubuntu*, or humanness," and "land for us is not a source of sustenance only, it also serves as a cultural and spiritual bond connecting us with our ancestors, and to the greater whole, Mother Earth."[16] I will deal with this notion of inter-relatedness in greater detail in following chapters, but the salient point is that although at first glance this seems to support Cox's definition, there is in fact far greater emphasis placed on land itself, and the relationship to that land, rather than belonging to or coming from a particular location. In this sense 'land' does not necessarily merely imply 'location.' It is the relationship with land itself and how this relationship connects people to the totality of the natural world, including their past, present, and future, that determines Indigenous identity, epistemology, language, religion and practices. As

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[13] Ibid., 71.
[14] Many of the Indigenous scholars used in this study discuss what it means to *be* Indigenous without necessarily offering a formal definition. These include Bastien:2007, Atleo:2004, Waters:2004, Goduka:2006.
[15] Nomalungelo Goduka, "Prologue," in *Indigenous Peoples' Wisdom and Power: Affirming Our Knowledge through Narratives*, ed. Julian E. Kunnie and Nomalungelo I. Goduka, *Vitality of Indigenous Religions* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), xi.
[16] Ibid., x,xi.

Goduka has pointed out above, kinship ties, including ancestors, are derivative of their relationship to the land and through the land, the greater universe. From this perspective, location would certainly be important, but primarily as it would determine the particularity of the relationship, resulting in the diversity of cultures around the world. Different location would denote varying relational characteristics, resulting in the diversity of cultural practices that are understood and labelled globally as 'Indigenous.' Therefore, a particular place-location characterizes the distinctive nature of the diverse Indigenous cultures but it is the underlying relationship with the land, indicative of a pervasive relational ontology, that illustrates their Indigeneity. Gregory Cajete says that "Native cultures are the earth, air, fire, water, and spirit of the place from which they evolve."[17] With their reciprocal relationship with the particular land base from which they come, distinct cultural, psychological, and physical characteristics are formed and emphasized.[18] This is also reflected in their mythic expressions in which "People living near water, emphasize water. People living in mountainous terrain look to the mountains, Desert people understand the desert and the flora and fauna."[19] According to Cajete, then, distinct land bases particularize the manner in which each culture expresses the relationship they have with 'land' itself, and through that land the greater universe. This allows for the identification of common characteristics in ontology while recognizing the diversity and individuality of each Indigenous culture.

Anne Waters' use and understanding of Indigenous also, on the surface, initially looks like it supports how it is used and defined by Wilson and Cox, but adds further nuances to the term. Like Wilson, she tends to use 'Indigenous' as a global term to identify pre-colonial cultures around the world, but says in her discussion on the shifting

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[17] Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Sante Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 306.
[18] Ibid., 187.
[19] Ibid., 207.

identities that makes up her world as a Seminole from Florida, that this often results in cognitive dissonance as she balances her different roles. She concludes with identifying her relationship to people and place as where these selves converge.

> My shifting voices are my shifting identities in play. Yet always, most frequently hidden, is the convergence and coagulation of the selves—of who I am now and in the becoming of this place where my people walked and where they and I walk still as we voice ourselves into being.[20]

Waters considers the Native American identity and worldview a "history of place consciousness, preserved through oral history, [which] manifests discrete geographical place symbols within consciousness that provide a conceptual framework of identity as place."[21] She states that "American Indian consciousness, and hence American Indian identity, is cognitively of, and interdependent with, our land base."[22] So in as much as the American Indian is 'Indigenous' to the Americas, whether or not one takes the post-contact colonial experience as an integral part of current Native self-identity, it is the connection to land that is central to their consciousness and identity. The specific location manifests particular "geographic place symbols," but for Waters 'place' is also intimately tied to "where my people walked," and where we "voice ourselves into being." The implication that can be drawn, once again, is that 'place' denotes more than physical location. The geographic place symbols provide the conceptual structure, but identity construction, while tied to a particular location, extends to a deeper sense of relationship. When people do not have a possessive sense of 'ownership' of land, 'place,' like 'kinship,' takes on a slightly different meaning than how it is understood in a normal Euro-American context. Simon Ortiz of the Acoma Pueblo community describes it as:

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[20] Anne Waters, "Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being," in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 170.
[21] Ibid., 155.
[22] Ibid.

> You recognize your birth as coming from a specific place, but that place is more than just a physical or geographical place, but obviously a spiritual place, a place with the whole scheme of life, the universe, the whole scheme and power of creation. Place is the source of who you are in terms of your identity, the language that you are born into and that you come to use.[23]

What this passage by Ortiz suggests is that the specificity of physical place or location requires further nuancing, with 'place' thought of as a connection to the wider natural world and "power of creation." Although one is born in a specific location, that 'place' includes the geographic particularities, but as a source of identity creation also extends beyond. It is the relationship one has with the universe and "power of creation" by virtue of one's connection to a specific place that is of primary concern. The particularity of physical or geographical place determines *how* the relationship with the natural world is manifest, not whether there *is* such a relationship. It is this broader connotation of 'connection to the land,' as implied by Waters, Ortiz, Cajete, and Goduka, that I wish to explore in determining what it means to be Indigenous.

In a similar, if more generalized way, according to Chris Cunningham and Fiona Stanley, Maori Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal contrasts Indigenous worldviews with those of typical 'Western' and 'Eastern' religions by defining 'Indigenous' as "those cultures whose world views place special significance on the idea of the unification of humans with the natural world."[24] Royal, say Cunningham and Stanley, is referring to the Indigenous view which "sees people as integral to the world, with humans having a seamless relationship with nature which includes seas, lands, rivers, mountains, flora, and fauna."[25] Once again Indigeneity is self-identified through special relationship and interconnectedness with the entirety of the natural world. So, when non-Indigenous

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[23] Quoted by Jyotirmaya Tripathy, "Towards an Essential Native American Identity: A Theoretical Overview," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 26, no. 2 (2006): 316.
[24] Chris Cunningham and Fiona Stanley, "Indigenous by Definition, Experience, or World View," *BMJ* 327, no. 7412 (2003): 1.
[25] Ibid.

scholars speak of the defining characteristic of Indigeneity as being a sense of *belonging to* a particular locale it may be speaking more to the sense of ownership inherited from the colonizing power, rather than the relational ontology with which Indigenous people identify. Certainly, there would be a sense of 'belonging' or being 'bound' to a specific land base, largely determining self and communal identity because of the particularity of the relationship, but it would not necessarily be in the Euro-American sense of belonging as in 'ownership' of that land. Similarly, the kinship connections and veneration that Platvoet and Cox say rule Indigenous religion, imply human kinship relations as understood in the Euro-American sense rather than the relatedness of all creation, human and non-human, that is central to an Indigenous metaphysic of nature.

In this context it is not necessarily clear that the two traits in Cox's definition of Indigenous as being bound to the land and venerating kinship relations are separate and distinct. How Cox defines the term fails to reflect the concept that in many cases Indigenous relationships with the land, and connection to location, *are* considered kinship relationships. Although obviously different, they are not distinct from ancestor relationships and veneration. Although this point, and the ontology associated with it, will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters, what is important at this stage is to recognize that connection to land, and through the land the entirety of the cosmos, is tantamount to kinship and thus requires a broader definition of Indigeneity.

What then are we left with in defining 'Indigenous?' In order to work with what could be considered a 'necessary and sufficient' definition I will presume a more fundamental approach which understands the term as a way of being in relationship with land. I will follow those who start from the position that Indigenous beliefs, ontology, epistemology, and practices, are those derived from being in relationship with the land, and through the land to the universe as a whole. Indigenous Peoples, then, are those who, because they have such a relationship, have developed these traits. In summarizing the

conclusion by a panel of both Native and non-Native scholars, Kenneth Mello of Southwestern University articulated a very good definition of Indigenous religion along these lines as: those religious beliefs and practices that developed from relationship with the land, by and for the people who live on the land.[26] By extension then, Indigenous beliefs, values, practices, epistemologies, languages, and culture, would be those *developed from radical relationship with the natural world, through the land, by and for the people who live on the land*.[27] Indigenous *people*, therefore, are those that have or have had such a relationship, and consequently developed such beliefs, values, practices, epistemologies, languages, and culture.

This, then, is the understanding I will be promoting in this thesis when I refer to Indigeneity or Indigenous people. Regardless of any contextual additions, the focus on deep relationality to land in its universal sense is the necessary and sufficient factor for the definition.[28] I recognize that in different contexts, such as political, economic, and 'religious' spheres of interaction, additional nuancing may be required, such as the addition by Wilson of the common experience of the oppression inherent in colonialism. For the purposes of this thesis, however, this more fundamental definition better reflects the ontological understanding I will be comparing. To Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete, for instance, the connection and participation with the natural world constitutes the best definition of being Indigenous and is found in various forms in all traditional Indigenous cultures, even the ancient folk traditions of rural Europe.[29] To Cajete, as far as Indigenous people are concerned all human development "is predicated on our interaction with the

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[26] Kenneth Mello, "Issues for Canada's First Nations Peoples" (Presented at the American Academy of Religions, Montreal, Canada, Nov 7-10 2009).

[27] Radical in this sense refers to the pervasiveness of the relational outlook in all aspects of the lived Indigenous experience.

[28] This definition includes those who are currently identified as Indigenous, is fundamental enough to exist in a complementary fashion with additional characteristics in different contexts, yet is not based on race or limited to habitation of particular locations for any arbitrary time frame.

[29] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 187.

soil, the air, the climate, the plants, and the animals of the places in which we live."[30] It is this participatory and reciprocal relationship with the land and place, and the subsequent need to maintain that relationship, which is shared by Indigenous people, that is reflected in narratives, ritual, art, and spiritual traditions, and consequently informs their psyche in all aspects of personal and communal identity. Cajete goes on to say that in Indigenous tribes the "philosophies, cultural ways of life, customs, language, all aspects of the cultural being in one way or another—are ultimately tied to the relationships that they have established and applied during their history with regard to certain places and to the earth as a whole."[31] Jyotimaya Tripathy agrees that there is a Native commonality of connection to the land that continues to the present time and connects Native American peoples into a common community. This essence is "realized in the Natives' symbiotic relationship with land and nature."[32] It is the "inherent connectedness to all life" that is central to Native systems."[33] Cajete says:

> In the same fashion as myth, land becomes an extension of the Native mind, for it is the place that holds memory. Hence, it becomes one of the major roles of totemic clans to define the kinds of expressions of reverence to be given to each sacred site. Sacred sites contain the compact of kinship to certain plants, animals, or natural phenomena with which a clan group identifies. It is the landscape that contains the memories, the bones of the ancestors, the earth, the air, fire, water, and spirit from which a Native culture has come to and to which it continually returns. It is the land that ultimately defines a Native people.[34]

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 4.
[32] Tripathy, "Towards an Essential Native American Identity: A Theoretical Overview," 313.
[33] Ibid.: 317.
[34] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 250.

The suggested definition also preserves the diverse nature of Indigenous cultures and the characteristic of 'place' or 'locale' by acknowledging that different lands and locations will naturally develop different relationships which will in turn be expressed in unique ways. Joseph Epes Brown expresses this point by stating:

> One explanation for the current new willingness to understand Native Americans and their life-ways is that being rooted in this land for thousands of years, the Indians' otherwise very diverse cultures have all come to express rich spiritual relationships with this continent; indeed the forms and symbols bearing these values are all drawn from the details of each people's particular geographic environment. Native Americans lived, and many still do live, what one might call a metaphysic of nature, spelled out by each group in great detail, defining responsibilities and the true nature of that vast web of human-kind's cyclical interrelationships with the elements, the earth, and all that lives upon the land.[35]

While this definition includes Native and 'original' peoples, it is not strictly limited to those, therefore taking account of historic migration and nomadic trends. It also does not draw an arbitrary time frame as to how long a people need to reside on any particular land. It includes observed importance in kinship ties and alliances because in many Indigenous contexts these biological relationships may be closer, but are not distinctly or ontologically different than those with the rest of the natural world. In addition, it does not contest the legitimate claim that Indigenous people have undergone common hardship and cultural devastation through colonialism by the dominant Western society and how that has shaped their current conditions, identity, and physical location, but recognizes this tragic experience as happening *to* Indigenous people, not as the defining trait that makes them 'Indigenous' as such.

However, what this definition does do is open up the possibility of re-claiming Indigeneity that may have been lost or weakened through colonialism, as well as the

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[35] Joseph Epes Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, Cmv ed. (Bloomington Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007), 83.

possibility of *becoming* Indigenous. By not designating who is Indigenous and non-Indigenous along racial lines, forced social circumstances, or particular time frames, the possibility exists that with increased or renewed relationship with the land people could actually become Indigenous, or at least *more* Indigenous. For instance, although Emily Cousins does not believe that non-Natives should "run their own sweat lodges and play at "being Indian"," which she considers a form of cultural appropriation, she does recognize the importance of non-Natives learning about the land and how to interact with it.[36] She quotes Vine Deloria Jr. who has encouraged people to think about the extent non-Native Americans have become Indigenous if they have "responded to the rhythms of the land."[37] This is, she notes, based on a definition of 'becoming Indigenous' that does not mean becoming Native, but rather "knowing the land where we live and showing it respect."[38] Accordingly, says Cousins, learning about Native religions, not copying them, can help in this process by offering a model of what it means to have a spiritual relationship with the land. By limiting the move toward Indigeneity to "knowing the land" and "showing respect," however, Cousins seems to imply that although non-Native can become *more* Indigenous, they would be unable to achieve the level of relationship achieved by Native peoples. The more general definition I propose, however, does not differentiate in this way and suggests that in principle it is possible for any person to gain this relationship with a particular land base and develop the beliefs, practices, and epistemology that could be recognized as Indigenous. Indeed, the implication is that at some point in history all people from every culture, or at least their ancestors, including those that make up the dominant Euro-American society, were Indigenous to a land-base somewhere, and therefore have the ability to renew that deep relationship anywhere.

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[36] Emily Cousins, "Mountains Made Alive: Native American Relationships with Sacred Land," *Cross Currents* 46, no. Winter (1997): 508.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

However, this thesis will largely concentrate on how this relationship is expressed in Native North American cultures as reported by Native scholars.

An example from within Native culture that both illustrates how connection to the land is fundamental to Indigeneity but can be lost or regained in differing circumstances, is that of the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq. It is still contested whether Mi'kmaq are traditionally native to Newfoundland, came over with the French to help eradicate the local Beothuk Indigenous population, or were merely seasonal occupants engaged in hunting and fishing.[39] In any case Suzanne Owen has studied the resurgence of Native culture in the province since the Mi'kmaq gained recognition as First Nations on the island. In particular she has done research on the intertribal borrowing of ceremonies from the plains traditions, such as the powwow, sweat lodge, and sacred pipe, which have become increasingly popular, yet were not traditionally part of Mi'kmaq culture. The sacred pipe has been recognized as a 'pan-Indian' ceremony throughout North America, but although some Elders believe the pipe was given to the Mi'kmaq hundreds of years ago, anthropologist John Crellin says it is a much more recent addition to Mi'kmaq ceremony.[40] Raymond Bucko has observed that the sweat lodge has re-appeared as a pan-Indian ceremony as well, largely done in the Lakota form.[41] The ceremony as performed by the Mi'kmaq, for instance, is usually done following Lakota protocol, even though some believe that in the past there was traditionally some form of Mi'kmaq sweat lodge.[42] Owen says:

> The sweat lodge ceremony, in its present form, has only recently become part of their culture, although several Mi'kmaq spoke of how they once had a form of the sweat lodge in the past. Not all Mi'kmaq

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[39] Suzanne Owen, *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality* (London: Continuum, 2008), 113.
[40] Ibid., 127.
[41] Raymond A. Bucko, *The Lakota Ritual of the Sweat Lodge: History and Contemporary Practice*, Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 252-53.
[42] Owen, *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality*, 127.

> accept the sweat lodge ceremony as part of their culture yet acknowledge its importance as a 'borrowed' ceremony to help revive their cultural identity as Mi'kmaq.[43]

The reason given for the necessity of borrowing such ceremonies was that the local First Nations people had been so culturally disconnected from the land that it no longer spoke to their Elders, and therefore the relationship had to be renewed using proper protocol.[44] Proper respect and procedure was necessary even if it meant having to borrow from those who had not experienced quite the same level of land dislocation.[45] Owen spoke to one of the first lodgekeepers to bring the sweat lodge to the Maritimes and he acknowledged that they had learned the traditions elsewhere, himself originally from the Cree. Owen quotes the keeper as saying, "Now we don't need to learn their songs—songs come through from the spirit world."[46] Another said they hoped that soon they would no longer need to borrow ceremonies because the land was starting to speak to their Elders. New songs were being created (or old ones re-learned) which would lead to a re-learning of the proper protocol according to their own tradition.[47] This example illustrates the premise that connection to a specific land may be lost, but can be renewed by Indigenous people with the ability to do so. In theory, therefore, even peoples who have long lost such an intimate connection to the natural world, such as European immigrants to the Americas and some Native peoples that were particularly hard hit from the effects of colonialism, could *become* Indigenous again, or re-establish their Indigeneity, through renewing and maintaining the required relationship with the land. This would not, of course, mean they became Native to North America if they were not

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[43] Ibid., 113.
[44] The disconnect with traditional ways was so severe in the case of the Indigenous Beothuk population, as was the genocidal violence that was endured, that they have become culturally extinct.
[45] Suzanne Owen, "Sources of Contemporary Mi'kmaq Spirituality" (Presented at the American Academy of Religion, Montreal November 7-10 2009). Owen spoke of these reasons during her presentation.
[46] Owen, *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality*, 123. Owen quotes Joey Paul from July 4, 2003.
[47] Owen, "Sources of Contemporary Mi'kmaq Spirituality".

already, but that the intimate relatedness to the land that resulted in the development of beliefs and practices that are 'born of the land,' is more fundamental to Indigeneity than any particular racial ancestry.

### 3.2 Research Issues and Context

In the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre report titled "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples" a team of researchers, led by Willie Ermine of the First Nations University of Canada, compiled a literature review of scholarship dealing with Indigenous research ethics.[48] The bibliography consists of hundreds of books and articles that relate to the topic of research in the Indigenous context. To comprehensively address all the issues presented in these scholarly works would make it a central theme of this thesis, which is not the case. However, it is helpful to contextualize this thesis within the issues, assessments, and conclusions raised by Ermine et.al. about this controversial topic as a way of situating the comparative experiment I wish to undertake. [49]

Although the primary goal in Ermine's report is to discuss ethical research on Indigenous people in the context of Health, it presents a critical review of the history of academic research on Indigenous people in general. He presents critiques that have been levelled against past scholarship, suggesting that for the most part it has been based on "misguided interests, motivations, and assumptions of an old order of scholarship."[50] He also notes that researchers have been viewed as intruders and predators who inaccurately describe Indigenous ways of life, and are intrusive, exploitative, and unethical.[51] The report states the position that Western methods have historically exploited Native people

[48] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples."
[49] Henceforth this research team will just be referred to as Ermine
[50] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 12.
[51] Ibid.

and have perpetuated a negative representation of social issues through inaccurate research, inadequate education, slanted media coverage, and dehumanizing stereotypes.[52] As a result there has been a movement towards participatory research action as well as 'insider' research conducted by members of the Indigenous communities, or in collaboration with Aboriginal people.[53] The report advocates a move to this type of research, as well as the emergence of Indigenous research paradigms founded upon Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and protocols. Ermine feels these research methodologies, in which Indigenous people control their own agenda, will promote empowerment, inclusivity, and respect, and will provide a platform for research with spiritual and philosophical foundations that will better serve the Indigenous community.[54]

Although this report criticizes many of the hidden agendas, presuppositions, and biases, of modern Western-centric academic colonialist scholarship, it does not address some of the legitimate concerns raised by contemporary theorists commenting on research conducted in an 'insider' fashion. Bruce Lincoln, for instance, states that:

> Understanding the system of ideology that operates in one's own society is made difficult by two factors: (i) one's consciousness is itself a product of that system, and (ii) the system's very success renders its operations invisible, since one is so consistently immersed in and bombarded by its products that one comes to mistake them (and the apparatus through which they are produced and disseminated) for nothing other than "nature."[55]

Lincoln is pointing out what many now accept as obvious. It is difficult, if not impossible, to objectively study one's own culture without one's embedded presuppositions influencing the research and conclusions. Such a study becomes what Sam Gill calls the 'religious study of religion' in which the study is designed and

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[52] Ibid., 13.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 16.
[55] Lincoln, "Theses on Method," 397.

motivated by the concerns of the community rather than an attempt at objectivity and impartiality.[56] For Lincoln such a study, which allows its subjects to define the terms in which they will be understood, can no longer be considered scholarship. In his article "Theses on Method" Lincoln states:

> When one permits those whom one studies to define the terms in which they will be understood, suspends one's interest in the temporal and contingent, or fails to distinguish between "truths", "truth-claims", and "regimes of truth", one has ceased to function as historian or scholar. In that moment, a variety of roles are available: some perfectly respectable (amanuensis, collector, friend and advocate), and some less appealing (cheerleader, voyeur, retailer of import goods). None, however, should be confused with scholarship.[57]

However, Ermine's report points out that not recognizing and taking into account the epistemological and ontological differences between Euro-American and Indigenous cultures, combined with the disparate power relations between the dominant and subordinate society, has fostered and will continue to foster the exploitation, racism, ethnocentricity, harmfulness, and negative cultural images that persists in academic scholarship of Native culture, people and communities. The report's central critique of past academic research is that there has been an assumption by Western researchers that it is possible to understand Indigenous worldviews, practices, beliefs, and other aspects of culture from the sole perspective of the dominant Euro-American worldview. As far as Western researchers have been concerned, their own worldview and epistemological paradigm is impartial, the sole and privileged representative of truth and all human knowledge, and universally sufficient for accurately assessing all Indigenous cultures and their beliefs and practices.[58]

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[56] Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," 967.
[57] Lincoln, "Theses on Method," 398.
[58] While likely true in many cases, this assessment seems overly critical to me and universalizes a perspective and methodology that would be difficult to defend as applying to *all* Western scholarship.

Although some of these issues will be considered in more detail later in this chapter, I would suggest here that both insider and outsider perspectives have merit and that their appropriateness needs to be assessed according to the particular study. For instance, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pointed out, the external 'cumulative tradition' of any particular culture, translated into their own cultural perspective, is really all the outsider has access to for study.[59] So, if it is the internal belief systems that are being studied, they can only be accurately and fully understood from an emic position. In the comparative experiment I undertake it is how Indigenous people understand their world, and how they see it expressed in Indigenous cultures, that forms one of the comparates. Therefore, as will be delineated later, it will be necessary for the particular purposes of this comparison to focus on how Indigenous people themselves understand their ontology and epistemology, as reported by Indigenous scholars and Elders. For that reason, and because of the particular goals of this thesis, I agree with Ermine in a limited sense and suggest it is imperative that Indigenous people 'speak for themselves' from within their own epistemological paradigms. While it would be a mistake to assume that these scholars fully represent the Indigenous perspective, their representation is adequate to gain enough comparative data for the purposes of this document.

Ermine suggests that what is required for the development of ethical academic research of Indigenous cultures is the recognition of an 'ethical space' produced by the confrontation of contrasting intentions and perspectives of the world.[60] This theoretical 'space' is the acknowledgement of the dividing line between foreign worldviews which have each been formed and guided by distinct "histories, knowledge, traditions, values, interests, and social, economic and political imperatives."[61] He sees the 'ethical space' as

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[59] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions*.
[60] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 20.
[61] Ibid.

a process that unfolds through a series of stages from "dialogue to dissemination of results" which allows for dialogue about intentions, values and assumptions from which the particulars of cross-cultural engagements are negotiated.[62] Ermine proposes that the development of the 'ethical space' will be a new enterprise in research which requires a shift in epistemological perspective that would be able to successfully accommodate different worldviews.[63] The report states:

> The principle imperative of this new enterprise, spurred on by believing in the ethical space is the realignment and shifting of the perspective, particularly from the Western knowledge perspective that dominates the current research order, to a new center defined by symmetrical relations in crosscultural engagement. This shift in consciousness will not and cannot be manifested through the lenses of Western thought alone (Freire, 1970). The ethical space will take form as new, previously oppressed or silenced voices enter the discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, it will require models of new knowledge and pedagogy from different worldviews.[64]

Ermine is proposing a paradigm shift which would allow each party coming together in dialogue to do so with an openness to the other that will foster an ethical interaction, while acknowledging the validity of different ontological and epistemological perspectives. Fundamentally it is simply a method promoting cultural and epistemological sensitivity, which has been advocated in a variety of literature on subaltern cultures.[65] It is also the central objective in the theological methodologies toward dialogue that were presented in the previous chapter. This is also what I am suggesting when I argue that for full and open dialogue to exist, the worldview of the foreign 'other' must at least be a 'live hypothesis.' It must be viable enough within one's own perspective that it can become a 'hypothesis' for belief, whether or not one chooses

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[62] Ibid., 21.
[63] Ibid., 43.
[64] Ibid.
[65] The role of the subaltern in such literature is discussed in more detail below.

to accept it.[66] The worldview of the 'other' cannot be so foreign that it is considered illegitimate before dialogue has even begun, nor the people who adhere to such beliefs thought irrational. Without being 'live' in that sense, there is limited chance of bridging the epistemic distance between the two foreign views, rendering the meeting at the ethical space less fruitful because of the dominance of the conflicting conceptual baggage Ermine's model seeks to bracket off. Because of the inherent impossibility of coming from a 'positionless position' such baggage would continue to colour one's perspective toward the validity of the other's perspective on the matters under discussion. As argued in the previous chapter, a further step is required to insure that openness.

In the final pages of the report Ermine challenges scholarship to come up with ways to help reconcile the ontological conflicts. He states:

> Particularly difficult terrains of the new dialogue will include how to resolve the issue of contexts, or how to reconcile disparate contexts in which the respective knowledge systems are embedded. *This means work to reconcile a scientific based knowledge that defines much of the Western world with an epistemology based on participatory consciousness and personal experiences with human, natural, and supernatural relationships found in Indigenous learning traditions. It is important for Indigenous knowledge to be recognized as valid in its own right and not to be dismissed if it contradicts or is not explicable in Western academic terms*. Concerted effort and fortitude will be required to place a particular focus of inquiry to the systems and institutions that promote and conduct research.[67] (Italics mine)

This is a crucial point for what I am undertaking in this thesis. The challenge from Willie Ermine and his academic team of Native scholars is to find an ontological and epistemological paradigm that moves toward reconciling the disparity between an adequate Western scientific worldview and the relational and experiential perspective of

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[66] As pointed out earlier, to become a true 'genuine option' it must also be forced and momentous; a situation in which one *must* decide between options in that one cannot decide *not* to choose. It must also be momentous in that it is not a trivial decision.

[67] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 46.

Indigenous peoples. As will be further developed, I argue that the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead is capable of doing just that. I will present some Indigenous perspectives, as expressed in particular Indigenous cultures and identified and reported by Indigenous scholars, with support from recognized non-Indigenous sources. I will also determine whether Whitehead's process thought is capable of interpreting, accommodating, and translating that perspective. If successful it will allow meeting at Ermine's proposed 'ethical space' in a manner in which the Indigenous epistemology and perspective is "recognized as valid in its own right" and not "dismissed if it contradicts or is not explicable in Western academic terms."[68]

There have been numerous scientists who have put Whitehead's philosophy in dialogue with current advances of scientific thought. These include physicists like David Bohm, Tim Eastman, and John Jungerman as well as other scientists such as Ian Barbour and Charles Birch.[69] David Ray Griffin has also written a number of books and articles, including *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism* and *Unsnarling the World-Knot,* which have argued that a 'modern' scientific worldview based on a materialistic/mechanistic understanding not only does not accommodate all human experience and what he calls 'hard-core common sense notions,'[70] it also fails to accommodate the current trends in Western science which point toward a more relational and process-based metaphysic. Whitehead's philosophy works towards framing a "coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of

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[68] Ibid.

[69] A number of these comparisons can be found in: John Jungerman, *World in Process; Creativity and Interconnection in the New Physics* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000). Timothy E. and Hank Keeton Eastman, ed. *Physics and Whitehead: Quantum, Process, and Experience*, Suny (Albany: State University of New York Press,2004). Charles Birch and John B. Cobb Jr., *Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Denten, Texas: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990). Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). David Ray Griffin, ed. *Physics and the Ultimate Significance of Time* (Albany: Sate University of New York Press,1986).

[70] Hard-core common sense notions are those which cannot be denied without inherent contradiction, such as the existence of other minds and the world we live in.

our experience can be interpreted" (PR 3). What I am proposing in order to meet Ermine's challenge is to show that Whitehead's philosophy is capable of functioning as the paradigm which facilitates interaction and dialogue, or a 'meeting at the ethical space' as Ermine calls it, with equality between participants, Euro-American and Indigenous.

The method of enquiry and comparison used, however, still needs to be contextualized. It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to fully address the historical and contemporary issues involved in situating a comparative discourse between Native North American and Euro-American religious thought. What I will do is provide a brief overview of key problems involved in such a study, some of which have already been noted, as well as suggest criteria for comparative research that are sensitive to these issues. I begin by situating the discourse within a historical context to better understand the extent of the difficulties, and then address some of the questions and issues that are specifically associated with any comparative study of Native traditions. In the final section of this chapter I will outline strategies for the methodological approach which I follow given the nature of this particular experiment.

Although comparative cross-cultural studies involving Native North American cultures, especially the study of 'religious traditions,' are subject to many of the same difficulties that are prevalent in any post-colonial encounter with Euro-American culture, theirs is a special, although not unique, case. Besides issues of authenticity, (mis)representation, translation (language, culture, and ontology), appropriation, and epistemological differences, there is the additional complicating factor, to say the least, of centuries of cultural abuse by the dominant colonizing society.[71] Any discussion on issues of encounter and comparison needs to be cognisant of the severity of the cultural

[71] For a thorough discussion on the attempted genocide of Native North Americans as well as ongoing cultural misrepresentation and appropriation see: Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us?* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994).

and physical violence that has been perpetuated on First Nations people, some of which is ongoing today, not only in how it changes the dialogue but because it affects issues of authenticity, representation, and survival. To historically contextualize this discussion it is important to note at least some of the violence against Native communities since first contact with European society. Besides the more blatant examples of actual mass killings, Ward Churchill has documented other activities in the United States that he considers genocidal, including the distribution of disease ridden blankets explicitly to infect the Native population with smallpox, the forced removal and resettling of hundreds of thousands of Natives that resulted in massive deaths, the illegal co-opting of the vast majority of Native land, the forced sterilization of as many as forty two percent of the female population by the 1970's, and the forced adoption of almost half the Native children in the United States into non-Native homes.[72] In Canada, the extent of physical, mental, and sexual abuse that was widespread in the Residential School system into which thousands of First Nations children were forcibly installed after being removed from their homes, is now common knowledge as a result of court cases, documented witness accounts, and official public apologies. The extent to which the language and cultural practices of First Nations people have been forcibly suppressed in order to hasten acculturation has also come to light.[73]

Questions surrounding translation, authenticity, representation, appropriation, and survival become particularly relevant in light of these historical conditions. Accurate language translations in many Native communities, as just one example, become difficult when there are so few fluent speakers left. The primary struggle now is for the languages themselves to survive. Difficulties arise as to what can be considered authentic

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[72] Ibid., 28ff.

[73] For a discussion on cultural genocide in Canada see Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 30ff.

representations of traditions when they have been suppressed and appropriated for centuries. Questions also arise as to who has the authority to 'speak' on behalf of a tradition when cultural appropriation and misrepresentation for commercial gain is widespread, and so few, if any, communities have managed to avoid the destruction, suppression, and/or forced transformation of their language, culture, and practices.

The current situation involving ongoing cultural appropriation, economic and political oppression, educational issues, justice, traditional land claims, and sovereignty debates, among others catalogued in reports such as "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," are also contextually important but too vast and complex to be addressed for the purposes of this thesis. Rather, I would like to present some of the current problems in the study of Native North Americans in two broad but related categories: issues of Representation and Hermeneutics.

### *3.2.1 Representation*

Included and interconnected within this category are questions of identity, authenticity, (mis)representation, and appropriation. The most obvious questions in this vein are about *who* has the right to speak on behalf of, or about, Native cultures and communities and *how* studies should be conducted.[74] For the academic community this sometimes focuses on whether scholarship should be privileged and allowed to formulate its own rules of research as it has in the past. Christopher Ronwanièn:te Jocks asserts that failure of the academic community to engage in "self limitation in the face of Native community demands and concerns,"[75] as well as its tendency to view Native

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[74] A thorough examination of this issue has been provided by Spivak in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?," which is discussed in more detail below. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L Grossberg (Basingstoke: Maxmillan Education, 1988).

[75] Christopher Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lee Irwin (2000), 69.

communities' wishes to make certain cultural domains off limits for research as simply an impediment to be overcome, is merely cultural appropriation "dressed up a bit but just as offensive to Native thought and practice as the ludicrous concoctions of commercial would-be shamans."[76] His comparison here is to the large number of Native and non-Native writers and practitioners who exploit Native culture for profit. These include what Vine Deloria Jr. calls 'fantasy literature' such as the books by Lynn Andrews, including *Medicine Woman* which has "demonstrated that it is possible to say almost anything and have it believed providing it is packaged correctly."[77] Other examples Deloria gives include: the controversial series of books by Carlos Castaneda in the 1970's and 1980's about his alleged relationship with Yaqui medicine man Don Juan; and the novel *Hanta Yo* by Ruth Beebe Hill, which was hailed as a classic and "the first time anyone had rendered an accurate version of traditional Sioux life" in which she claimed that "she alone knew the truth about the original Dakota/Lakota Indians, that their descendants were pale imitations…"[78] He also, however, criticizes Native Americans like Sun Bear who managed to bring non-Indians into his own version of what it means to be Native by creating his own 'Bear' tribe and advertising for 'spiritual warriors.'[79] In addition, there is the issue of 'whiteshamanism' or 'plastic shamans' who present themselves, often for commercial gain, as representative of traditional Native culture.

The question, therefore, is not simply whether one is Native, non-Native, or part-Native, but one of integrity and intention. John Grim feels these two terms are key for the self-scrutiny of a non-Native studying Native religions. He says that:

> No non-Native study of a Native religious practice can identify itself as an Indian explanation. Rather all interpretations arise from worldviews

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Vine Deloria Jr, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 42.
[78] Ibid., 38, 38-43.
[79] Ibid., 38, 41.

> and related perspectives whose values may have ideological force. Studying American Indian religions entails a reflexive step that activates self-scrutiny. That is, this approach encourages students to inquire into the images they have of Native Americans.[80]

It is, then, the intent of not misrepresenting one's own perspective and the practical integrity of being particularly self-reflexive in scrutinizing one's own preconceptions and images that is important. Questions of intent and integrity also apply to the previous comments by Jocks on the privileging of scholarly endeavors and whether historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and religious studies scholars have the right to study and represent Native cultures regardless of demands and concerns of the community itself. Jocks criticizes what he sees as the "academic tradition of prying and cajoling and tricking 'information' out of Native 'informants'—then expertly demonstrating the real, hidden reasons and motivations for such outlandish behavior and beliefs."[81] The question for Jocks is not whether the person involved in cross-cultural comparison and study is Native or non-Native, but whether a model can be visualized that would enable "authentic exchanges in a context of real respect."[82]

But as Lee Irwin has pointed out, the field of Native American religious studies is vastly complex, with no simple summary of relevant information available.[83] He comments on how remarkably diverse Native religions are, and how they are "grounded in very specific languages, places, lifeway rites, and communal relationships embedded in a unique ethnic history often overshadowed by the more pervasive history of religious and political suppression."[84] The issues of representation are compounded by the fact that

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[80] John A. Grim, "Cultural Identity, Authenticity, and Community Survival: The Politics of Recognition in the Study of Native American Religions," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lee Irwin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 43.
[81] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 71.
[82] Ibid., 72.
[83] Lee Irwin, "Introduction," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lee Irwin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 4.
[84] Ibid.

no one viewpoint can hope to represent anything more than one's own community and even that is questionable. Because there is no recognized central authority on religious matters, as there are in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, in a very real sense Native Elders are largely authorities unto themselves, dependent on and responsible to their own spiritual lineages and relationships and that of their communities.

The systematic destruction and suppression of Native culture, along with forced conversion and assimilation into the dominant Christian society that has persisted for centuries, has also resulted, in many cases, in the necessity of what can only be described as cultural reinvention, further complicating issues of both identity and authority. A prime example of reinvention of culture in the Native community is the case of Black Elk, an Oglala (Sioux) Elder who, in spite of allegedly converting to Christianity, became the leading spokesperson on traditional Native American beliefs and practices through the publication of two books based directly on translated interviews: *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Niehardt and *Sacred Pipe* by Joseph Epes Brown. William K. Powers describes the former book as the "fictive culture of a white man's dream of Indian tradition looming large on the academic scene" with the result that "contemporary Indians have raised his status to that of saint."[85] He says that much of today's Lakota culture, along with Native American 'traditional' culture in general, is based on the 'teachings' of Black Elk as presented in these two books which he says is "a body of text sometimes more reminiscent of a summer vacation bible school than a Lakota paradise," an obvious allusion to the very real possibility of Christian influence in Black Elk's account.[86] Vine Deloria Jr. agrees that these two books have become some kind of "sacred national Indian religious canon" which, because they were largely written in a universal manner and the

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[85] William K. Powers, "Cosmology and the Reinvention of Culture: The Lakota Case (Oglala, South Dakota)," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 7, no. 2 (1987): 170.
[86] Ibid.

theological concepts were similar to that of other tribes, were taken as accurate accounts about Native religions in general in spite of Black Elk's Sioux heritage.[87] This is especially true in cases involving young Native Americans who were raised in the city or were otherwise separated from a traditional upbringing.[88] Reinvention of culture, then, occurs when the colonizing power has so suppressed the Native tradition that the only resource left for self-identity is one that is translated and universally represented by the academic establishment of the dominant society.

The issue of representation of members of a marginalized group within a society, or 'subaltern,' has been extensively addressed over the last few decades by a number of scholars studying the effects of colonialism and imperialism, in Southeast Asia in particular.[89] One of the main concerns of these scholars and their respective historiographies has been the differences between the local or Indigenous perceptions and the authoritative accounts of the struggles against imperialist power structures.[90] Whereas the authoritative accounts most often come from a vocabulary associated with the concerns of the dominant power, such as economics, patriarchy, and politics, the subaltern perspectives are largely ignored or subordinated, and therefore lost. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses the example of the practice of *sati,* in which a Hindu widow commits suicide by placing herself on the burning pyre of her dead husband, to illustrate this point.[91] When this practice was outlawed by the ruling British it was generally understood that they were "White men saving brown women from brown men."[92] The

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[87] This universalizing may be attributed to the fact that the interviews were documented by non-Natives through an interpreter and may not be the specific intent of Black Elk himself.
[88] Deloria Jr, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 36.
[89] See articles and books by the Subaltern Studies Collective such as Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press,1988).
[90] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Editors Note," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xi.
[91] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 297.
[92] Ibid.

Indian nativist position, says Spivak, is "The women actually want to die."[93] However, nowhere does one hear the 'voice' of the woman who engaged in the practice. Also, according to Spivak, it must always be kept in mind that the subalterns themselves are not a monolithic group with a single voice, but instead "one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous."[94] Although this may be true, this issue is slightly different in the case of Native North Americans. For many Indigenous societies the *subject* can be understood as the community rather than the individual. Although there is no monolithic Indigenous culture or perspective in the North American context, one consequence of a relational ontology is that the Native self-identity is strongly tied to the community. It is not that there is lack of individuality but that, much like picking one corner of a fabric pulls the whole cloth, the fabric of the community is constituted by the entirety of the individuals of which it is derived. The aforementioned report on "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples" confirms this analysis with an ontological and epistemological definition of community:

> The Indigenous community represents the synthesis of many peoples' search for knowledge at the juncture of physical and metaphysical realities. The knowledge of many people developed through this process of experiencing totality, wholeness, and inwardness, effectively created a unified consciousness that transformed the collective into a participatory organism known as community. In doing so, the community, through its membership, became empowered as the 'culture' of accumulated knowledge. The people became the community, and the community became the worldview.[95]

Therefore what could be understood as the 'voice of the subaltern' is in the Indigenous context often the voice of the community rather than just the individual. The individual subaltern experience for First Nations people is that of separation and

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 284.
[95] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 29.

alienation of the self due to the destruction of community cohesion by the dominant culture, especially illustrated by such circumstances as forced relocation, repression of language and cultural practices, and the Residential School system. The individual experience is the collective experience of the community in many cases. That is not to say that individual experiences and expressions are not important, nor that, as Spivak has pointed out, the colonized subaltern *subject* is not "irretrievably heterogeneous." It is merely to acknowledge that *in addition to* the difficulty of hearing the voice of the individual subaltern is the difficulty, in a relational worldview, of hearing the voice of the subaltern community. The community as a collective unit which substantially contributes to individual self-identity is also marginalized in many of the ways suggested by postcolonial scholars.

Nevertheless, subaltern studies also look at the ways in which the ordinary members of the marginalized community react to, and in some manner subvert, the impositions of the ruling class. Although detailed descriptions of such incidents are not pertinent to this particular study, there are certainly many cases since first European contact. These could include such divergent subversive reactions as the violence of the Northwest Rebellion of 1885,[96] or the prophetic movement of Seneca religious leader Handsome Lake whose ethical codes are still in use today.[97] Other subaltern reactions could include the appearance of new ceremonies such as the Ghost Dance which was instigated as a peaceful community response to the violent domination of the European culture in order to reconcile the massive changes that were occurring,[98] as well as the

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[96] It could be argued that this was not a 'subaltern' revolt because the instigator and leader, Louis Riel, could be considered the 'native elite' and therefore not a member of the marginalized class of society. That would be how it is understood in subaltern studies involving India, but may be different in this instance because it was the subaltern communities themselves which revolted.

[97] Elisabeth Tooker, "On the New Religion of Handsome Lake," *Anthropological Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1968).

[98] Ken S. Coates, "Indigenous Traditions," World Religions: Canadian Perspectives. Doris R. Jakobsh (ed)Toronto: Nelson Education. 2013.

underground continuation of ceremonies such as the Plains Sun Dance which was misunderstood by Euro-American society as brutal self-mutilation and subsequently criminalized for many years.

Atleo relates the difficulty non-Native visitors to his home community on Vancouver Island have with accessing details and perspectives on daily life.[99] Because of past misunderstanding that banned and criminalized important ceremonies, such as the Potlatch, the community has grown distrustful and consciously alters its behavior whenever outsiders are around, whether they are anthropologists or government officials. When a visitor arrives, the whole community adjusts to show the face that the outside world has come to know and is comfortable with, not returning to normal behavior until the visitor has left. This small but effective subversive act shelters the community from outside influence but also makes it difficult for the larger dominant society to hear and understand the needs and 'voice' of the marginalized individuals and community. Similarly, many Indigenous communities in which peoples have grown tired of being studied have "passively resisted researchers with untruths and deliberately fictitious information."[100]

The subaltern perspectives are, as one would imagine by their very nature, extremely difficult to obtain. Spivak in particular addresses the issue of representation and retrieving the perspective of the subaltern in her seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by asking whether the marginalized individual in society can 'speak' or be represented in any adequate way without being subordinated by either the foreign 'other' or the native elite. Her conclusion is that the subaltern individual cannot speak, but that in itself does not mean that an attempt at retrieval of the subaltern subject should not be made. Although the attempt must be made it must be recognized that any such

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[99] E. Richard Atleo, *Tsawalk* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).
[100] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 12.

representation is still clouded with layers of translation, re-culturation, and hegemonic dominance that makes it impossible to hear the voice of the individual subaltern subject. The subaltern cannot speak, as Joanne Sharp says, because she is so imbued "with the words, phrases and cadences of western thought in order to be heard."[101] The subaltern must use the languages and knowledge patterns of the dominant society in order to be heard or recognized as legitimate. She is therefore always lost in translation in which she cannot be truly heard except through layers upon layers of interpretation, all of which to some extent distort the original experience.

Probably the most applicable issue for my purposes is what Spivak calls 'epistemic violence.'[102] To Spivak, epistemic violence is the "remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other."[103] In the context of the present study it can best be understood as the "violence done to the ways of knowing and understanding of nonwestern, indigenous people."[104] Western modes of thought, whether religious, scientific, philosophical, economical, or political, become "universalised to the extent that they are often seen as the only way to know. Other forms of understanding and expression are then marginalised and seen as superstition, folklore or mythology."[105] The Indigenous forms of knowledge are then used as examples of how 'primitive' the colonialized culture is, and how necessary it is to assimilate the people into the dominant society. These dominant ways of understanding reality are held by the Western scholar to be 'objective,' somehow existing without presupposition or perspective. Examples of such epistemic violence in the particular context of this thesis, although previously mentioned in discussing Ermine's report, will be more thoroughly

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[101] Joanne P. Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representaton* (London: Sage, 2009), 111.
[102] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 280.
[103] Ibid., 280-81.
[104] Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representaton*, 111.
[105] Ibid., 110.

studied in subsequent comparative chapters, especially in regards to language and epistemology.

Another pressing and relevant concern for this thesis is the difficulty of acquiring subaltern representation without inherent essentialism. There is a danger in assuming that because I will be using data largely derived from Native scholars, academics, and other Native 'elite,' the marginalized individuals in the subordinate society will not be adequately represented—that their voice will not be heard. Questions arise as to the authenticity of that representation. Spivak has pointed out the difficulty in representing the subaltern without negating their heterogeneity, often collapsing into essentialism in which the spokesperson is assumed to represent the community at large.[106] This has been especially true, as has been pointed out, in the case of Black Elk.

Spivak does, however, recognize the need for a 'strategic essentialism' which may need to be adopted in order to do comparative studies for specific purposes, such as woman's rights or tribal needs. In this way, a community is represented based on common characteristics and needs for specific strategic reasons. The concept acknowledges the strategic nature of the process, does not forget the ultimate heterogeneity of the individuals within the community, but strives to represent their commonality as authentically as possible. In many ways this is the best one can hope for in a study such as this. I will adopt, with the above mentioned caveats, a form of strategic essentialism toward Indigenous peoples. Although it is recognized that there is no monolithic consensus on exactly how Indigenous ontology is expressed, there is, I maintain, some commonality in many aspects to which the scholars speak. Although Indigenous scholars do not necessarily represent each individual separately they strive to

[106] Ibid., 114.

illustrate the common concerns and expressions of their communities to move toward better understanding from the wider society.

For the purposes of this comparative experiment the Indigenous scholar's representation of the Indigenous worldview collected herein is sufficient to determine whether Whitehead's philosophical thought is adequate for the goals of this thesis. But as Irwin says, there are no easy answers to the problem of representation.[107]

### *3.2.2 Hermeneutics*

Jocks also questions the meaningfulness of information that has been acquired through what he sees as the abuses of Native religious integrity.[108] He summarizes these as: inaccurate commercial adaptations and academic interpretations (outright falsification, distortion, and violation of context); adaptations or interpretations which violate rules of privilege; unethical use of knowledge without Native permission or attribution; and profound disrespect that results from a demonstrable lack of belief in the efficacy of the ceremonies and practices involved.[109] An important question, therefore, surrounds proper understanding of beliefs and practices, how this knowledge is acquired, and whether knowledge gained using unethical techniques can be considered meaningful. It also involves questions of whose perception of what is 'rational' or what constitutes 'knowledge' should be privileged in order to gain an accurate understanding, that of the community under study or the researcher. Although Sam Gill, in his article "The Academic Study of Religion" does an admirable job of defining and delineating the academic study of religion from what he terms the 'religious study of religion,' and in doing so he also illustrates the limitations of both. He wants to be clear that the academic

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[107] Irwin, "Introduction," 5. I understand and accept, however, the necessity of providing my own interpretations of Native scholars' interpretations. Were I to avoid doing so, the thesis would not be the comparative exercise I intend.
[108] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age." 65.
[109] Ibid., 63-65.

study of religion as promoted by the American Academy of Religion should acknowledge that "It is academic; it is Western; it is intellectual."[110] Of course, as Jocks points out, this attitude ensures that *Western* forms of rationality and epistemological methodology become normative.[111] Jocks objects to this and says that on the one hand, as an academic himself, he does not want to foster irrational discourse, but on the other as a Native he feels that it is important that "the religious discourse of any Native People respond to its own rationality."[112] He points out the inherently experiential and wholistic nature of the Native epistemology that does not understand knowledge other than from lived experience, and 'religious knowledge' apart from its complex relations with other social domains, which is distinctly different from the Western conception of knowledge as 'data' which can be transmitted independent of the accompanying experience.[113]

This contrast in how Euro-American society and traditional Native North Americans understand the manner in which knowledge is generated and communicated, and how it should be understood, underlies the hermeneutical difficulty in successfully translating one culture to another in order to place them in comparative dialogue. From the perspective of language translation it becomes difficult to translate linguistic meaning from one worldview context to the other without the 'forcible transformation' of the Native language which results in the epistemic violence identified by Spivak. In his article "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology" Talal Asad discusses this inequality of languages in the context of the anthropological study of

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[110] Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," 967.
[111] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 69.
[112] Ibid.The danger of this perspective being taken too far is that any and all discourse would need to be conducted solely in the language of the specific Indigenous culture, and only between those peoples. Otherwise, translation, both linguistic and conceptual, is necessary.
[113] Ibid., 65,70,71.

societies that have less power, or are 'weaker' in the relationship. [114] He says that the 'weaker' societies are:

> …more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy *desired* knowledge more readily than Third World languages do.[115]

According to Betty Bastien, while writing her book she was forced to conduct the conversations and interviews in *Siksikaitsipowahsin* (Blackfoot) in order to accurately interpret them from within the tribal worldview.[116] Otherwise she was limited to the shallower understanding that English provides, a language she arguably feels is unable to convey words contextualized in relationships with the sacred.[117] Atleo says that stories told in his native language of *Nuu-Cha-nulth* are almost impossible to fully understand if translated at face value because each word conveys common contextual conditions such as place, time, and social situation, directly associated with the worldview of the community.[118] Given Asad's thesis it is clear that much of the meaning in any oral account would be lost as the message is transformed during the translation process. It would not only be the expected transformation of meaning that occurs during any translation between languages of equal power, but also the massive loss of context and meaning within the original language as it is forcibly transformed into the terms and categories of the privileged dominant language. However, Asad also implies parallels

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[114] Talal Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 157,58.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 76.
[117] Ibid., 70. This position is arguable because I would suggest that Bastien ignores the long history of religious language in the West that developed specifically to express relationships with God.
[118] Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 3.

between linguistic translation and cultural translation. Assuming such parallels apply, it becomes likely that the ontological and epistemological understanding of the dominant society would be privileged the same way in any comparative study or encounter, all of which necessitates some form of cultural translation. The resulting transformation of language *and* the wider cultural worldview would render it impossible to fully understand and appreciate the original context and meaning, especially in light of the hegemonic tendencies of dominant colonial societies. Although there may be some sort of 'authentic' Native North American culture still existing, however that may be defined, it would largely be hidden behind the misrepresentation resulting from the centuries of forced transformation by the dominant Euro-American society.

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* shows explicitly the relationship between academic discourse and this sort of imperialist colonialism, or as Richard King says, "His work points to the complicity between Western academic accounts of the nature of 'the Orient' and the hegemonic political agenda of Western imperialism."[119] Although Said's work deals with the power relations between Western and Asian societies, it is his position on how the dominated society is represented with which I find strong parallels to the situation in North America between Euro-American and Native culture. Said says that "the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer."[120] What is being studied and compared from both sides, then, is not so much the traditions themselves but the representation of the traditions as they have been forcibly transformed by the more powerful dominant society. The difference is that one's

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[119] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 83.
[120] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 272.

own representation is naïvely taken as 'true' rather than mere representation. This addresses the previous issue of representation, not so much in who has the right to speak but, as Jocks has pointed out, as concerns the meaningfulness of the information that is obtained under these circumstances.

### 3.3 Research Methodology

Any new comparative study of the traditional beliefs and practices of Native North Americans requires a methodology that is cognisant of the historical situation, the comprehensive, complex issue of representation, and the hermeneutical issues of translation and coming to understand the ontology and epistemology of the Native communities being compared. To that end I would like to outline a strategy towards building a model for comparative analysis that I will use for this experiment. I will build from basic suggestions put forward by Christopher Ronwanièn:te Jocks and Shawn Wilson. Although he does not delineate them in quite the same way, Jocks suggests criteria that he feels should be clearly acknowledged and stated in any study of Native North American cultures which addresses such topics as *representation and authority, reciprocal relationship and accountability*, *respect and permissions*,[121] and *motivation and intent*.[122] I will also add *recognition of presuppositions* to this list in the context of comparative religion. In each case I will also indicate how these criteria will be incorporated into the present study.

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[121] Most issues in this regard have to do with direct ethnographic studies so I will not be dealing with them directly. Others are covered in the section on *reciprocal relationship and accountability*. I will point out, however, that I consciously strive to use sources that are respectful and have not violated privacy considerations.

[122] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 72.

### *3.3.1 Representation and Authority*

Jocks writes "Given the profound linguistic, philosophical, historical, and political chasms between modern, literate, Amer-European civilization and the oral world of traditional American Indian communities, no written source, whether the author is Indian or not should be exempted from the closest critical evaluation."[123] I have no doubt that this is the minimum requirement for any comparative study involving Native North Americans. All sources need to be contextualized historically, politically, and socially to determine not only their authenticity and authority but to identify influences from the dominant Euro-American society such as Christian imagery and concepts, and possible transformation of concepts through translation, cultural misrepresentation, cultural reinvention, and academic discourse. Of course, the focus of the study determines much of the criteria for such an analysis. A comparative study of early traditional spiritual beliefs and practices will require different criteria for representation and authority than a study of later, possibly hybrid, formulations such as the Native American Church. In the present study I am interested in current formulations and understanding of traditional practices and beliefs, as expressed by Indigenous scholars. This would naturally widen the legitimate source material somewhat to include those that may have been influenced by the dominant society, but still retain an underlying ontological understanding that is consistent with more traditional beliefs and practices.

I believe that for the particular goals of this study it is critical to hear the voices of the Indigenous community itself as the basis for a comparison, including how they understand their own traditions and the worldview that accompanies it. It is precisely their own understanding of the nature of reality that is being compared in this study, rather than strictly the accompanying practices. Although it is certainly true that in many

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[123] Ibid.

cases, as noted above, language translation becomes a critical issue, I think that all language and concepts are theoretically translatable, although not necessarily in a word-for-word correspondence. To avoid the linguistic hegemony that Asad describes, I propose it is up to the dominant language, in my case English, to accommodate the conceptual forms that are embedded in and accompany Native languages and culture. To this end, by using a cross-reference of sources, I will strive as much as possible when comparing concepts to determine whether or not terms used in English accurately describe the concepts as they are described and understood by the Indigenous sources. As Asad says:

> The good translator does not immediately assume that unusual difficulty in conveying the sense of an alien discourse denotes a fault in the latter, but instead critically examines the normal state of his or her own language. The relevant question therefore is not how tolerant an attitude the translator ought to display toward the original author (an abstract ethical dilemma), but how she can test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms.[124]

This comment is especially pertinent for my own research as I will be conducting an experiment in ontological comparison between the Indigenous relational worldview as exemplified by particular Native North American societies, and a Western philosophical/theological metaphysic. It will be important to recognize the similarities and differences without forcing the Native concepts into foreign categories that may distort or transform their original meaning. To avoid imperialistic tendencies it is also important that the onus *not* be placed on the Native ontology to reconcile any conflicts or discrepancies. Rather, in this study the intent of the experiment is to determine whether Whiteheadian process thought is capable of successfully interpreting Indigenous ontology as it is understood and lived by Indigenous peoples, and translated by Indigenous

[124] Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," 157.

scholars. Because I am not Indigenous I will necessarily be cross-referencing Western modes of translation, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources, to arrive at a consensus interpretation of the available data. In this way I hope to present as accurate an interpretation of the ontological concepts as is possible within the context of an academic comparative study.

As important as it is to allow the Native voice to be heard, that does not disallow non-Native studies and representation as sources, especially when they help elucidate, hopefully without distortion or transformation, apparently authentic Native perspectives. What is most important, as Jocks said, is that *no* source is exempt from critical evaluation.

This comparative experiment will be thematically presented in a dynamic dialectic style using a variety of mostly Native North American cultures as sources. By dynamically moving between themes and the two different ontologies it will present the data in a methodological fashion more in keeping with both an Indigenous and Process philosophical method than it would if separated into reified categories as if each theme could be understood on its own. The data will be largely drawn from both Native and non-Native sources representing diverse Native North American cultures, all of which have been identified, or self-identified, as Indigenous. This rather generalist approach is warranted, I believe, because rather than comparing a single Native community, I wish to compare the underlying ontological perspective of particular Indigenous concepts and practices as exemplified by most, if not all, the Native cultures in North America. Joseph Epes Brown, author of *The Sacred Pipe, Teaching Spirits,* and *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian,* Religious Studies professor, and considered an authority on Native American spirituality throughout his long career,[125] sums up how the Indigenous

[125] In spite of critiques of universalism in the presentation of *The Sacred Pipe* by Vine Deloria Jr. as discussed earlier.

ontology is expressed throughout Native American traditions in general, lending support for both the proposed definition of 'Indigenous' as well as the research and presentation methodology which I will use in the following chapters:

> Unlike the conceptual categories of Western culture, Native American traditions generally do not fragment experience but rather stress modes of inter-relatedness across categories of meaning, never losing sight of an ultimate wholeness. Indeed, in Native American religious traditions, humans connect with the Great Mysterious by entering into relationship with its innumerable forms and dimensions. This series of relationships begins with the immediate family and reaches out to encompass the extended family and outward again to the band and the clan and the tribal group. Relationships do not stop with the human but stretch out to the environment: to the land, the animals, the plants, and to the clouds, the elements, the heavens, and the stars. Ultimately, those relationships that people participate in extend to embrace the entire universe.[126]

This form of relationality can be found in all the Indigenous cultures under study in this thesis. In fact, it forms the basis for the general definition of what it means to be Indigenous because it is through this manner of relationship that Indigenous practices, beliefs, and epistemology are developed.

### *3.3.2 Reciprocal Relationship and Accountability*

Jocks states that a scholar needs to provide "clear and comprehensive accounts of their relationships with the Indian communities they study."[127] As well, they should feel obliged to reciprocate in some substantial way if they have a career and livelihood that is built on the study of a Native community. The criteria, largely based in Native relational concepts of sharing and reciprocity, is mainly applicable in the case of anthropological, sociological, and religious ethnographic studies which involve extensive contact and research over time from within a community, although each project would require

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[126] Joseph Epes Brown, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 84.
[127] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 72.

evaluation as to whether some form of reciprocity is appropriate. It is certainly applicable in any study where long-term, one-way transfer of data, knowledge, or experience, results in an unethical imbalance of value in favour of the researcher.

It is, however, important in virtually all cases that one's relationship to the communities being researched is clear. This is largely to avoid the issues presented earlier involving misrepresentation and appropriation as well as to make explicit the perspective being presented. To this end, I should make clear that I do not have biological kinship ties to any Native communities. I acknowledge that I was not born or raised in a Native environment and therefore it is impossible for me to fully understand or articulate the Native perspective as if it were my own. My research and scholarship comes from a necessarily etic position as defined by Russell McCutcheon who states:

> The emic perspective, then, is the outsider's attempt to reproduce as faithfully as possible—in a word, to describe—the informant's own descriptions or production of sounds, behavior, beliefs, meanings, institutions, etc. The etic perspective is the observer's subsequent attempt to take the descriptive information they have already gathered from several emic settings and to organize, systematize, compare—in a word, redescribe—that insider information in terms of a system of the scholar's own making…[128]

This type of acknowledgement is a critical aspect of self-reflection that is important in any academic endeavour. This research will use a cross section of emic data from Indigenous scholars, as well as that reported by non-Indigenous scholars, and compare that data from the etic perspective of Whiteheadian Process Philosophy.

This accountability extends far beyond any particular community being studied. Because of Indigenous peoples' core relational ontology the scholar becomes accountable to a much wider arena, both conceptually and physically.[129] Stan Wilson says that

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[128] McCutcheon, "Introduction," 17.
[129] In such a pervasive relational ontology, accountability could even extend to the universe at large.

comprehensive relational accountability is the fundamental principle of Indigenous spirituality. It is something he understands to be present in a similar way in all Indigenous groups.[130] To Wilson, comprehensive relational accountability is not only a way Indigenous peoples 'honour our relations' in regard to self-in-relation-to-everything-else, it is also a way to describe "how we, as a species, can not only adjust to new and changing environments but can also correct the adverse conditions that we have created."[131] Shawn Wilson argues that from an Indigenous perspective, research is ceremony and therefore maintaining relational accountability is an integral part of their axiology and methodology.[132] This relational accountability, therefore, extends to conceptual ideas as well as physical human and non-human communities. A researcher and presenter is accountable to the sources and the readers, but also the concepts and methodological framework. By doing research and presenting data and ideas, the scholar is entering into a web of relationships that need to be honoured. To this end, the comparative experiment will include the commonly used Indigenous protocol of introducing myself, and how I arrived at this time and place, which also serves to establish perspective. Although, as a non-Native scholar I will also be conducting much of the comparison in a typical Western academic fashion, I will strive to follow protocol, where possible, that honours both Indigenous and Process Philosophy methodology.

### *3.3.3 Motivation and Intent*

As established earlier, it is more important *how* and *why* research is conducted than *who* is conducting it. Jocks feels that *why* a study is conducted should be an integral part of its justification, which should not include "mere curiosity" or filling in gaps in the

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[130] Stan Wilson, "Honouring Our Relations: Aboriginal Spirituality as Comprehensive Relational Accountability," *Canadian Social Studies* 33, no. 3 (1999).
[131] Ibid.
[132] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 11.

research record.[133] To Jocks, that is not sufficient to justify destructively prying into people's personal lives.[134] Hopi anthropologist Wendy Rose states that there have been many cases of non-Natives who have written "honestly and eloquently about any number of Indian topics" but have done so from "the stated perspective of the non-Native viewing things Native."[135] Because they are non-Native they cannot write from or produce the Native perspective but they can still create beautiful works dealing with Native themes or "the relationship between human beings and the American environment."[136] What they produce is "another perspective, another view, another spiritual expression" which leads her to conclude that the issue is a matter of integrity and intent, not *who* is producing the work.[137] It is worth noting that any view, including my own, is to some extent hybridized in any representation of the foreign 'other.' It is the integrity involved, as a non-Native, in not identifying one's study as a Native perspective, description, or explanation. It requires a reflexive step to identify the motive and intent of the study, the legitimacy of that motivation, and to acknowledge the images one might still retain of Native society that may or may not be legitimate. To that end I have clearly stated, and will reiterate when appropriate, the motivation and intent of this study.

### *3.3.4 Recognition of Presuppositions*

All academic comparative exercises entail basic and methodological presuppositions on the part of the comparativist. There is no 'objective' perspective from which any study can be conducted, no 'positionless position.' The recognition and acknowledgement of these assumptions is critical, with the objective of making clear

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[133] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 72.
[134] Because of the philosophical nature of this study, plus the fact I am using previously published works in the comparison, this critique is avoided.
[135] Quoted from Grim, "Cultural Identity, Authenticity, and Community Survival: The Politics of Recognition in the Study of Native American Religions," 43.
[136] Quoted from Ibid.
[137] Quoted from Ibid.

one's own perspective, and attempting to eliminate those presuppositions that violate many of the criteria mentioned earlier, such as respect, integrity, privacy, and reciprocity. In many Native North American cultures it is typical to begin any dialogue or presentation by stating who they are, including their lineage, and how they got to be in this time and place.[138] This serves to establish their own perspective, and how they came to know of what they would speak. This protocol is also typified in academic works by many Indigenous scholars whose work will be presented in this document, such as Betty Bastien, Anne Waters, and Shawn Wilson.[139] As mentioned earlier, the comparative analysis will open with a similar presentation in order to observe and honour this protocol.

In *Orientalism and Religion* Richard King outlines the opposing methodological views of sociologists such as Peter Berger and Christina Larner who advocate what Berger calls 'methodological atheism' in which religion is essentially viewed as a human projection, and that of Robert Bellah and anthropologist Talal Asad who argue for an approach King refers to as 'methodological agnosticism.'[140] Although Bellah wants to keep the critical and analytical perspective of the social sciences, at the same time he "rejects any attempt to establish the secular and historicist presuppositions of these cognitive disciplines as superior to religious explanations themselves."[141] He suggests that if this methodological atheism is given the final word, the subject being considered is "belittled by the critical lens through which it is viewed."[142] King encourages

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[138] In a recent Process Philosophy workshop I attended at the Center for Process Studies on January 10-12, 2012 ("Process, Pragmatism, and Religious Pluralism" conducted by C. Robert Mesle), this type of protocol was also observed. Rather than just the typical introductions of names, status, and place of study, an extensive description of background, religious tradition lineage, and reasons for coming was expected in order to facilitate a relational environment.

[139] This protocol has been followed in many of the works cited earlier such as Bastien:2007, Waters:2004, and Wilson:2008.

[140] King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* 48,49.

[141] Ibid., 48.

[142] Ibid., 49.

methodological agnosticism, which involves a more dialogical approach, as being a more adequate, although certainly not perfect, position to take towards the study of religious phenomena.[143] I too suggest that methodological agnosticism coupled with a philosophical analytical perspective, allows the subject of study to "speak in the light of such critical analysis."[144] The comparative study of religion, I believe, requires that the tradition under study be allowed to speak for itself from within its own hermeneutical perspective rather than strictly submitting to the Western rationality of the dominant society. This position will be particularly highlighted when discussing the translation of the concepts associated with the English terms 'life' and 'person,' as well as when focusing on Indigenous epistemology.

There are a number of additional assumptions I would advocate for comparative study which are particularly appropriate for my own research with Native traditions and could arguably be included under the rubric of methodological agnosticism. John Cobb Jr. outlines a number of these in his article "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism," and they were listed in the previous chapter.[145] The assumptions include: avoiding the reification of 'religion;' that the world is more complex than our thoughts can grasp; and that religious experience has a realistic dimension.[146] Briefly stated, avoiding the reification of 'religion' in the context of Native traditions, among others, is the realization that there is no essential Native religion which is universalizable over all Native communities and separable from any other aspect of traditional culture, whether it be social, political, or economic. It is impossible to point to one domain and call it 'religious' as opposed to another as 'non-religious.' Cobb recommends that whether or not we continue to use the term 'religion' for convenience it should more

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Cobb Jr., "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions About Religion and Pluralism," 243ff.
[146] Ibid.

appropriately be thought of as 'Traditional Ways.'[147] In addition, Cobb's particular pluralistic perspective assumes the seemingly simple acknowledgement, which is often neglected, that the totality of reality is wider and more complex than humans can grasp and, therefore, it cannot be assumed that any one perspective accommodates all possible knowledge, thereby allowing for an equal and shared partnership in learning.

Cobb also takes a realist position in his understanding of other religions and assumes that "the experiences talked about in the great religious traditions also have a realistic element."[148] This does not mean that he considers all religious statements as necessarily true, just that, along with his Whiteheadian assumption that sense experience is not the only source of knowledge, he believes that it is possible that such experiences may point to something real, but non-sensory, from which it is possible to learn. Once again, the emphasis is on letting the tradition 'speak' within its own social, epistemological, and ontological perspective, thereby, at least initially, giving it the benefit of the doubt with regard to their experiential interpretations.

These strategic suggestions directly address the general difficulties of representation—through critical evaluation of both Native and non-Native sources and recognition of perspective, presuppositions, and intent—and the hermeneutical problems associated with coming to understand the information obtained within the Native epistemological and ontological framework before engaging in any translational or comparative process. In this particular study the epistemological and ontological framework *is* what is under study.

Interconnected throughout is the integrity and respect taken for granted between cultures of 'equal power' but which has been lacking within the unequal power relationship between the dominant Euro-American society and the Indigenous societies of

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[147] Ibid., 246.
[148] Ibid., 257.

North America. It should be noted, however, that no methodological strategy can be expected to completely address the diversity and complexity of issues in any study of Native North American traditional culture, given both the historical record and the ongoing unequal relationship between these cultures and the dominant mainstream North American society. In some ways the damage is done. Critical evaluation of sources does not in itself ensure authentic representation. Forced cultural transformation and re-invention has progressed to the point that what is available to study is how the traditions are understood *now*, not how they may have been understood and practiced pre-European contact. Native traditions need to be evaluated in this light. Nor does respectfulness and integrity of motivation and intent ensure that there will not be indiscretions, however unconscious. F. David Peat comments on how easy it is "for a well-meaning outsider to interpret what he has seen and experienced, and in the process, misrepresent the knowledge and worldview of Indigenous people."[149] Neither do these suggestions, in other than a vague way, address the 'insider/outside' debate in academia which is sometimes taken to imply that an etic perspective is in a better position to interpret and analyse religious beliefs and practice. In John Cobb Jr.'s comparative theological context, the next step would be to enter into interreligious dialogue to determine whether the information and interpretations compiled are accurate and appropriate from the Native perspective, and subsequently go beyond dialogue to determine what can be learned by both parties to further mutual transformation of understanding. Using terms favoured by Willie Ermine, the ideal, but perhaps impossible, situation would be that the two cultures must meet at the 'ethical space' which is essentially a 'neutral zone of dialogue,' in which "notions of hierarchy are replaced by concepts of equal relations."[150] This could in turn

[149] F. David Peat, *Blackfoot Physics* (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2005), 16,17.
[150] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 20).

result in agreements to interact that recognize and accommodate each party's divergent paradigms, yet are mutually and equally beneficial.

But even consistent application of what might be considered a more appropriate methodology can still be a problem. Richard King points out that it is "a fallacy to believe that any sophisticated methodology can be adhered to at all times."[151] He states that we cannot look at methodologies as "cast-iron structures" but rather as "praxis-ideals that one should at least attempt to aspire to."[152] To use and rephrase Paul Ricoeur's imaginative comment on the imperfectability of all translations: in the end one has to give up the idea of the perfect translation (or methodology) in order to forge ahead anyway, serving in agreed deficiency two 'masters' in the comparative process: Indigenous Peoples and Euro-American society.[153]

### 3.4 Theory and Method Summary

Typically, then, the following comparative chapters would consist of identifying a number of areas for comparison, and categorizing these areas into sections, or as McCutcheon states "organize, systematize, compare." Each section would have data presented from one of the ontologies under study and then a comparative analysis conducted with the other. This typical academic approach, however, is not consistent with the process-based study that I am advocating. In neither an Indigenous nor a Process perspective is it possible to isolate and discuss the concepts separately as if they were not wholly interconnected with each other. They exist only in relation to each other and to categorize and analyze them separately does violence to how they should be understood. The ontological aspects that will be under discussion, such as 'relationality,' 'epistemology/ways of knowing,' 'language and symbolism,' 'life and personhood,' and

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[151] King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* 49.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ricoeur, *On Translation*, 7.

'the relationship between the world and the Divine,' can be identified but not separated out as distinct categories of analysis. Rather than following this typical academic style I will be integrating the research and presentational principles suggested in an attempt to bridge the gulf between a typical academic analysis and one in keeping with both Indigenous and Process ideals.

Although I have discussed and presented some strategies to avoid many of the issues that challenge any study of Indigenous peoples, to justify how and why I have chosen this particular research and presentation methodology I will summarize my approach. The central questions in a comparative study such as this one involve how to determine who will be the subjects of the study, how they will be represented, and how the study will be conducted in an ethical manner.

*Comparative Subjects:* The proceeding comparative experiment identifies some general ontological and epistemological characteristics found in Indigenous cultures and how they are exemplified in Native North American societies. I began this chapter with what I argued was a necessary and sufficient definition of what it meant to be Indigenous. If only one particular culture was included I believe this thesis would have limited applicability or import. Therefore I will be utilizing a strategy of 'strategic essentialism' that generalizes, with caveats, particularly common traits over a wide range of cultures defined as Indigenous in order to make the comparison more widely applicable. I will not, however, be the one making the determinations of which traits apply. In general, I will discuss characteristics identified by Indigenous scholars as either embedded in their own culture and/or shared among all or most Indigenous peoples.

*Representation*: Because of inherent difficulties in identifying who has authority to speak either as individuals or for communities, as representatives of Indigenous people, the primary sources I will be using will be the works of Indigenous scholars who self-identify as articulating the perspectives of their own culture or that of Indigenous

people in general. However, although I do not assume this representation is universal, I do assume it is common enough for the purposes of this comparative experiment. I will also be using noted non-Native scholars to reinforce this data. Although this does not necessarily give a voice to what has been identified as the subaltern individual, it goes a long way toward hearing the subaltern community speak within its own hermeneutical perspective as much as possible within the context of doctoral research in the academy.

*Ethical presentation*: Both the motivation and intent of this comparative experiment have been presented throughout this document so it is not necessary to reiterate it here. However, I will note that this exercise will be taking an agnostic methodological perspective to avoid what Jocks has identified as the profound disrespect that results from the lack of belief in the efficacy of the ceremonies and practices involved.[154] It will not be coming from a confessional position but will allow for a philosophical and religious realism in line with Cobb's Whiteheadian assumption that major religious traditions have experienced something in reality from which we can learn.[155] After all, the point of the experiment is to show that Whitehead's philosophy is equipped to interpret and accommodate Indigenous ontology as they experience it.

I should also point out that because I am not doing first person ethnographic research, rather I am using the writings of Indigenous peoples—both academics and non-academics—the principle of reciprocal relationship and the accompanying accountability are different than a typical anthropological research study. There is no particular individual community which is under study to which I am accountable. Rather, I am accountable to the authors from whom I am getting information, to represent them and their ideas to the best of my ability, and to the readers of this document to present the

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[154] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 63-65.
[155] Cobb Jr., "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions About Religion and Pluralism."

data with integrity. I also feel a sense of accountability to the people who helped form my own particular perspective and sensitivities to the topic.

In keeping with this sense of relational accountability, and the Indigenous tendency to begin speaking or presenting by introducing who they are and how they came to be in this particular time and place, I will begin the comparative experiment in Chapter Five with a brief historical description of my own background up to the present. This will serve to situate my own perspective as well as introduce myself into the relationship formed by this document, the source material, and the reader. From a process perspective it also conforms to the understanding that all information and perspectives are situational and that the objective past conditions the present, and provides the vector for the future. I will also, in keeping with the research principles outlined previously, formally state the motive behind this comparative experiment. The rest of the material will be presented in a fashion that I believe is more suited to both the Indigenous and Process ideals. Rather than attempting to categorize and then analyze, the material will be presented in a more holistic dialectic that interweaves the data and the comparisons. Although there will be a certain linearity to the presentation, the themes will dynamically connect in a fashion that will attempt to better illustrate the interconnection of the Indigenous ontological concepts and those of Process philosophy. Although interpretation of the data from both sides of the comparison is unavoidable, by presenting the comparison in this fashion I hope to avoid many of the problems and issues involved in the reification of concepts and categories, thereby avoiding the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness (SMW 51).

# Chapter Four: **Whitehead's Process Ontology**

The comparative analysis that I am undertaking in this thesis will be presenting data from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and comparing it to a Whiteheadian Process perspective to ascertain if, and to what extent, it can be accommodated and/or interpreted. To that end, an introduction to Whitehead's metaphysic is required, although rather than merely providing yet another comprehensive interpretation of his thought I will concentrate on those concepts that contribute directly to the comparative experiment conducted in later chapters. I will only go into such detail as is necessary to understand the concepts as they are applied in the subsequent comparative study. More specific detail, as well as some repetition in order to reintroduce certain concepts, will be included in the comparative sections as necessary. This chapter will also serve as a glossary of terms in that as concepts particular to Whitehead are introduced in the comparison, references to the specific section that discusses the concept in more detail will be provided.[1] It would be impossible to articulate an interpretation of Whitehead's thought that would be accepted by *all* Whiteheadian scholars but the explanations included in this chapter will strive to be a common, if not universally accepted, interpretation, unless otherwise noted. More specifically, the description of how the past is incorporated into the present and future and whether it should be thought of in realist terms, as well as the explanation of the God/world relationship—both of which are less clear in Whitehead's work and so have multiple interpretations and criticisms—will be based largely on my understanding of commonly accepted positions. I will strive in most cases to present interpretations, which, while perhaps not accepted by all process theists, could still be considered within the bounds of what Whitehead's philosophy allows. At the end of this chapter I will provide a simplified summary of the concepts.

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[1] For a more comprehensive glossary please see John B. Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book* (Claremont P&F Press, 2008).

### 4.1 Process and Creativity

Reality, in process thought, is not constituted by material substances that endure through time and space in the Newtonian sense, but rather is composed of a series of events, the most limited being a single 'actual occasion.' Neither should each event be thought of as some sort of substance, but instead conceived as an individual process of 'coming-to-be.' In this sense, Whitehead's metaphysic is considered atomistic, not in the sense that the world[2] is constituted by discrete units of material substance, but rather that there is nothing more fundamental than individual 'actual occasions,' or 'actual entities.'[3] Although the 'coming-to-be,' or 'process of concrescence' as Whitehead calls it,[4] is not thought of in physical temporal terms, temporality being considered the succession of such events, each occasion does pass through a succession of phases. These phases are understood as a process with temporal extension, which happens as an indivisible unit.[5]

Although the process of coming-to-be of the occasion must not be thought of in temporal terms, there is still a sense of some phases of the concrescence presupposing others.[6] Each event can be thought of as having four stages that are necessary in order to incorporate both continuity and change: the conformal stage (or physical pole); the conceptual stage (or mental pole); the comparative stage (part of the conceptual stage but considered supplementary phases of the mental pole); which leads to the final 'satisfaction,' which is the point when the actual entity is fully determinate "(a) as to its genesis, (b) as to its objective character for the transcendent creativity, and (c) as to its prehension—positive or negative—of every item in its universe" (PR 26).

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[2] The 'world' in this sense is the entirety of finite entities which make up physical reality as we know it.
[3] Except in the case of God these terms are generally used interchangeably.
[4] It is called 'concrescence' because as each process reaches final determination it becomes 'concrete.' At that point it is fully determined and ready to be taken account of as an object.
[5] Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 121.
[6] Ibid.

In the initial conformal stage, the event must conform, to some degree according to relevance, to the past actual occasions in its entire actual world. It must take account, in its entirety, of the fact that there is a series of past events that has led up to its own process of concrescence. For instance, an enduring object, mostly inherits, in this initial stage, that which contributes to its continuing existence as that entity. Whitehead says that each event predominantly inherits that which is most 'intensely relevant' to its own genetic continuance (PR 148). However, it must still take account of, 'grasp,' or 'prehend,' all other past actual occasions in its actual world. Whitehead calls this 'perception in the mode of causal efficacy.' It is the internal perception of all the past events that act as the efficient causation in the determination of each process of concrescence. In fact, the 'actual world' of an entity is precisely that which has causal efficacy for the determination of the event (PR 169). Each event feels, or 'positively prehends,' that which positively contributes to its own completion. Although it prehends all events in its actual world in varying degrees of relevancy and intensity, it negatively prehends that which does not contribute positively to its final determination, based on its own 'subjective aim'[7] towards final satisfaction and in a manner consistent with its 'subjective form' that determines *how* the data is prehended.

> In a process of concrescence, there is a succession of phases in which new prehensions arise by integration of prehensions in antecedent phases. In these integrations 'feelings' contribute their 'subjective forms' and their 'data' to the formation of novel integral prehensions; but 'negative prehensions' contribute only their 'subjective forms.' The process continues till all prehensions are components in the one determinate integral satisfaction (PR 26).

[7] Subjective aim as understood by Whitehead will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

Past events that are negatively prehended still 'exist' as part of the objective past; they just do not contribute in a positive way to the entity's constitution. The 'principle of intensive relevance' asserts:

> Any item of the universe, however preposterous as an abstract thought, or however remote as an abstract entity, has its own gradation of relevance, as prehended, in the constitution of any actual entity: it might have had more relevance; and it might have had less relevance, including the zero of relevance involved in the negative prehension; but in fact it has just *that* relevance whereby it finds its status in the constitution of *that* actual entity (PR 148).

This conformal stage is called the 'physical pole' of the actual entity. In Whitehead's dipolar conception of all actual entities, the physical pole is the 'feeling' of the past actual world that contributes to each individual coming-to-be.[8]

Once the past actual world has been prehended, the entity enters into the conceptual stage and supplementary (comparative) phases that provide the possibility of individual novelty and originality. This is where valuations are made, possibilities and choices considered, propositions formed, comparisons and comparisons-of-comparisons are made, and new information, such as what is provided by sense perception, is integrated, once again in a manner consistent with the subjective aim and subjective form. This stage, which is constituted by the inclusion of 'conceptual' feelings as well as "the more complex forms of feeling that integrate the physical and the conceptual feelings" is called the 'mental pole.'[9] It is by virtue of the two poles, the physical and mental, that each occasion is considered 'dipolar.' All actual entities, in order to be 'actualized,' *must* have both a physical and mental pole.

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[8] 'Feeling' in a Whiteheadian sense, can be used interchangeably with 'positive prehension.' Therefore, something is 'felt' when it positively contributes to the coming-to-be of an occasion of experience.
[9] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 41.

Although events conform to the past, they are also partially self-determining and are therefore considered to be subjects of experience. In fact, each of the actual occasions that constitute the world *is* an experiencing subject or 'occasion of experience.' David Ray Griffin has coined the term 'panexperientialism' to describe this understanding.[10] It must not, however, be confused with 'panpsychism,' which implies that all things in the world have *conscious* experience or consciousness as such. Rather, panexperientialism suggests that all actual occasions in the world experience to some degree.

When a process of concrescence reaches final determination, or 'satisfaction,' it becomes concrete and is no longer a 'subject of experience;' it achieves what Whitehead calls 'objective immortality' (PR 29). The subject becomes an object that is available for prehension by other subjects in their own initial conformal phase. What was an experiencing subject is now a concrete fact, which Whitehead calls a 'superject' in the sense that it is available as initial datum and causal efficacy for subsequent subjects (PR 29). Reality is constituted, therefore, by experiencing subjects that inherit the past, have the ability to make new subjective valuations and choices that contribute to their own self-determination, and upon final satisfaction become objects available for prehension by subsequent subjects. In each actual occasion the multiplicity of the previous world's subjects is unified in its final satisfaction. In this way the world is creatively advanced. Whitehead calls this ultimate principle on which reality is based 'Creativity' (PR 21). Creativity is the meta-concept, or 'Category of the Ultimate,' of the process that is embodied in any and all particular instances of the creative process that brings about *both* God and the world of finite actualities (PR 21ff). Whitehead says:

> 'Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the

[10] David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism; a Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 97.

> universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity. (PR 21)

### 4.2 Nexus and Transmutation

Physical reality as we perceive it consists of groups of actual occasions. Whitehead calls any group of actual occasions that are bound together because of their internal relatedness, or "constituted by their prehensions of each other," a 'nexus' (PR 24). They are the 'public matters of fact' that make up our world. A nexus can be as simple as an electron, or as complex as a human body. In fact, reality as we know it in its entirety, which Whitehead calls this particular 'cosmic epoch,' is a nexus (PR 91). Everything in the world that we experience, such as rocks, trees, desks, cars, and animals, are nexūs (the plural form of nexus), which are themselves composed of nexūs. The actual occasions that compose these nexūs are perceived in a unified way due to the Category of Transmutation (PR 27). Rather than being perceived as a grouping of individual events each nexus is perceived as a unified whole in which the micro multiplicity has been transmuted into the macro unity.[11] Common internally related characteristics are generalized over the whole group so that they are perceived as one unit. Therefore a rock is perceived as a unified object rather than the group of molecules of which it is composed. The nexus, then, is felt as one object. It is because of this transmutation of the multiple micros into the singular macro that discussions on the process of individual events can be abstracted onto whole objects as we perceive them.

### 4.3 Relativity

Cobb and Griffin state that "Every occasion takes account of its entire world, and that world includes past occasions of unified experience as well as the body. The question

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[11] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 42.

is one of degree of importance of the past experiences in informing new one."[12] The most relevant events and experiences are those which are most important in contributing to the entities own becoming. Whitehead calls this prehension of other actual entities in the world according to relevance, with the entity's own series of inheritance being most relevant, 'intensive relevance' (PR 148). Every actual entity, then, is immanent in every other actual entity; giving them, therefore, what Whitehead calls 'mutual immanence' (AI 254, MT 218, MT 225).[13] Mutual immanence of all actual entities, including God, can in this sense be conceived as that which constitutes the network of ontological relations that make up the world. Whitehead states this as the 'principle of relativity':

> That the potential for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual; and that every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence. In other words, it belongs to the nature of a 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming.' This is the 'principle of relativity' (PR 22).

He goes on to state that "In a sense, every entity pervades the whole world" (PR 28). So, all actual entities in the world must be accounted for in some way, *by* and *in* every actual entity in the world. Every actual entity forms part of the constitution of every other actual entity in the world, however intense or trivial its relevance. In fact, says Whitehead, if degrees of relevance, including negligible relevance, are taken into account

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[12] Cobb Jr. and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, 87.

[13] This statement must include a qualification that contemporaneous actual occasions do not have mutual immanence, and therefore do not have causal influence over each other. Future occasions are also not immanent in present ones in the same way that past occasions are, because they have not yet occurred. Present occasions include a vector toward future ones, in that they will partially constitute future occasions, and in that way the future is partially embedded in the present, but they do not constitute the present actual occasions in the same way past occasions do. As an example of how different some interpretations of Whitehead can be, in his book *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* Jorge Nobo argues that Whitehead did indeed want to include *all* actual occasions in 'mutual immanence' including present and future ones. Jorge Luis Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

then "every actual entity is present in every other actual entity" (PR 50). Whitehead further states:

> Any actual entity in the actual world of a subject must enter into the concrescence of that subject by some simple causal feeling, however vague, trivial, and submerged. Negative prehensions may eliminate its distinctive importance. But in some way, by some trace of causal feeling, the remote actual entity is prehended positively (PR 239).

Actuality, therefore, is constituted by internal ontological relationships. All prehensions that constitute the subject, or how the occasion is 'coordinately divided,' have an 'internal relation' to that subject (PR 286). Each experiencing subject is constituted by its relationship to the world and God, and its own self-determining choices.

It could be said, therefore, that every subject that is coming into being prehends the entirety of its antecedent actual world to an extent relevant to its own becoming. Many actual entities in the world are negligibly relevant, or not relevant at all, so are 'negatively prehended' rather than felt as a positive prehension. Relevance changes as situations change so what was once non-relevant can become relevant and positively felt by a subsequent occasion, and vice-versa.

> [The principle of intensive relevance] asserts that any item of the universe, however preposterous as an abstract thought, or however remote as an actual entity, has its own gradation of relevance, as prehended, in the constitution of any one actual entity: it might have had more relevance; and it might have had less relevance, including the zero of relevance involved in the negative prehension; but in fact it has just *that* relevance whereby it finds its status in the constitution of *that* actual entity (PR 148).

### 4.4 The Past as Objectively Immortal

Because each experiencing subject reaches final determination, or 'satisfaction,' and becomes available for prehension by subsequent subjects it is both a 'subject of experience' and what Whitehead calls a 'superject,' which is able to pass on the

experiences to subsequent subjects. He states: "An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences" (PR 29). The entity 'perishes' and loses all subjective immediacy while becoming objectively immortal as part of the past. It is not the 'substance' that is permanent as an object, however, but the 'form' that passes onto the subsequent subjects: "In the philosophy of organism it is not 'substance' that is permanent, but 'form.' Forms suffer changing relations; actual entities 'perpetually perish' subjectively" (PR 29). This raises questions about how and in what sense the past is objectively present.

There are a number of interpretations of how this could be possible. Jorge Nobo divides them into two camps. One includes Charles Hartshorne and Victor Lowe, who assert the literal immanence of the universe in each occasion, whereas the other camp, consisting of process scholars such as William Christian, A.H. Johnson, Ivor Leclerc, Siegfied J. Schmidt, and Donald Sherburne, understands immanence of the past only in terms of how eternal objects characterizing the subjective form of an earlier occasion are repeated in characterizing the subjective form of subsequent occasions. [14]

In whatever sense it is understood, however, the past does not physically exist in some particular place. The past objectively exists, *as* the past in every new concrescing occasion. Cobb says that the past is alive in the present; it is the present "*as* derived from that past."[15] The past has not totally ceased to exist but has become objectively immortal in that it is everlastingly an 'object' of prehension for subsequent subjects. Whitehead says that the "whole antecedent world conspires to produce a new occasion. But some one occasion in an important way conditions the formation of a successor" (MT 164). The past then, although actual, has no physical 'existence' apart from the particular forms and feelings it contributes to future occasions of experience. This is not inconsequential

[14] Jorge Luis Nobo, "Whitehead's Principle of Relativity," *Process Studies* 8, no. 1 Spring (1978): 12.
[15] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 33.

however, because it is the forms that dictate the definiteness of each occasion, and the feelings that contribute to how those forms are manifest. It is the objective and subjective eternal objects, as prehended, valued, harmonized, and integrated into the final satisfaction of the experiencing subject that constitutes the superject that is available for future inclusion in subsequent occasions**.**

Nancy Frankenberry has pointed out that Whitehead was very serious about how important it is to understand that past occasions do not merely influence later concrescing subjects but are truly 'immanent' in such.[16] For Whitehead, antecedent occasions are not just passive states of affairs that partially constitute new emerging occasions by repeating universal forms, but contribute active creative energy by virtue of their immanence. It is, according to Frankenberry's interpretation, particular actualities (or nexüs of actual entities) that are the data of prehensions, not merely universals.[17] Each particular superject is prehended by the mediation of the universal eternal objects, but what is prehended, then, is not simply the objectification of the 'forms' of past events but the "concrete actuality of past feeling."[18] Whitehead states:

> The organic philosophy does not hold that the 'particular existents' are prehended apart from universals; on the contrary, it holds that they are prehended by the mediation of universals. In other words, each actuality is prehended by means of some elements of its own definiteness. This is the doctrine of the 'objectification' of actual entities. (PR 152)

For Frankenberry, although satisfaction is the end of the process of unification, it is not the end of the creative energy involved.[19] She goes on to say:

> Still, the fully determinate subject-superject (the initial datum to be felt) cannot be, or at least is not, thrust forward or objectified in its fullness. Past actual occasions superject themselves by means of their projected

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[16] Nancy Frankenberry, "The Power of the Past," *Process Studies* 13, no. 2, Summer (1983): 133.
[17] Ibid.: 139.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.: 137.

> perspectival feelings (the objective datum). These perspectives, possible because of the divisible character of the satisfaction, are abstractions from the full unity of the subject. They constitute the objective immortality of the past actual entities as they enter into the formation of present processes of becoming.[20]

Rather than passive repetition, therefore, past actual occasions are immanent in and contribute creative energy as "the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into new transcendent fact (AI 227)," as it energizes the present (AI 241).

The immediacy of what antecedent occasions pass on to subsequent actual entities as superjects perpetually perishes, acquiring objective immortality, so with subsequent prehension 'fades' over time (PR 29). Therefore, for each actual entity the 'objects' of the past do not have equal intensity, except in God.[21] Although the entirety of the past may be enfolded in each actual world, it is not normally conceptually available with any real intensity, but as it fades becomes more and more vague and indistinct. In an analogous way, events in our immediate past have a more vivid intensity but fade as time passes, making it more difficult to remember past events in great detail. This does not, however, mean that those events were not instrumental in constituting ourselves as actual entities, and are therefore still enfolded in each new becoming moment. We could, for instance, remember details of our past with far more intensity under the influence of hypnosis when the normally overriding intensity of sense perception is lessened. It is the 'subjective immediacy' that perishes, not the form of the event itself that is brought forward into each new occasion's own subjective form.

### 4.5 Society

Although a nexus is the simplest grouping of actual occasions that can be conceptualized, a nexus in which the members inherit one or more defining

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[20] Ibid.
[21] All occasions retain subjective immediacy in God's consequent nature.

characteristics from the other members is what constitutes a Whiteheadian 'society.' Each member of a society—each actual occasion or nexus—inherits a defining characteristic, or common form, from the other members of the society as it takes account of its own past and the world around it (PR 34). A nexus has 'personal order' when it is a society *and* when the "genetic relatedness of its members orders these members 'serially'" thus making it an enduring object (PR 34). A personally ordered society is formed, therefore, when a defining characteristic from one actual occasion or nexus is inherited by another in a serially ordered fashion. Thus the nexus achieves temporal endurance.

When a society is one that "(i) enjoys social order, and (ii) is analysable into strands of enduring objects," it is called a 'corpuscular society' (PR 35). Most macroscopic entities, such as a rock, are considered corpuscular societies because they are both socially ordered and can be analysed into strands of enduring objects, such as molecules. Although a rock is directly analysable into strands of enduring objects (its molecules), not all societies are. A molecule is not as simply analysable into component atoms. A molecule is something greater than merely the sum of its parts; therefore it would not be considered a corpuscular society but a 'structured society' that may have more or less corpuscularity depending on the "relative importance of the defining characteristic of the various enduring objects compared to that of the defining characteristic of the whole corpuscular nexus."[22]

A structured society, then, is one in which there is a "definite pattern of structural inter-relations" that provides a favourable environment for its 'subordinate societies' (PR 99). Subordinate societies and nexūs are the component groups of structured societies and are those that could, if abstracted from the society that they are in, exhibit independent existence with their own defining characteristics (PR 99). Thus, because a molecule that

[22] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 30.

is part of a rock has independent existence as a society whether it is in a particular society or not it would be considered a subordinate society of the rock (PR 99). Whitehead states that a structured society "may be more or less 'complex' in respect to the multiplicity of its associated sub-societies and sub-nexūs and to the intricacy of their structural pattern" (PR 100).

Social ordering is necessary for all societies but not for all nexūs. There are social and non-social nexūs and both can be members of a structured society. The most recognizable form of a non-social nexus is that of empty space. Empty space is a nexus by virtue of it having actual occasions that are bundled together by inherent internal relatedness; but these occasions do not achieve endurance through time because there is no social ordering or inheritance of any defining characteristics from one occasion into the next. Therefore we do not perceive them as having achieved physical existence, thereby making the space 'empty.' According to Whitehead it is these particular non-social nexūs that we describe as 'chaos' (PR 72). But it is also in this empty space that novelty is born precisely because of the lack of social order.[23] In fact, it is the novelty created in the 'empty space' that constitutes 'life' in a living cell. [24] The other nexūs of which the cell is comprised predominantly inherit characteristics from the physical pole, whereas each occasion in the chaos of empty space within the cell is dominated by the conceptual pole, thus more intensely introducing novelty and 'aliveness.'

## 4.6 Life and Personhood

### *4.6.1 Life*

In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead attributed three characteristics to life: absolute self-enjoyment, creative activity, and aim (MT 152). All actual occasions, as 'occasions

[23] Ibid., 28.
[24] ...along with being "introduced in accordance with the Category of Conceptual Reversion" (PR 104).

of experience,' have these characteristics to a varying degree, which makes it fairly ambiguous what could be considered 'life' or simply 'experience.' However, to be 'living' in the sense discussed in *Process and Reality*, creative activity must include novelty introduced in accordance with the Category of Reversion; beyond that which is felt as data in the initial conformal stage. Conceptual reversions are the conceptual alternatives to what has been prehended from the previous actual world. Whitehead states that, "the first phase of the mental pole is conceptual reproduction, and the second phase is a phase of conceptual reversion" (PR 249). For instance, if an emotion such as anger is prehended as part of the subject's antecedent actual world, it is 'valued up' or 'valued down' during the conceptual stages (PR 241). Depending on the result of this valuation, conceptual alternatives are present to the subject and the emotion of anger may be reverted, with the concrescing entity becoming more angry, less angry, or staying the same. This reversion of previous concepts, anger in this case, is what introduces novelty in the concrescing subject. The resulting actual entity is in that way *different* than the previous entity. It also means changes via conceptual reversion are passed along to future occasions. The more capable of conceptual reversion an actual occasion is the more potential it has for complexity, intensity of experience, novelty, and therefore 'life.'

Self-enjoyment, as referred to in *Modes of Thought*, means that the individual occasion of experience 'enjoys' its own self-creation as concrescence reaches satisfaction. Whitehead states that absolute self-enjoyment must mean "a certain immediate individuality, which is a complex process of appropriating into a unity of existence the many data presented as relevant by the physical processes of nature" (MT 150). Each actual occasion prehends the "many data presented as relevant" (both physical and conceptual), and through the process of concrescence integrates its feelings into a unity of existence that culminates with the occasion's final satisfaction. In that sense, an occasion of experience *is* "an individual act of immediate self-enjoyment" (MT 151*)*.

The third characteristic Whitehead attributes to life in *Modes of Thought* is 'aim.' For Whitehead, all actual occasions have aim. In general, this is the aim to self-actualization in a particular region (spatiotemporal position) in the extensive continuum (physical universe). The subjective aim is toward value in the particular instance of the subject's own satisfaction, as well as towards value for the future. Whitehead states that, "It is the essence of life that it exists for its own sake, as the intrinsic reaping of value" (MT 135). As much as 'subjective form' determines *how* data is prehended, 'subjective aim' determines not only the 'subjective form,' but also *what* data is positively prehended and integrated into the final satisfaction. It is by virtue of the subject's aim that what is positively felt and negatively prehended is determined. The aim of all actual occasions in a general sense, then, is self-actualization at the highest value possible in its own particular circumstance as well as contributing value to future occasions. In a human being this subjective aim could be quite complex and intense indeed, whereas for non-living societies this could be simply the aim towards its own actualization. Once again, the ability to aim towards higher value in terms of complexity and intensity of satisfaction, contributes to Whitehead's understanding it as having more or less 'life.'

Although, therefore, all three characteristics of life in *Modes of Thought* are present in all actual occasions, to be a living society in the sense described in *Process and Reality* requires something more. Every actual occasion enjoys itself, embodies creative activity to some degree, and has an aim toward self-actualization. As well, both inorganic societies and living societies involve "the intervention of mentality operating in accordance with the Category of Transmutation" in that a 'congenial uniformity' of mentality is generalized over the entire society so the diversity of detail can be ignored in favour of its unity as a nexus (PR 101). In the case of inorganic societies, Whitehead says:

> These material bodies belong to the lowest grade of structured societies which are obvious to our gross apprehensions. They comprise societies of various types of complexity—crystals, rocks, planets, and suns. (PR 102)

The Category of Transmutation facilitates conceptual integration within the society but does not speak to its conceptual originality. In a 'living society,' however, mentality in accordance with the Category of Reversion, and the initial aim derived from God that presents 'choices' for the subject, is also present in an important way in order to introduce conceptual novelty, as 'novelty of appetition' (PR 102).[25] This combination, of conception integration in accordance with the Category of Transmutation and conceptual originality in accordance with the Category of Reversion, is a requirement for a living society, and one that is not present in inorganic nature. For structured societies to be 'living' they require a combination of both 'inorganic' sub-societies and 'entirely living' nexūs. In a single living cell, for instance, the physical structure of the cell is composed of societies in which the genetic reproduction of past physical and conceptual data is of prime importance. These societies do not require the environment of the whole 'living society' to exist and have endurance, and therefore have physical and temporal stability. These appear as the enduring materials observable as physical structures—such as the molecules that make up the cellular walls. To be a living society, however, requires the dominance of conceptual novelty that these subordinate societies lack; it requires a "novelty of definiteness not to be found in the inherited data of its primary phase" (PR 104). Life, according to Whitehead, exists in the 'empty space,' or 'interstices,' within the cell structure (PR 105). The nexus of empty space includes actual occasions that are dominated by conceptual novelty but lack the genetic social organization required for

[25] Appetition is "immediate matter of fact including in itself a principle or unrest, involving realization of what is not and may be" (PR 32). It is "at once the conceptual valuation of an immediate physical felling combined with the urge towards realization of the datum conceptually prehended" (PR 32). I think of it as an 'appetite' to 'be' a certain way.

endurance. Because these nexūs lack physical endurance on their own—because they are not themselves structured societies—the special environment of the total living society is required for their existence. If separated from this total society the conditions no longer exist that the nexus must presuppose for its own actuality. Whitehead says: "The characteristic of a living society is that a complex structure in inorganic societies is woven together for the production of a non-social nexus characterized by the intense physical experiences of its members" (PR 105). These 'entirely living nexūs' are required for the societies in which they exist to be 'living' as Whitehead defines it.

In addition, the final ingredient of a 'living society' such as a living cell, is that these entirely living nexūs must be regnant, while the 'inorganic' societies of the cells physical structure are subservient. For a cell to be alive, and exhibit the novelty involved with such things as regeneration and reproduction, the entirely living nexus within must be dominant. If a living cell were to die, therefore, the entirely living nexus is no longer regnant and life is gone; the physical structure of the cell membranes still exists, but the cell collapses. It is no longer 'alive.'

### *4.6.2 Personhood*

There are two fundamental ways in which societies that have spatiotemporal extension can be formed. Borrowing terminology from Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin describes these as 'nonindividualized societies' and 'compound individuals.' A nonindividualized society is one that does not have a dominant member that would allow it to respond and act in relation to its environment as a whole unity.[26] Once again a rock is an example of such. Inorganic structured societies, such as rocks, are not capable of achieving such originality (PR 101-102). They have enough conceptual activity

[26] David Ray Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," *The Journal of the American Society for Pyschical Research* 87, no. 3 (1993): 241.

(conceptual pole) to have "some initiative of conceptual integration," but lack originality of conceptual prehension (PR 101). The conceptual activity that the do have is in accordance with the Category of Transmutation, which allows the structured society to be prehended as a unity rather than as its multiple subordinate societies. A rock, therefore, is perceived and 'transmuted,' thereby being "obvious to our gross apprehensions" as a unified physical body rather than as a group of molecules (PR 102). Plants would be considered an organic example of a nonindividualized society because, although they are constituted by living cells, as far as Whitehead is concerned there is no need to imagine that they have the central organizing 'dominant member' that is necessary for a unity of response. Although arguable, according to Whitehead plant behaviour seems to be explainable solely in terms of cooperation between the members that constitute the plant, such as roots and leaves, thereby making it a 'democracy' or 'republic' of entities (PR 157). There is no 'monarch,' or dominant occasion to coordinate the members into a unity of response to its environment as a whole.[27]

Compound individuals are those which have a higher level of experience due to how the members are interrelated. We can think of a molecule, which is obviously comprised of atoms, as nonetheless having *molecular* occasions as a unity that is not as simply explainable by the cooperation of its members. Multi-celled animals and higher level animals are far more complex compound individuals comprised of a complex interrelation of living cells. David Ray Griffin has explained the compound individual thus:

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[27] I would suggest that more current understanding of plant life, as well as the understanding exhibited by Indigenous peoples, may alter the idea that there is no unity as a whole in a plant's experience and how it responds to its environment. Although a comprehensive look at this idea is beyond the scope of this thesis, Stephen Buhner has cataloged many ways in which plants appear to exhibit such unity of response, especially in regard to their chemical constituency. See: Stephen Harrod Buhner, *The Lost Language of Plants: The Ecological Importance of Plant Medicines to Life on Earth* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2002).

> Whatever image is used, the main point is that a compound individual has a higher-level series of experiences that gives the total individual a unity of experience and action not possessed by nonindividual societies, such as rocks, computers and probably plants. By virtue of its dominant occasions of experience, which unify into themselves the various experiences of its bodily parts and then exert a supervening power throughout the next moment of the bodily life, the compound individual can respond as a whole to its environment.[28]

These dominant occasions that are part of, integrate the experience of, and in some sense control (supervening power), the total individual, are themselves temporal societies of higher occasions of experience that arise from the "more-or-less complex organization of the cells" of an animal body and constitute mind, psyche, or 'soul.'[29]

To be a living person, then, requires, "some definite type of hybrid prehensions transmitted from occasion to occasion of its existence" (PR 107).[30] Although a living nexus is itself non-social as far as its 'life' is concerned, "it may support a thread of personal order along some historical route of its members" (PR 107). The 'life' itself has no personal order, but some definite mental originality is channelled, or 'canalized,' from one entirely-living nexus to the next in a serially ordered fashion as the society maintains temporal and spatial endurance which results in "life turning back into society" (PR107). This channelling builds on the previous originality providing depth, character, and complexity. Mental activity is thus channelled from one living occasion to the next in a serially ordered fashion and built upon, which results in the complexity of mental activity we associate with a 'personality.' Self-consciousness is the direct awareness of the central direction of this mental activity as a person (PR 107). Although, as Whitehead

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[28] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 243.
[29] Ibid.: 242.
[30] In this sense a hybrid prehension is "the prehension by one subject of a conceptual prehension, or an 'impure' prehension, belonging to the mentality of another subject" (PR 107). The mentality of the 'entirely living nexūs' within the living being, which is transmitted from one occasion to the next via hybrid prehension, "may support a thread of personal order along some historical route of its members" (PR 107).

says, we could imagine that even the lowest forms of life, such as single cell organisms, may be "canalized into some faint form of mutual conformity," which explains adaptation and regeneration, self–consciousness is only achieved by higher life forms such as humans (PR 107). Life, says Whitehead, is, "a passage from physical order to pure mental originality, and from pure mental originality to canalized mental originality" (PR107-108).

## 4.7 Eternal Objects, Initial Aim, and the Primordial Nature of God

### *4.7.1 Eternal Objects*

In the preceding explanations the various forms, concepts, ideals, emotions, and other potentialities have been mentioned as part of the 'conceptual' or 'mental' aspect of reality that allows for continuity, inter-relationality, and creative advancement. Whitehead calls these 'eternal objects' and understands them as real 'objects,' which are all the forms of potentialities that exist eternally but lack actuality unless they are integrated, or 'ingress,' into the concrescence of an actual occasion. They are those objects that not only eternally exist but also have the potential to participate in, and contribute forms of definiteness to, any concrescing subject. Rather than 'becoming' themselves they are, as Nobo says, "presupposed by the becoming of every occasion because each occasion becomes definite through the ingression into (or reproduction within) its nature of some set or other of eternal objects."[31]

Whitehead distinguishes between those eternal objects that are objective, such as mathematical forms, and those that are subjective, such as emotions and consciousness (PR 290-293). However, they all exist as mere potentials until they are actualized in the world. Objective eternal objects are prehended along with the actual world during the

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[31] Jorge Luis Nobo, "Whitehead and the Quantum Experience," in *Physics and Whitehead: Quantum, Process, and Experience*, ed. Timothy E. Eastman and Hank Keeton, *Suny Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 227.

conformal stage and form part of the initial datum that each past actual entity contributes to the subject's own concrescence. The objective eternal objects are perceived in the initial conformal stage, secondary perception involving sense data, as well as during the various stages of conceptual valuation (PR 290). They are an "element in the definiteness of some objectified nexus, or of some actual entity, which is the datum of a feeling" (PR 290). The prehension of objective eternal objects gives physical form as we know and perceive it to the nexūs that make up the universe. Whitehead states:

> The solidarity of the world rests upon the incurable objectivity of this species of eternal objects. A member of this species inevitably introduces into the immediate subject other actualities. The definiteness with which it invests the external world may, or may not, conform to the real internal constitution of the actualities objectified. But conformably or non-conformably, such is the character of the nexus for that actual entity. This is the real physical fact, with its physical consequences. Eternal objects of the objective species are the mathematical Platonic forms. (PR 291)

Subjective eternal objects are primarily "an element in the definiteness in the subjective form of a feeling" (PR 291). They contribute to *how* the actual entity is felt. It is, as Whitehead states, "an emotion, or an intensity, or an adversion, or an aversion, or a pleasure, or a pain. It defines the subjective form of feeling of one actual entity" (PR 291). A subjective eternal object can also, however, contribute to the objectification of a perceived nexus. It can become one of the aforementioned 'characteristics' of a nexus according to the Category of Transmutation (PR 291). 'Redness,' for instance, can be an eternal object that is generalized as a characteristic over a whole nexus and determines one aspect of *how* it is perceived (PR 292). Subjective eternal objects such as emotions

can also be conceptually felt via 'hybrid feelings'[32] from previous actual entities. In this way emotional states are transferred from one entity to the next through genetic inheritance as one occasion conforms to the previous one in its own serial lineage. Subjective eternal objects are then valued up or down and the possibility of 'conceptual reversion' is entertained.[33]

Griffin tells us that although each actual occasion includes within itself its entire past actual world; the occasions differ from each other largely because of the different eternal objects they embody.[34] Eternal objects are that by which objects have the physical forms we perceive in the world, but also emotions, ideas, and the consciousness that gets 'canalized' from one actual entity to the next in higher animals. Both types, subjective and objective, are equally real and can be equally actualized.[35] Griffin states:

> Emotion is as real as mass, intensity of experience as real as charge. This democracy in the house of forms, along with the panexperientialism it presupposes, reinforces the Whiteheadian antireductionistic conviction that animal psyches are as actual as protons.[36]

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[32] Rather than being a 'primary feeling,' such as conceptual feelings and simple causal feelings, a "hybrid physical feeling originates for its subject a conceptual feeling with the same datum as that of the conceptual feeling of the antecedent subject" (PR 246). A hybrid feeling would be an 'impure' feeling because it is arises out of an integration of 'pure' primary feelings (PR 33). These can be "i) those which feel the conceptual feeling of temporal actual entities, and (ii) those which feel the conceptual feeling of God" (PR 246).

[33] Once the concept of prehending hybrid physical feelings from God was introduced by Whitehead, however, the need for the Category of Reversion was less applicable. He says, "Thus a more fundamental account must ascribe the reverted conceptual feeling in a temporal subject to its conceptual feeling derived, according to Category IV, from the hybrid physical feeling of the relevancies conceptually ordered in God's experience. In this way, by the recognition of God's characterization of the creative act, a more complete rational explanation is attained. The Category of Reversion is then abolished…" (PR 250). Alternate possibilities available for reversion, then, are derived in the initial aim from the primordial nature of God.

[34] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 249.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

### *4.7.2 Initial Aim and the Primordial Nature of God*

Since Whitehead's philosophy does not acknowledge the possibility of *creatio ex nihilo*, the forms he calls 'eternal objects' *must* be real objects that come from somewhere, even though they are only potentials without actuality. He says that, "According to the ontological principle there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere" (PR 244). Therefore, eternal objects must 'exist' as potentials that come from somewhere, and that 'somewhere' is what Whitehead calls the 'primordial nature of God.' He goes on to say:

> Accordingly, the differentiated relevance of eternal objects to each instance of the creative process requires their conceptual realization in the primordial nature of God. He does not create eternal objects; for his nature requires them in the same degree that they require him...The general relationships of eternal objects to each other, relationships of diversity and of pattern, are their relationships in God's conceptual realization. (PR 257)

Cobb explains that if the potentials where not ordered in some fashion when presented to each subject then "Any occasion might select any aim and it might select any locus or standpoint in the extensive continuum. Order could only be sheer chance."[37] This is in reference to the postulation that the eternal objects determine the particular spatial standpoint, or region, which is the locus of the concrescing subject within the entirety of the extensive continuum, thus determining its unique perspective.[38] Some limitation, therefore, is imposed upon the subject as far as the selection of eternal objects that constitutes its initial aim.[39] It is this limitation that, in turn, determines which occasions will be in the past of any new occasion.[40] The initial aim, as derived from God, therefore, not only determines its standpoint within the extensive continuum but also its

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[37] Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 93.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 94.

relations to all other occasions, those that are contiguous, those that are contemporary, and those that are in its past.[41] Thus we can understand the initial aim as "the originating element in each new occasion."[42] It is by virtue of the eternal objects as envisaged and ordered by God that all occasions within the extensive continuum are internally, ontologically, related and there is order in the universe.

God's primordial nature, then, is the conceptual envisaging and ordering of the eternal objects. It is the ground of all order and originality that determines the initial phase of the subjective aim of each new actual occasion, and offers both objective and subjective eternal objects for prehension in each process of concrescence (PR 108). It is eternal and primordial (a given for *all* occasions), but infinite and actually deficient.

Whether through ingression in the initial aim supplied by God, or through 'conceptual reversion' in the later supplementary stages, the ordering of eternal objects is not only essential to the aim at value by each subject, but also the realization of novelty and life.[43] Whitehead says that, "It must also be noted that the pure mental originality works by the canalization of relevance arising from the primordial nature of God. Thus an originality in the temporal world is conditioned, though not determined, by an initial subjective aim supplied by the ground of all order and of all originality" (PR 108). In Cobb's words:

> It is only by virtue of God's ordering of the eternal objects that one conceptual feeling, conformal to that of a past temporal actual occasion, can give rise to a new conceptual feeling of an eternal object not present in the prehended occasion. Apart from God there could be no novelty in the world.[44]

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[41] Ibid., 115.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 99.
[44] Ibid.

Thus, God's primordial nature is not only essential to the ongoing creative advance of the world, but God's immanence through the ingression of eternal objects derived from the primordial nature is constitutive of the novelty required for 'life' as conceived by Whitehead.

### 4.8 God in the World

Whitehead's Ontological Principle states that, "Everything in the actual world is referable to some actual entity. It is either transmitted from an actual entity in the past, or belongs to the subjective aim of the actual entity to whose concrescence it belongs" (PR 244). Therefore, if eternal objects are 'felt' via God, God must be an actual entity. Because all actual entities are dipolar in nature, God, like all other actual entities, must have both a mental (conceptual) pole and a physical pole. For Whitehead, God's mental pole is the primordial nature and God's physical pole, which he calls the 'consequent nature,' is the prehension of all satisfied actual entities in the world that are 'woven' upon the primordial concepts (PR 345). These two natures are not ontologically distinct from each other, in that they are united in God's perfected nature, but are the physical and conceptual poles of the process by which all actual entities are constituted, including God. It is why God, by virtue of both conceptual envisaging (the primordial nature) and physical prehension (the world as it reaches satisfaction) is considered an actual entity. Because God then passes back into the world through the initial aim of every actual entity, each actual occasion of experience prehends God and in turn contributes to the ongoing creation of God. God could not exist without a world and the world cannot exist without God (PR 348). Due to the principle of relativity, not only does God prehend that which is in the world, the entities in the world prehend God. What results is a panentheistic natural theology in which everything in the world expresses the divine and is included in the divine, but in itself does not make up the totality of the divine. Like all

other actual entities, then, God is both immanent in the world and transcendent in subjective distinctness.

Each process of becoming for any actual entity, other than God, originates from the physical pole during which it must conform to, by prehending, its entire antecedent actual world. Subsequently, the conceptual phase, or pole, takes account of the eternal objects derived from the world and presented by the primordial nature of God. Supplementary conceptual pole phases involving reconciling contrasts, comparisons, perceptions, and propositions, culminate in the unity of the final satisfaction of the process of concrescence at which point the subject is fully determinate, and therefore available for prehension by subsequent actual occasions. For Whitehead, God is also an actual entity, but God originates in the conceptual pole of the primordial nature (PR 345,348). The primordial nature is timeless and eternal and consists of the forever unchanging envisaging and ordering of all eternal objects (PR 31). In the primordial nature there is no 'past' for God to inherit and conform to so God must originate in the conceptual pole. The correlate of what for actual entities in the temporal world is their physical inheritance of, and conformity to, the 'past,' is God's prehension of all actualities of the evolving world into a "living ever present fact " (PR 350). This pole, which is 'consequent' to the world, is the "weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts" (PR 345). God, then, "is to be conceived as originated by conceptual experience with his process of completion motivated by consequent, physical experience, initially derived from the temporal world" (PR 345).

Although somewhat controversial as to how it is possible in Whitehead's conceptual scheme, God too is determinate in his consequent nature. God achieves objective immortality as a superject available for prehension by the actual entities in the evolving world (PR 32,345). But unlike other actual entities, God's consequent nature is forever in the process of concrescence without ever reaching completion, or 'final

satisfaction' (PR 345). Also unlike other actual entities, God retains full immediacy of all that has happened in the world. For all other actual entities, when each process of concrescence achieves subjective immediacy and then comes to final satisfaction it becomes fully determined and subjective immediacy is lost as it 'perishes' and becomes part of the objective past (PR 60). At that point, as an object it becomes available for prehension by subsequent subjects. As time advances the past 'fades' and becomes more and more vague and indeterminate, even though it is now 'objectively immortal' and retains its actuality *as* the past.

For God, however, the immediacy of all events in the evolving world is retained. There is no past in God's eternal primordial nature and subsequently no perishing. According to this interpretation, everything that has ever happened anywhere and at anytime in the actual world exists in the objective past of the temporal world's finite actual entities, with varying degrees of intensity and relevance, but all events in the temporal world retain full immediacy in the unity of God's consequent nature, while retaining the multiplicity of each individual self-realization.[45] By virtue of this objective immortality in God, the consequent nature is the "fluent world become 'everlasting'..." (PR 347). According to Cobb, in terms of the past, Whitehead can be thought of as a full-fledged realist.[46] Past events objectively exist as the past in each new moment, perpetually losing intensity (or objective immediacy) in each subsequent prehension, while retaining everlasting immediacy in God's eternal present.

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[45] "Thus the consequent nature of God is composed of a multiplicity of elements with individual self-realization. It is just as much a multiplicity as it is a unity; it is just as much one immediate fact as it is an unresting advance upon itself. Thus the actuality of God must also be understood as a multiplicity of actual components in process of creation" (PR 350). Cobb suggests that it may be that not *everything* in a fully satisfied occasion is included in God's consequent nature because of such Whitehead phrases as "The wisdom of subjective aim prehends every actually for what it can be... " (PR 346), and the "tenderness that loses nothing which can be saved" (PR 346). From passages such as these Cobb asserts that God's saving work is not sheer preservation, even though Whitehead sees value in everything, but instead saves that which can be saved to achieve the transformation into a harmonious whole. Ibid., 128.

[46] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 71.

For most of *Process and Reality* Whitehead discusses God with reference to the conceptual or mental pole, with few references to the physical pole or consequent nature. In the last chapter, however, he discusses God's immanence in the world in regard to the consequent nature but in a fashion that has generated much discussion and debate as to whether it is consistent with his previous work. The issue debated is that although Whitehead clearly understands God as an 'actual entity,' God's consequent nature is always in concrescence while never achieving final satisfaction as he prehends the ever-changing world and 'weaves' it upon the primordial concepts (PR 345). Yet to achieve objective immortality requires the determinateness that for other actual entities is only achieved in the final satisfaction of the concrescence. This consequent nature that never achieves satisfaction somehow completes itself and the "perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world, and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience" (PR 351). This has led some process thinkers, such as Lewis Ford, to state that it is not possible for the consequent nature to be prehended by worldly occasions,[47] while others, such as Charles Hartshorne and early Cobb, understand the unity of God as a personally ordered society of successive occasions rather than the unity of an actual entity that Whitehead explicitly states.[48] God as a personally ordered society would allow the type of determinateness required for prehension by subjects. Still others, such as Marjorie Suchocki and Palmyre Oomen, and later Cobb, have emphasized the reverse dipolarity of God, although in different ways, to show that a close reading of Whitehead can provide an adequate solution to the

[47] Lewis S. Ford, "The Consequences of Prehending the Consequent Nature," *Process Studies* 27, no. 1-2 (1998): 134.

[48] Hartshorne believed this is what Whitehead actually meant and has stated such in his book *The Divine Relativity*. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, Conneticut: Yale University Press, 1948).

problem.[49] In any case, process theists, including Cobb and Griffin, have leaned towards a reading of Whitehead that follows an implicit understanding that the world is physically prehended by God through his consequent nature, which "saves that which can be saved" and subsequently responds back to the world with a particular ordering of the eternal objects, relative to each new occasion's situation, which lures the subject towards maximum novel complexity, intensity of experience, and therefore value for its own and subsequent actualities. This reading is certainly implied by the passage in the penultimate paragraph of *Process and Reality*:

> In the fourth phase, the creative action completes itself. For the perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world, and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience.... It is the particular providence for particular occasions (PR 351).

[49] A thorough discussion of the issues surrounding the prehensibility of God's consequent nature can be found in a number of articles on the subject. These would include: "Decentering God" by Donald Sherburne, and "Sherburne on Providence" by Cobb, which center around a conversation about whether or not God can order the eternal objects of the initial aim particular to each subject in accordance with God's antecedent consequent prehension of the world in order to provide 'providence' for each occasion. In her article "The Prehensibility of God's Consequent Nature", Palmyre Oomen has suggested a closer reading of Whitehead's concept of the reverse dipolarity of God as an actual entity, rather than as a society as argued by Charles Hartshorne and early Cobb, provides a basis for God being determinate in his consequent nature, and therefore prehendable. Although she argues it in a different way, Marjorie Suchoki also uses God's reverse dipolarity as an explanation of how it is possible for God's consequent nature to be imminent in the world in her articles "The Metaphysical Ground of the Whiteheadian God" and "The Dynamic God". Although these are widely recognized as the most adequate interpretations of God as a prehendable actual entity, both Joseph Bracken and Lewis Ford still argue that God's consequent nature cannot be prehended in "The Consequences of Prehending the Consequent Nature"(Ford) and "Prehending God in and Through the World" (Bracken). Cobb's updated understanding is available in the 2007 revised edition of *A Christian Natural Theology* (2007). See: Donald W. Sherburne, "Decentering Whitehead," *Process Studies* 15, no. 2 (1986); John B. Cobb Jr., "Sherburne on Providence," *Process Studies* 23, no. 1 (1994); Palmyre M. F. Oomen, "The Prehensibility of God's Consequent Nature," *Process Studies* 27, no. 1-2 (1998); Marjorie Suchocki, "The Metaphysical Ground of the Whiteheadian God," *Process Studies* 5, no. 4 (1975); Marjorie Suchocki, "The Dynamic God," *Process Studies* 39, no. 1 (2010); Ford, "The Consequences of Prehending the Consequent Nature."; Joseph A. Bracken, "Prehending God in and through the World " *Process Studies* 29, no. 1 (2000); Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*.

Although Cobb is not convinced that Whitehead meant this providence to be quite as individualistic as it has been taken, the minimum it suggests is that "the aim derived from God in each moment is affected by how we have responded in the past."[50]

What seems clear is that God cannot be thought of dualistically as if the primordial nature and the consequent nature are distinctly separate parts rather than abstract concepts describing God's dipolar nature. Cobb cautions that it does not make sense to suppose that there are two separate prehensions of the natures of God.[51] We can merely abstract out the primordial nature and the consequent nature to talk about them as they are bound into the unity of God's actuality. To speak of God's consequent nature is in many ways simply to speak of God as an actual entity that prehends and can be prehended by other actual entities in the world. It is what makes God "really actual, completing the deficiency of his mere conceptual actuality" (PR 349). To Whitehead, eternal objects can only be available for prehension by actual occasions in the world because they have been envisaged and ordered by an actual entity—God—thus making them available for prehension. Eternal objects, then, are available for prehension because of God's actuality as an entity constituted by both consequent and primordial natures, but they are still derived from, and ordered in, the primordial nature.

Lewis Ford states that although it would be wonderful for process theologians if Whitehead had said that God's consequent experience provided particular aims for particular emergent occasions, he did not.[52] The notion that what happens in the world affects God's subsequent ordering of eternal objects presented in the initial aim of each new actual occasion, however, appears to be implied in the final chapter of *Process and Reality* and is a common interpretation by process theologians. Whitehead need not have

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[50] Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 130.
[51] Ibid., 129.
[52] Lewis S. Ford, *Transforming Process Theism* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), 125.

stated it explicitly in order for it to be an adequate reading of his system, as long as there is consistency with his overall metaphysic. This ordering, consequent to God's prehension of the world, is how God makes available those eternal objects most relevant for any particular concrescing subject. In this way God values and 'saves' all that happens in the evolving world, and returns into the world those choices and potentials with an aim towards highest value and complexity in each individual entity. Whitehead states:

> The consequent nature of God is his judgement on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgement of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgement of wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage. (PR 346)

Each novel actual entity in the evolving world achieves objective immortality in God and is 'woven' upon God's eternal primordial conceptions, thus advancing creative novelty in God. However this 'weaving' is understood, it appears clear that Whitehead intended that God's prehension of the world is meant to contribute to an everlasting and ever-enlarging divine. The ever-changing world affects God. Whitehead states that:

> Thus, by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God's nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God. He shares with every new creation its actual world; and the concrescent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God's objectification of that actual world. (PR 345)

The eternal objects themselves may not be new, and his eternal conceptual nature may remain unchanged (PR 345), but how the eternal objects have been actualized in original combinations by each concrescing occasion contributes to God's novel experience of the world. God's response to the world is the saving, judging, and relevant ordering as all contrasts are reconciled within the unity of his nature "directed with the subjective aim, clothed with the subjective form, wholly derivative from his all-inclusive

primordial valuation" (PR 345). God's subjective aim "prehends every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system—its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy—woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing" (PR 346). The perfected actuality that is God in his unity of the prehension of the finite world and infinite primordial possibilities, "passes back into the temporal world and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience" (PR 350-351).

Thus Whitehead describes in four phases how actuality is achieved. 1) The "phase of conceptual origination, deficient in actuality, but infinite in its adjustment of valuation" (PR 350). This is the primordial nature of God—infinite and eternal. 2) "The temporal phase of physical origination, with its multiplicity of actualities" (PR 350). This phase consists of the actual world in its multiplicity of actual entities, which although "deriving its determinate conditions" from God's primordial nature (the first phase) have individual creative novelty. 3) The 'perfected actuality' whereby the multiplicity of the actual entities in the temporal world are unified in God's consequent nature, yet retain individual identity (PR 350); the many (of the world) becoming the one everlastingly in God. 4) The 'perfected actuality' of God's consequent nature "passes back into the world and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience" (PR 351). The fourth phase constitutes God's immanence in the world as derived from the ordered relevance of the eternal objects originating from God's primordial nature, supplying an initial aim ordered in a way that is a persuasive 'lure' toward maximum value for each individual occasion and for the future.[53]

[53] This is the most controversial phase with much discussion, as noted earlier, on how to understand it. The interpretation I use is a common reading for process theologians and is the one I presuppose in this thesis.

### 4.9 Summary

In summary, in a Whiteheadian process metaphysic, reality is understood as being constituted by events, the smallest of which are called 'actual occasions of experience,' rather than material substances that endure through time and space. Each new occasion, or actual entity, 'grasps,' or 'prehends,' the past occasions that are relevant to it, which, along with any novel changes that may be introduced in the process of becoming, constitutes the new occasion, or 'subject of experience.' Each occasion must take account of the entirety of its past world, but does so in varying degrees of relevance, the most intensely relevant being those that contribute to its continuity as an entity. Although each becoming occasion is partially constituted by its conformity to the past world, it is also self-determining in that, as an experiencing subject, it incorporates novel possibilities in its becoming. When each becoming subject reaches final determination, or 'satisfaction,' it loses subjectivity and becomes an object available for inclusion into all future subjects. In that way it achieves 'objective immortality' in that it will always be a fully determined object of the past, available for inclusion in the present and future. Therefore, all becoming occasions can be thought of as including all past occasions, in varying degrees of relevance, making all occasions in the world internally, or ontologically, related to each other. This process of conforming to the past, introducing novel possibilities, and contributing originality to the future, is what constitutes the creative advance of the world.

The 'public matters of fact,' which are the 'things' we perceive in reality such as molecules, air, rocks, animals, planets, etc., are groupings of such actual occasions that are bound together by internal relatedness in some way. If these groupings are socially related in an ordered fashion in which they inherit defining characteristics from each other, they are what Whitehead calls a 'society.' If such defining characteristics are inherited in a serially ordered fashion they achieve temporal endurance and spatial

extension—they take on physical actuality that can be empirically perceived. Temporality, in fact, *is* the succession of such serially ordered events. The world and everything in it, therefore, is constituted by a network of internally, or ontologically, related subjects of experience that incorporate the entire past, introduce novelty and originality, and thereby contribute to the future.

Although there is no ontological difference between actual entities, there is a difference in capacity for novel originality, and therefore complexity and intensity of experience, which contributes to 'life' as understood by Whitehead. Although a molecule is a subject of rudimentary experience, it does not have the capacity for originality in the same way a living cell does. The more complex and intense the experience of the subject, the more 'life' it has. If a particular grouping of occasions, such as an animal, has a 'dominant occasion' that gives the group a unity of response to its environment, it is what Griffin and Hartshorne call a 'compound individual.' Complex mental activity can be channelled in a compound individual from one living occasion to the next in a serially ordered fashion and achieve what we understand as a 'personality,' which can also result in consciousness as direct awareness of this mental activity is achieved. 'Nonindividualized societies,' such as rocks (inorganic) and possibly plants (organic), are merely aggregates of experiencing subjects, so do not in themselves have the capacity to become a 'person' in this sense.

In Whitehead's 'philosophy of organism,' the potential 'forms of definiteness' that not only give form to the data included in each becoming subject, but are also the potentials and possibilities that result in novelty and originality, must originate from an actual entity. That actual entity is God. The 'eternal objects,' or forms of potentiality such as color, emotions, concepts, ideals, and mathematical forms, are envisaged, ordered, and made available for ingression into each entity by the 'primordial nature' of God, which is infinite and eternal. However, in the same way that all entities prehend, or take account

of, their own past actual world in varying degrees of relevancy, God's 'physical,' or 'consequent,' nature includes all actual occasions in the world as they complete their own becoming and achieve objective immortality. God, then, includes the world in the unity of his perfected nature, and "passes back into the temporal world and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience" (PR 350-351). God is in the world, and the world is in God; God judges and saves the world, and orders the possibilities available to each entity.

Having sufficiently delineated those aspects of Whitehead's thought which are pertinent to this study, I can now turn to the comparative experiment that is the core of this thesis. As I do so, the Whiteheadian themes and concepts I have considered here will undoubtedly emerge. As they do I will continue to supply further explanation, and/or refer back to the sections of this chapter as appropriate.

# Chapter Five: **All My Relations**

> "Against materialistic framing of the environment as discrete things stands relationally framing the environment as nested relatedness."[1] (Bird-David)
>
> "Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of."[2] (Shawn Wilson)
>
> "The chief proposition of the universe is relationality."[3] (Black Elk)

I mentioned in Chapter Two that my understanding of John Cobb Jr.'s theological comparative method involves going into encounter with a religious tradition, usually including some form of inter-religious dialogue, with an open attitude based on a pluralistic ontology in order to go beyond dialogue with the hope of mutual growth and transformation. My argument is that going into such relation and dialogue would be more fruitful and honourable if the 'other' religion is viewed as what William James calls a 'live hypothesis,' which I hope this dissertation would facilitate. Because I am not a theologian I view this present work as antecedent to the inter-religious dialogue and engagement that is currently considered the 'New Comparative Theology.'

The motivation in my own comparative study is to provide a better understanding of certain fundamental aspects of the Native ontology, in particular its relational premise, with the hope that it will help facilitate future inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue with Indigenous people as more active and equal partners in the encounter. My intent would be similar to Jocks' when he says that he is "committed to clearing open ground for new kinds of discourse between this hemisphere's First Peoples and Euroamerican intellectual tradition, in which the former are active, critical participants rather than

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[1] Nurit Bird-David, ""Animism" Revisted: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropologist* 40, no. Supplement (1999): 77.
[2] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 80.
[3] Black Elk quoted by Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 30.

passive specimens or curiosities."[4] I would like once again to make it clear before I begin, because I do not think it can be overemphasized, that the subsequent chapters are not meant to be a comprehensive, objective, ethnographic study of Indigenous religion in general or in particular. Nor am I, as a non-Native scholar, assuming that I can fully understand the Native North American experience as if I were a First Nations person. What I propose is that a comparative study between a contemporary, Western philosophical metaphysic and some central aspects of Indigenous ontology as exemplified, experienced, understood, and reported by Indigenous people and scholars may provide a common context of understanding, and potentially an opening for a more equal partnership in future dialogue. By making a foreign worldview a 'live hypothesis' in the Jamesian sense, the hope is that an initial encounter would be enhanced by openness to the foreign 'other,' which in turn will facilitate more equality between dialogue partners, as well as a more pluralistic attitude in any inter-religious contact in the tradition of the transformationist theology of John Cobb Jr. The following comparative experiment is meant to be but one step towards this goal.

It is also important to note that the purpose of this comparative exercise is not to attempt a comprehensive Whiteheadian explanation of all Indigenous worldviews and interpretations. It is enough for my purposes to see whether a process perspective gives us the tools to accommodate and better understand the fundamental Indigenous experience as I have defined it previously. Therefore, I sometimes deviate from using terminology and concepts in the technically rigorous manner that a Whiteheadian process analysis often calls for. I have attempted to balance such systematic rigour with a less technical analysis typical of the Indigenous sources. Otherwise, I would run the risk of

[4] Ronwanièn:te Jocks, "Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age," 63.

alienating the Indigenous perspective by forcing it into strictly Whiteheadian schema, something that, to a certain extent, is already unavoidable.

### 5.1 Personal Introduction: Where I Come From

In keeping with the methodology and protocol discussed in Chapter Three, it is important at this point to briefly introduce myself and my history, and therefore my perspective, before beginning this comparative experiment.

I was born in the late 1950's in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, into a lower middle class family of Celtic ancestry on my mother's side (Scottish and Irish) and German ancestry on my father's. I was raised in a rather liberal Baptist Church setting until my middle teens when, given a choice, I stopped attending and living as a practicing Christian, while continuing to support basic Christian values and morals. Although certainly not affluent, I enjoyed the privileges of being a white, male, Protestant in the dominant society, including a good education, good nutrition, a solid family with a stay-at-home mother, and widely available opportunities and choice in work and education. I received a college education in my chosen field, working as a recording engineer and live audio technician in the music business, and spent the first fifteen years of my adult life working in retail consumer and professional audio sales and consulting, as well as recording/producing music albums, and producing live music performances. During that time I married my high school sweetheart and had two sons. Although I no longer practiced a religious lifestyle I retained an ongoing interest in how people thought about their place in the world and their relationship to what they conceived as the divine. I was blessed with parents who had an open inclusiveness to others so had very little experience with bigotry and prejudice until much later in life, other than at a naïve children-in-the-playground level. When my sons were old enough for school and my wife returned to outside work I was given the opportunity to formally study my interest in how and what

others believed about the world, which progressed into a joint Religious Studies/Philosophy bachelor's degree in Religious Studies and Applied Ethics. I returned to work in the music business once my degree was completed. Until then I had little personal contact with any First Nations people other than what could be expected in any Canadian city, but what I had was positive. In spite of the observable difficulties and issues surrounding Native Canadians in both an urban and reservation setting, I had the pleasure of having a few Native friends in high school, and others later in professional life.

My first long lasting connection to a First Nations family came in 2000 through my wife, who had just begun an apprenticeship with a traditional Cree Elder, Fishwoman, who was born and raised in Northern Alberta. Through a series of serendipitous events after having a particular moving experience with nature, my wife was accepted as an apprentice in protocol and ceremony on how to deal with and understand such an experience with the land. Although none of the data in this document is directly related to anything learned from her teacher, the ongoing reciprocal relationship between our families, and observing my wife's apprenticeship and new life unfold, has been instrumental in my underlying awareness, understanding, and sensitivities—and therefore my particular perspective—to the Indigenous worldview and ways of knowing. It is to these valuable and wonderful relationships that I feel accountability and the need to honour in my thesis presentation.

During this period I once again had the opportunity to return to school and embark on an MA program in Religious Studies, focusing on diversity of religious belief. One particular theological position toward other religions caught my attention because its pluralistic attitude was different than the norm. The comparative theological method of John Cobb Jr. was predicated on a pluralistic ontology and metaphysic—that of Alfred North Whitehead—that strove to accommodate and interpret *all* human experience.

While attending a conference honouring John Cobb Jr.'s lifelong work and contributions,[5] I was fascinated to learn that although it seemed to be recognized that process philosophy was consistent with many Indigenous beliefs and views, there had been very little, if any, work done assessing to what extent the Indigenous ontology was accommodated by process philosophy, something I saw as an integral part of Cobb's theological method. It was also clear that some interpretations of Whitehead did not fully accommodate how I understood the Native experience, while others did. Upon returning from the conference I transferred into a Ph.D. program to investigate this further.

### 5.2 Universal Relationality

This chapter will focus largely on understanding reality as inherently relational in both the Indigenous and Whiteheadian context. It will illustrate, from both primary Indigenous and secondary non-Indigenous sources, how this relationality is expressed and exemplified through various Indigenous concepts, language structures, practices, and fundamental perspectives on divine immanence. Methodologically it will put particular Indigenous beliefs and practices, largely as identified by Indigenous scholars, into conversation with Whiteheadian process thought to determine the extent to which the process perspective may help interpret and understand Indigenous ontology. Although epistemology is implied throughout this chapter it will be specifically dealt with in the following chapter that focuses on Indigenous epistemology in comparison to Whiteheadian concepts.

The underlying ontological understanding that supports the connection to the land and nature that has been identified as fundamental to Indigeneity is that reality is inherently relational. The indigeneity of 'springing from the land' reflects an active,

[5] The 2007 conference in Claremont, California entitled *The Legacy and Lure of John Cobb Jr.* previously mentioned.

participatory, connection and interconnection with nature, and all of creation. It is this relatedness that is central to Indigenous self-identity not only on a personal level but also in how one understands one's place in the family, community, environment, and relationship to the divine. It underlies many Indigenous epistemologies (or ways of 'knowing'), morality, languages, and understanding of space, time and causation. In effect, Indigeneity as exemplified in many Native cultures around the world, including the First Nations communities of North America, can be thought of as lived radical relationality.[6] Whiteheadian Process Philosophy is a metaphysic that is also predicated on universal immanent relationality, which seeks to interpret *all* experience of the world so, I propose, is in an optimal, if not unique, position to translate many aspects of the Indigenous ontology. At the very least, I believe, it can provide the tools for a better understanding of such an ontology. This will in turn, I have argued, put Indigenous peoples on a more equal footing in future intercultural and interreligious relations and dialogue.

According to Deloria Jr. a central tenet of Native worldviews is that: "everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it."[7] This interconnectedness includes but goes far beyond just a sense of social relatedness; it is ontologically what reality *is*. As Shawn Wilson states, for Indigenous people humans *are* the relationships they hold.[8] Because humans are not ontologically different from the rest of creation this extends to the entire natural world, which is understood not so much as a single definite reality, but as multiple realities made up of different sets of relationships.[9] In fact, Wilson says that in an Indigenous ontology, "reality is not an object but a process of

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[6] 'Radical' in the sense that it is pervasive in the lived experience.
[7] Vine Deloria Jr, *Spirit and Reason* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999), 34.
[8] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 80.
[9] Ibid., 73.

relationships."[10] It is this lived awareness of relationality that defines First Nations people and their place in, and experience of, the world. Jyotirmaya Tripathy has pointed out that it is this "inherent connectedness to all life" that is central to Native systems."[11] Similarly, Betty Bastien states that in her own tribe, the *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot), human beings are understood to exist only in relation to their relatives, which encompasses the whole universe:

> An individual cannot exist without a network of kinship alliances. Knowing who you are is knowing your relatives—and knowing your relatives is being in your centre. Being in the centre of the universe means knowing one's place in the universe, and that place is at the centre of our tribal, natural, and cosmic alliance. Being centred means knowing the specific interdependent relationship one has with natural and cosmic orders.[12]

These relationships and alliances "define tribal people as human beings and circumscribe their relationship to the underground people, the star people, the winged people, and to the four-legged."[13]

In Whiteheadian Process philosophy, the concept that describes this sense of internal relatedness that defines what reality *is* in itself is the 'Principle of Relativity'(PR 22).[14] From this view, every entity that has ever existed, including God, is in some way present in every new entity that is coming-to-be (PR 50). In turn, once it has reached its final 'satisfaction' of being, it immediately becomes a datum for subsequent entities, thus participating in the creative advance of all creation. Because to Whitehead every actual entity prehends, or takes account of, not only its own genetically inherited objective past, but also that of its entire actual world, and reality itself is simply an ongoing creative

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Tripathy, "Towards an Essential Native American Identity: A Theoretical Overview," 317.
[12] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 95.
[13] Ibid., 40.
[14] For a more detailed discussion on the principle of relativity and mutual immanence see Section 4.3.

process of actual occasions coming to 'be,' there is an internal relatedness to all past actual occasions, and hence all creation. In a sense, Whitehead says, "everything is everywhere at all times" (SMW 91).

This 'mutual immanence' of all actual occasions constitutes an internal relatedness at the most basic ontological level. It is also the basis for the Whiteheadian position that all entities, including humans, are not different in kind from each other. To Whitehead, there is no ontological difference between entities; they all, even God, must conform to the same fundamental metaphysical principles, prime among which is the principal of relativity.[15]

When Indigenous people, then, understand all creation to be inherently related, in process terms this can be understood as recognition of internal relatedness due to mutual immanence based on the principle of relativity. On one hand, when anthropologist Nurit Bird-David refers to the Indigenous worldview as "relationally framing the environment as nested relatedness" and contrasts it with the classical Western "materialistic framing of the environment as discrete things,"[16] this reflects a metaphysical understanding that parallels the process view of reality as ongoing creative advance with reality consisting of a series of events rather than discrete substances and enduring substances 'floating' in space. On the other hand, it also comments on the deep awareness of the internal relatedness of all 'things' that make up the natural world, as does Shawn Wilson's statement that in an Indigenous view people *are* the relationships they hold. When Black Elk states that the chief proposition of the universe is relationality he is not just reflecting on what Cox refers to as reverence for kinship and ancestor relations, but is commenting on the very structure of reality.

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[15] There has been much controversy and discussion as to whether Whitehead was consistent in this assertion when applied to God, but although that is beyond the scope of this thesis it is discussed in more detail in Section 4.8.

[16] Bird-David, ""Animism" Revisted: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," 77.

### *5.2.1 Language and Symbolism*

As a 'lived radical relationality' this relational ontology is lived out in all levels of social existence, including language and cultural practices. Joseph Epes Brown explains in his last work *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, how in Native American thought, nothing exists in isolation because it is fundamentally inter-connected to everything else, a sense of relationship that is supported by the forms of language and ritual.

> Relationships between members of family, band, clan, or tribal groups tend to be defined, and thus intensified, through relational or generational terms rather than through personal names which are considered to be sacred and thus private to the individual. This sense of relationship pertains not only to members of a nuclear family, band, or clan. It also extends outward to include all beings of the specific environment, the elements, and the winds, whether these beings, forms, or powers are what we would call animate or inanimate. In Native American thought no such hard dichotomies exist. All such forms under creation are understood to be mysteriously interrelated. Everything is relative to every other being or thing; thus, nothing exists in isolation.[17]

As was stated earlier, and reiterated here by Brown, this fundamental ontology of reality *as* relationship is reflected and supported by Indigenous language and ritual. Bastien notes that, "The ceremonies, lands, stories, ritual, language, roles, and responsibilities are the hallmarks of a holistic worldview. They are intertwined and interdependent with each other and form the cultural and ceremonial integrity of *Nitsitapi* [Indigenous people or "one of the people"]."[18] Although a comprehensive analysis of the wide diversity of Indigenous languages is far beyond the scope of this thesis, there are a few observations that are particularly relevant. It should be noted first, however, that according to some scholars, such as Thomas McElwain, linguistic structure does not

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[17] Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, 39.
[18] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 90.

necessarily reflect perception structures.[19] He does, for instance, reject the hypothesis presented by Benjamin Whorf that in Indigenous cultures like the Hopi, particular linguistic characteristics, such as a weak morphological distinction between nouns and verbs, give rise to, or correlate to, "perceptions of reality that emphasize quality over sequence and relationship over entity."[20] Studies subsequent to Whorf's indicate that the Hopi language is indeed capable of reference to past and future and to concrete objects and empty space despite Whorf's conclusions to the contrary.[21] McElwain also cautions against making the assumption that because of their language structure, Native American thought focuses on process and Euro-American thought focuses on the static.[22] He does acknowledge, however, that although both concepts are present in either society they may be applied differently using different linguistic means. Both cultures, then, could understand the concept of time, but the linguistic structure of how it is referred to may be different. How words are used within a language, therefore, may reflect what is considered appropriate or important in any particular culture. The perceptions may be the same but how it is said, and how many words the concept requires to be conveyed may be different. In other words, the experiences or perceptions themselves may not be peculiar to a particular culture, but the language structure may reflect how those perceptions are understood and prioritized. I would conclude, then, only partially agreeing with McElwain, that a culture that has a fundamental ontological outlook that is inherently based on the dynamic process of relationality, may well have a language structure that prioritizes that understanding. The language structure reflects what is of priority in the

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[19] Thomas McElwain, "Seneca Iroquois Concepts of Time," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 7, no. 2 (1987): 269.
[20] Ibid.: 268.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.: 275.

ontological outlook, although that would, of course, limit any subsequent linguistic interpretation in a type of circular epistemology.

To Whitehead, language is an example of what he refers to as 'symbolic reference.' In a very basic sense, as the phrase implies, symbolic reference is the use of symbols in a referential way. More technically, it is a mixed mode of perception that synthesizes the positive prehensions of an actual entity felt as causal efficacy (internal perceptions of the actual world as opposed to those perceived externally through sense organs) with the presentational immediacy of our sense perception of the contemporary external world (PR 168, Symb 21). Although symbolic reference has a complex meaning within the comparative phases of the concrescence (coming-to-be) of an actual entity, it is enough at this point to understand that language is an example of how Whitehead understands 'symbolism.' To Whitehead, symbols always have two elements that are being united—symbol and meaning—which must have some general common ground that unites them (S 8). He states that, "The human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience" (S 8). Symbols are used to enhance the importance of what is symbolized (S 63). Therefore, that which is being symbolized *has* importance to the subject using the symbol.

From a Whiteheadian process perspective, then, words and language structure have symbolic reference relevant to what is considered important to the speaker. That reference can be transferred from one person to another, but like any symbolic reference is prone to vagueness and error. However, the closer the mutual context and direct experience, the more accurate the transference of the concept from one person to the other. A word, such as 'forest,' does not usually create the direct experience of what the speaker is referring to, other than the experience of the word itself, but is meant to facilitate a particular recognition and integration of a concept. We can, therefore, gain an

understanding of what is considered important, as well as how some things are understood, by the language and language structure of a people. For instance, Whitehead feels that the structure of Western languages, inherited from the Greek philosophical traditions, includes a "factor of extreme objectivism in metaphysics, whereby the subject-predicate form of proposition is taken as expressing a fundamental metaphysical truth" (PR 159). Because of this, process oriented conceptuality is extremely difficult to discuss using Western languages because a substantist metaphysic is embedded in the language structure itself. In the same way, although Indigenous and non-Indigenous people live in the common totality of reality ('cosmic epoch' as Whitehead says) Indigenous languages tend toward structures that reflect the dynamic relationality and process nature of their metaphysical presuppositions.

One simple example of how a relational ontology is reflected in Indigenous languages is how people and objects are referred to in Cree. Shawn Wilson says that in his own Native language there is no direct correspondence for English words such as 'chair.' Rather, the Cree word would be more accurately translated as "the thing that you sit on."[23] The same would apply to an item such as a 'pen' being 'something that you write with' and so on. Objects are often not named as nouns so much as descriptive verbs of what one does with them. Also, kinship words are understood only in regard to whom they are related to. A term such as *kookuum*, for instance, which is normally translated into English as 'grandmother' would actually be better understood as '*my* grandmother' or '*your* grandmother,' and never in isolation as an abstract concept. A grandmother

[23] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 73.

cannot exist without being in relation; she must be *someone's* grandmother, she is never just *a* grandmother.[24]

F. David Peat argues that the "songs, ceremonies, traditional ways, and all the trappings of Indigenous science can be found enfolded within the [Indigenous] language."[25] He says that the dominant feature of Algonquin languages such as Cree and Blackfoot, for instance, is verbs, some of which have over a thousand different endings, because they are concerned with "the animation of all things within their process-vision of the cosmos."[26] He says this holistic and process view is an almost universal factor in the Indigenous languages of North America.[27] This emphasis on verbs evident in the Algonquin language family reflects a reality of transformation and change, and although nouns do exist they are "temporary aspects of the ever-flowing process" and therefore not primary in themselves.[28] The Iroquois, as another example, have over one hundred kinship terms, which reflects their typically Indigenous stress on relationship.[29] To learn Mohawk, therefore, is to learn more than just grammar and syntax, but also to "understand the meaning and nature of different kinship relationships, realizing why they are important, and understanding the whole worldview in which they are embedded."[30] Rather than being categorized with strict boundaries, according to Peat, Indigenous languages reflect the fluidity and transforming ability of objects existing, not so much in themselves, but through relationships.[31] Algonquin languages, therefore, do not make use

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[24] Ibid. In a relational ontology in which kinship terms extend beyond biological families, however, an elderly person can be a 'grandmother' to everyone, so could be called *kookuum* as a general term of honour regardless of whether or not they have biological grandchildren. This does not detract from the general referential perspective.
[25] Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 219.
[26] Ibid., 222.
[27] Ibid., 17.
[28] Ibid., 237.
[29] Ibid., 222.
[30] Ibid., 223.
[31] Ibid., 228.

of categories or boundaries but rather are concerned with processes and relationship to processes, and the Iroquois languages reflect the web of inter-relations.

Indigenous languages, however, do not reflect relationships only to objects, but also to concepts, ideas, and information. Anthropologist Jean-Guy Goulet illustrates how the Dene Tha, of the Athabaskan language group, form sentences to convey information that directly corresponds to their relationship with the information or event.[32] The example he uses shows that to the Dene Tha true knowledge can only be obtained by direct experience. When conveying information, how the statement is structured also conveys one's own relationship to how that information was obtained and one's relationship to the information itself. Goulet reports that a simple statement about a group of people going for water could be translated into English as: "I say they said 'we are going for water' because he [my son] said this is what is said."[33] This statement reflects the fact that the person heard from his son that the group said they were going for water. It turns out that when the son was asked whether the original speakers had actually said "We are going for water" the answer was in the negative because the son had only *heard* secondhand that they had said that. No one present, then, understood that this group going for water was actually 'knowledge' as far as they were concerned. What they had knowledge of was only what had been said to them directly. Although this certainly speaks to the experiential epistemology of the Dene Tha, it also illustrates how the language structure supports a relational view. It is the relationship one has with the information that is clarified and stipulated in the sentence structure.

Similarly, according to Stephanie Inglis, Mi'kmaq nouns and verbs, also from the Algonquin language family group, have endings that "tie into the cognitive categorization

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[32] Jean-Guy Goulet, "Ways of Knowing: Towards a Narrative Ethnography of Experiences among the Dene Tha," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 50(1994): 117.
[33] Ibid.: 118.

system of "connectedness," and "wholeness," vs. "disconnection" or "lack of oneness."[34] Things and events are understood according to how connected they are to the greater whole. A mountain, for instance, is intrinsically connected to the greater whole whereas a rock, although still connected, is less so because it has broken off from the whole. The rock exists independently while still being connected to some extent. In the same way a hand can be separated from the body and the body can still live, while a body could not survive if its heart were removed. Those things that can exist separately, but are still somewhat connected, have different word endings than those that are connected to and are an intrinsic part of a larger whole.

These examples of typical Indigenous language structure all show an understanding that objects and concepts, and therefore reality itself, exist only in relationship to everything else and because of the diversity and dynamic nature of the relationships, are in a constant process of flux and change. Whitehead makes a substantially similar point when he states, "Thus nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process" (SMW 72). In this sense, each subjective world is dependent on the relationships one holds. Each actual entity, as a subject of experience, is thereby constituted by its relationships. Shawn Wilson argues that because of the relational way of understanding reality, the Indigenous ontology is that of multiple realities, as opposed to a single distinct reality that exists independently in time and space.[35] Each person's reality becomes their own particular relationship to everything in their world. This statement, although apparently existentialist, corresponds very closely to what Whitehead means by the concept of 'actual world.' John Cobb Jr. describes 'actual world' as "the world as actually given for any actual occasion."[36] An entity's

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[34] Stephanie Inglis, "400 Years of Linguistic Contact between the Mi'kmaq and the English and the Interchange of Two World Views," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 24, no. 2 (2004): 394.
[35] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 73.
[36] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 22.

actual world is everything that is available for inclusion by that entity, or in fact *is* included as efficient causal efficacy in the initial conformal phase of its coming-to-be.[37] It is that network of relations by virtue of which it is constituted. The initial phase of coming-to-be, in Whitehead's thought, consists of conforming to the objective past actual world of that particular subject. It is composed of, and includes, all past actual entities in its actual world. But the actual world available to any particular actual entity is different: "Each actual occasion defines its own actual world from which it originates. No two occasions can have identical actual worlds" (PR 210).[38] In this sense there are, as Wilson says, multiple subjective realities, each one different because what is causally effective for one occasion is not identical to that which is causally effective for any other. Each occasion's relationship with all past occasions is particular to it, based on what is causally effective for its own process of becoming. Cobb uses the example that light leaving the sun does not become part of the actual world for occasions on Earth until it reaches them.[39] Therefore there are things in an actual occasion's past that are not yet part of their actual world. In the same way, the sound of a hammer hitting a nail will become part of the actual world of occasions relative to how close they are to the source. What is relevant and causally effective to any particular occasion is dependent on its own perspective, or relationship with everything else.

By extension, in an Indigenous relational ontology things can only be described, or even exist, by the relationships they have, not by simple description of time and space. Because these relationships exist in a state of flux and change, Indigenous language structures have a greater focus on the process of change and relationship. In addition to

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[37] For more detailed discussion on the phases of "concrescence" see Section 41.
[38] Each actual occasion's perspective, which determines what constitutes its actual world, is dependent on the subjective aim, the initial phase of which is provided by God. For further discussion on the initial phase of the subjective aim and how that determines perspective refer to Section 4.7.
[39] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 22.

paralleling a process-based understanding of how things are all internally related and the dynamic process of change that accompanies these changing relationships, this ontology also reflects a rejection, as does process thought, of what Whitehead calls 'simple location.' Simple location refers to the substantist, materialistic view that objects exist in a definite time and space independently of relationships to anything else. Whitehead describes the concept of simple location thus:

> …material can be said to have just these relations of positions [spatiotemporal regions] to other entities without requiring for its explanation any reference to other regions constituted by analogous relations of position to the same entities. In fact, as soon as you have settled, however you do settle, what you mean by a definite place in space-time, you can adequately state the relation of a particular material body to space-time by saying that it is just there, in that place; and, so far as simple location is concerned, there is nothing more to be said on the subject. (SMW 49)

Rather than only relying on definite spatiotemporal co-ordinates in the Newtonian sense to describe when and where something is, process thought understands physical and temporal positioning as being in relation to all other regions in the entity's actual world. To describe these relationships, then, is to describe where and when something *is*. In another sense, however, it is also to describe *what* something is since the 'where' and 'when' partially constitute the 'what.' If an actual occasion is largely constituted by its prehension (or inclusion) of, and therefore its relationship with, its own actual world, and that actual world is different for each occasion depending on its own perspective, then a rejection of 'simple location' also rejects the notion that an entity is the same no matter its location. Having a different spatiotemporal location necessarily changes an occasion's actual world, thereby changing its ontological constitution. One of the false presuppositions that modern science continues to hold on to in spite of their own evidence to the contrary, as far as Whitehead is concerned, is that "a pellet of matter remains in all respects self-identical whatever its changes in environment" (MT139).

Rather than a chair being exactly the same chair no matter its spatiotemporal positioning, process thought suggests that ontologically it actually is a different chair. The actual world from which it constitutes itself, is different in different locations and times. Referring to objects by the processes or actions that one does with them, such as in the case of the pen or chair, illustrates a fundamental understanding that things do not exist outside of their relationships. What set of relationships an entity has defines what an entity is, as well as where it is in time and space. This is true not only on the micro level but also for macro level objects. Simple location suggests that a chair is *exactly* the same chair no matter where or when it is. Moving its simple location only involves changing the chair's space/time co-ordinates. Process thought, as a relational metaphysic, suggests that because the chair's relationship with its environment changes with time and location, *it* changes with time and location. This perspective is also reflected in the Cree use of descriptive verbs to describe objects by their use. From the perspective described by Wilson, to the Cree something that at one time is a chair, as something to sit on, may be a log for the fire at another time and place. In English, one is using a log as a chair whereas in Cree at one point it *is* a 'chair' and at another it *is* a log.

### *5.2.2 Sacred Objects, Ceremonies, and Rituals*

In a lived radical relationality, the ontological perspective I have been describing is reflected in virtually all cultural practices. An example of a ritual that supports an awareness of such relatedness is the Sacred Pipe Ceremony. The pipe, according to Jordan Paper, is a particularly common sacred object in a multitude of Native cultures and areas throughout North America.[40] Not only are there rituals particularly centred on the lifting of the pipe, it is also an important aspect of almost all important ceremonies of

[40] Jordan Paper, "Cosmological Implications of Pan-Indian Sacred Pipe Ritual," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 7, no. 2 (1987): 298.

Native cultures where it can be found. Black Elk's *The Sacred Pipe,* which is his account of the 'seven rites of the Oglala Sioux' as recorded by Joseph Epes Brown, details the seven major ceremonies as given to the Lakota by White Buffalo Woman, which features the sacred pipe as a central part of the rituals. The sacred pipe is what connects and renews the relationships in the ceremony, not only between participants but also between the participants, the natural world (creation), and the Divine (*Wakan-Tanka* in the case of the Lakota). In his later book *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian,* Brown reports that at the end of sacred pipe ceremonies in Lakota culture the participants all exclaim "We are all related." This acknowledgement is not just of the kinship relations among the participants but "the mysterious relatedness of all that is."[41] Once again illustrating how external social practices reflect the internal conceptual understanding, Paper says that the communal smoking of the sacred pipe also illustrates the "cosmos of social relationships."[42] As the pipe is passed in a circle among the participants it "creates social communion and joins all in a sacred circle."[43] Although the ritual itself varies somewhat throughout the diverse North American cultures that use the Sacred Pipe, one of the most common features that Jordon says is universal to these ceremonies is how, after lighting the pipe, it is offered to the spirits of the four directions as well as the earth and sky.[44] It is the smoke that connects to, and carries the prayers to, the 'Great Mystery.' Radiating from the person holding the pipe, representing the centre of the actual universe at that point in time and space, are the circles of human relationships, animal relations (or those who walk, crawl, fly, or swim), and the powerful spirits (the four directions/winds, the

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[41] Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, 40.
[42] Paper, "Cosmological Implications of Pan-Indian Sacred Pipe Ritual," 301.
[43] Jordan Paper, *Offering Smoke: The Sacred Pipe and Native American Religion* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1988), 36.
[44] Ibid.

sky and the earth/sea), all of which together form 'All My Relations.'[45] The pipe, then, conceptually and ontologically unifies the multiplicities of 'all my relations' both external (physical) and internal (spiritual). The individual components of the ritual, and even the individual grains of tobacco, not only represent but really *are* some specific form of creation.[46] According to Brown, the ceremony ontologically unifies, through the fire in the pipe, the apparent multiplicity and separateness of the phenomenal world,[47] paralleling the Whiteheadian dictum that "the many become one and are increased by one" (PR 32), which Whitehead understands as the creative principle that underlies all reality.[48]

This relational multiplicity within the unity of the totality of reality is advocated by E. Richard Atleo—hereditary chief of the *Nuu-chah-nulth* on Vancouver Island—in what he calls the Indigenous science of '*Tsawalk*,' or 'oneness.' The underlying world view for the theory of *Tsawalk*, which is representative of the ontology of the *Nuu-chah-nuth*, is the assumption of the all-inclusiveness of existence and experience in a universe that *is* simply a network of relationships.[49] For Atleo, to "create, maintain, and uphold relationships" through ritual and ceremony as well as in everyday life, is the primary purpose of life for Indigenous people. Even everyday social relationships, such as marriage, become expressions of the general characteristic of creation that is "designed so that each being is fulfilled through relationship with another."[50] A scientific theory based on this assumption of universal relationality, in Atleo's view, might better

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[45] Paper, "Cosmological Implications of Pan-Indian Sacred Pipe Ritual," 301.
[46] Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, 40.
[47] Ibid.
[48] For Whitehead, the 'many' entities which constitute the world, become one in each final satisfaction of being, which then increases the world by one as each becomes part of the data for the next becoming entities. This illustrates the ultimate process of creative advance he calls Creativity (PR 20).
[49] Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 118.
[50] Ibid., 49.

accommodate some of the findings of both modern natural sciences, as well as human experience in general. He says that "Whereas the methodologies of physical sciences demand the isolation of one or two variables so that cause and effect can be measured, the theory of Tsawalk assumes that any variable must be affected by a multitude of additional variables that can be found in a variety of contexts across different dimensions of experience."[51]

This multi-variable concept can be understood from a process perspective in Whitehead's notion of 'society.'[52] Although on one level the Principle of Relativity supplies us with the resources to understand the relatedness and interconnectedness of all things through mutual immanence, Whitehead's 'society' reflects the type of social order and web of relationships that characterizes the Indigenous ontology as illustrated by *Tsawalk*. A society, in process philosophy, is a line of inheritance, usually serial, of defining characteristics that results in that society achieving social order and temporal endurance. When an 'event' incorporates the relevant past and thereby genetically inherits particular features that then get passed on to subsequent events in a serial fashion, temporal endurance and spatial extension in a particular form is achieved, which results in an actualized enduring object (AI 34). Characteristics of a society in a Whiteheadian sense are, (a) inheritance of defining characteristic(s) from other members of the society, usually in a serially ordered fashion, (b) inclusion (usually) of societies and non-social nexūs that may or may not be subordinate, (c) existence within a wider background of social order that consists of societies with more general characteristics. What should be made clear is that a Whiteheadian 'society' is different than a set or class of entities with the same characteristics. The set of all things red, for instance, does not make all red things a society. Something that is red does not necessarily inherit redness from all other

[51] Ibid., 118.
[52] For a more comprehensive description of 'society' see Chapter Four section 4.1.5

members of the group of 'all red things' in a serially ordered fashion. Its redness could be merely the result of the ingression of the eternal object 'red.' Therefore all things red is a set or class, rather than a description of social order. Whitehead says that a society "is more than a set of entities to which the same class-name applies; that is to say, it involves more than a merely mathematical conception of 'order'" (PR 89).

Societies come in many permutations, from the simplest form involving one member at a time to its widest form of what Whitehead calls the 'cosmic epoch.'[53] While Whitehead normally used the term 'society' to refer to the various organisms, objects, or other ontologically related and socially ordered groupings of events, John Cobb Jr. points out that he also used it when speaking of what we would normally think of as human societies.[54] Social communities, such as towns and neighbourhoods, which also have common defining characteristics derived from the other members, could also be thought of as societies in this sense.[55] But humans, like all other entities, are members of a vast number of societies, some of which are subordinate to others and some which are not. As Whitehead says, "there is no society in isolation" (PR 90). All societies, other than the largest most complex society of our current cosmic epoch, are part of a network of societies. Every society, then, must be considered in the context of a background of other societies in which they exist. "Each society must be considered with its background of a wider environment of actual entities, which also contribute their objectifications to which the members of the society must conform" (PR 90). Each member of a society is also a

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[53] "that widest society of actual entities whose immediate relevance to ourselves is traceable. This epoch is characterized by electronic and protonic actual entities, and by yet more ultimate actual entities which can be dimly discerned in the quanta of energy" (PR 91). In other words—the universe as we know it.

[54] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 29.

[55] Ibid., Also see: John W. Lango, *Whitehead's Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 19. Lango arguably understands Whitehead's discussion on 'societies' involving human communities as largely analogical and metaphorical. Regardless, it is clear that Whitehead uses human societies and communities to illustrate the complex web of social relations by which human beings inherit various defining traits (PR 89, 90).

member of other societies from which they inherit defining characteristics. The various societies within which entities exist are a complex, interpenetrating network that contribute inherited characteristics in proportion to their importance (PR 90). Whitehead states that:

> The environment, together with the society in question, must form a larger society in respect to some more general character than those defining the society from which we started. Thus we arrive at the principle that every society requires a social background, of which it is itself a part. In reference to any given society the world of actual entities is to be conceived as forming a background in layers of social order, the defining characteristics becoming wider and more general as we widen the background. (PR90)

The widest background of social order is that of our entire 'cosmic epoch.' Within that is the entire world of actual entities; our galaxy, our planet, animals, humans, etc. As the layers get narrower so does the society itself. So in one sense they are discrete layers, but the interpenetration of the various societies of which any one actual entity could be a part must always be kept in mind. This social background, in proportion to its importance, must "contribute those general characters which the more special character of the society presupposes for its membership" (PR 90). So any particular human community presupposes the wider society of human beings of which they are part.

Whitehead's notion of 'society' helps us to understand the Indigenous worldview in a number of ways, one of the most basic being Atleo's description of *Tsawalk*. As in *Tsawalk*, Whitehead rejects the idea that something can be studied in isolation from everything else. When he states that there is no society in isolation and that each society must be considered with its wider background of societies within societies, he is referring to the same type of relational web that creates the variables Atleo seems to be referring to. In the Indigenous, relational world view of the *Nuu-chaa-nuth*, as reflected in *Tsawalk*, there is the underlying assumption that *no* variable can be studied or understood

in isolation, but must be recognized as being included in the network of relationships and relationships between variables that make up reality, including all human experience. This worldview recognizes the complexity of the web of relationships and how every individual relationship or combination of relationships exists within a background of even more complex relational variables. These variables could be considered the intersection of these diverse relationships, each of which contributes a defining characteristic to the identity of that which is coming-to-be. Each variable represents a possible subordinate society as well as wider, more general societies that define the entity within the relational web. Although certainly not expressed as systematically as Whitehead's process philosophy, *Tsawalk* is a lived experience of the world, reflected not only in the Indigenous ontology but also, as Atleo points out, in the social life, rituals, and self-identity of the *Nuu-chaa-nuth*. To Atleo, these variables represent the wealth of relationships that each being has with other beings and creation at large. Nothing exists in isolation from these relationships, nor can anything be studied or understood by only taking a couple of them into account, as he accuses Western science of wanting to do. Whitehead would agree and says that if we trace interrelations within a selected group and ignore the wider background set of activities, we will fail to fully understand the 'retained activities' of the selected group (MT 141). By ignoring the diverse relations in the wider group we fail to take account of any changes and activities that affect the smaller group, and we instead assume a "comparatively unchanging systematic environment" (MT 141). This can be most clearly seen in regard to Indigenous Knowledge, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, which, from an Indigenous perspective, cannot be understood or studied in isolation from the land and people involved and their relationships with each other.

Because of the inherent ontological relationality in Whitehead's notion of society there is an ontological level to the social order in any particular instance of society that

must not be ignored, and constitutes Whitehead's most common usage of the term. It is not *merely* a description of order and relatedness on the macroscopic human social level, but also an internal ontological order. Members of a society, whether at the micro level of actual occasions or the macro level of human beings, serially take account of their whole past actual world in every new moment and prioritize its relevance in a very real way. Similarly, Atleo is not just talking about the fact that humans live within a complex social structure of interconnecting relationships creating a wide diversity of variables when studying behaviour or beliefs. As stated earlier, to Atleo this relational web is the general characteristic of all creation. From both a Whiteheadian perspective and that of *Tsawalk* the social relational identity of Indigenous peoples, which exhibits a complex network of social relationships from a human sociological perspective, is also a complex network of ontologically accounting for one's whole world, which includes the genetic inheritance of societal connections**.** In Whiteheadian terms, on an ontological level, reality *is* a dynamic set of relational events that must take account of, or include, each other on a continuous basis and that enjoys its own temporal endurance and spatial extension based on the inclusion of the historical route of relevant past events. In an Indigenous relational ontology this understanding is reflected in all aspects of life and social interaction between humans, the natural world, and the divine.

Another example of how Whitehead's notion of 'society' can help us understand the Indigenous worldview is to apply the concept to sacred objects such as the 'sacred medicine bundles' from Native North American traditions like the Lakota and Blackfoot. It not only helps to clarify how 'symbolic' and 'sacred' objects may be understood, but can also facilitate a better understanding of what, in the Indigenous context, it means for something to be 'alive' and have 'personhood.' From a Euro-American etic perspective the objects of a bundle 'symbolize,' or refer to something 'other' in a referential way, but are not necessarily connected in an ontological manner. However, the bundle means

something quite different from a Native perspective, which may be easier to understand if it is thought of in terms of a Whiteheadian society. John Cobb Jr. states that:

> Not only can language symbolically refer beyond language, but also nonlinguistic entities such as actual occasions and societies also function as symbols. Further, while they function in the experience of perceivers as symbols, they have their own actuality independently of this function, and they function causally as well as symbolically.[56]

The following is, of course, not necessarily *the* Native perspective, but is a non-Native translation using foreign concepts and categories that may help to elucidate the importance of sacred objects and their place within Native culture and ontology.

According to Joseph Epes Brown, in Western culture symbols are thought of as "formal elements that stand for something else," whereas Native North Americans believe that the form "*is* an actual materialization of the powers, beings, or ideologies represented."[57] Many Native American languages reflect this particular understanding of symbols in that words are not considered as simply arbitrary referents to other units of meaning, but are experienced as immediate units of power in themselves.[58] Therefore, according to Brown, "To name a being or any element of creation is actually to make manifest the power or quality, soul or spirit, of that which is named."[59] This comparison is similar to the difference Paul Tillich suggests between 'signs' and 'symbols' in which signs merely refer to something else whereas symbols participate in the power of that which is being referred to.[60] The most common example is that of a flag that represents a country, but also elicits a host of emotions associated with that country, such as patriotism. Brown's suggestion, however, goes beyond 'participating in the power' by

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[56] Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book*, 55.
[57] Brown, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*, 62.
[58] Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, 67.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Paul Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," in *Philosophy of Religion: Toward a Global Perspective*, ed. Gary E. Kessler (Boston: Wadsworth, 1999).

actually manifesting the power being represented. Even the idea of being 'represented' means something different in a Native sense according to Vine Deloria Jr. It is not merely a 'symbolic gesture,' but rather that in these objects "their power and knowledge, are actually present in the creation of something new."[61] Similarly, Bastien says that for Indigenous peoples' symbols are not an abstraction or representation of reality. Rather, they are "a medium for communicating with the cosmic forces of the universe…"[62]

It seems clear from these few descriptions that what Euro-American society understands as 'symbolic' is not necessarily how these objects are used and understood in a traditional Indigenous context. An object that is thought of as a 'symbol,' whether physical or conceptual, may not inhabit the same region of space as that which it is referring to, but is ontologically connected through internal social relations. Thinking of such objects as members of a 'society' in the Whiteheadian sense, rather than as members of a mere 'class' or 'set,' may give us the tools to appreciate the Indigenous understanding.[63] These 'symbols,' from this perspective, do not just participate in the power of that which is symbolized, in an Indigenous relational universe they are directly interconnected and share defining characteristics genetically inherited from each other. Although Whitehead may not have meant that each member of a society materializes the power and knowledge of the society as a whole, his notion of society may help to illustrate how it could be understood to do so.

In Maria Nieves Zedeño's description and explanation of a sacred bundle in her 2008 article "Bundled Worlds: The Roles and Interactions of Complex Objects from the North American Plains" we begin to see how their role in Native society may be better understood in the context of Whitehead's concept of 'society,' rather than as a mere

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[61] Deloria Jr, *Spirit and Reason*, 132.
[62] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 80.
[63] For more detail on 'society' in this sense see Section 4.5.

'symbolic' object. She says that a bundle is "a complex object with a singular life history." They are "multifarious but strictly ordered sets of objects [that] embody the corpus of ecological and cosmological knowledge needed to survive in the human and supernatural world."[64] Physically, bundles are composed of "two or more items intentionally held together by wrapping so that they may influence one another and act in concert as needed in ritual activities."[65] The bundles found among the tribes of the North American Plains, such as the Lakota and Blackfoot, are usually "skin or cloth-wrapped, and variously contain animal skins and parts, rocks, plants, paints, pipes, and various other items that embody the physical landscape."[66] The items within the bundle are heterarchically linked in that they "can influence one another in a number of different ways depending on specific historical and social circumstances."[67] The social organization between the objects can be thought of as being diversely interconnected with patterns of internal relationship that coexist, but also diverge into wider patterns of social order. Zedeño further illustrates what I suggest are parallels with a Whiteheadian 'society' when she says: "While an object has its own properties and realms of interaction, when two or more objects are combined, their interactive capabilities integrate to become a new object—the bundle—that is more than the sum of its parts."[68]

So, using Whiteheadian terminology, each item in a sacred bundle is understood as a corpuscular society in its own right.[69] It is a grouping of internally related entities with personal social order, which gives it temporal endurance and spatial extension as an enduring object. But if thought of in the context of 'society' rather than 'class,' as it

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[64] María Zedeño, "Bundled Worlds: The Roles and Interactions of Complex Objects from the North American Plains," *Journal of Archaeological Method & Theory* 15, no. 4 (2008): 362,64.
[65] Ibid.: 363.
[66] Ibid.: 364.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.: 362.
[69] For details on "corpuscular society" see Chapter Four section 4.5.

would more typically be understood, each is also a member of the larger social order from which it originated. If the bundle contains a small rock that rock is also a member of the wider society of 'rock,' from which it genetically inherits defining characteristics, which also contains members that are not present, such as a mountain. The same applies if the bundle was to contain a bear claw that is also a member of the society 'Bear,' not only the actual bear from which it came but also 'Bear' in general. By having such objects in the bundle, then, these wider societies are present in a very real way, not just 'symbolically' in the Western sense. Kenneth Lokensgard says that Blackfeet use the term *aitapissko* to describe their medicine bundles, which means that something lives within them. Medicine bundles then, are "actually microcosmic aggregations of the beings who comprise *Niitsisskowa,* the Blackfoot landscape. These beings are made present in the bundles by their respective bodies (skin, plants, rocks, etc.)"[70] The most common name for the Blackfoot Beaver Bundle is *Ksisskstakiyomopistaan,* which literally means 'Beaver-bundled-up.' The bundle is not just named for the beaver but *is* Beaver 'bundled-up.'[71] What is being identified here is the bundles ontological connection to the society of Beaver. Using Whiteheadian concepts, the contents of the bundle include the society of 'Beaver,' which consists of the particular set of relationships that genetically inherits and manifests in a serial fashion defining characteristics associated with the society of 'beaver' in a more general sense. The relationships and alliances that the bundle carrier and the wider community have with these wider societies are 'represented' and 'present' in the bundle and therefore participate directly in any ceremonial use.

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[70] Kenneth Hayes Lokensgard, *Blackfoot Religion and the Consequences of Cultural Commoditization*, ed. Graham Harvey, Afeosemime Adogame, and Ines Talamantez, Vitality of Indigenous Religions (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), 77.
[71] Ibid., 97.

So, in an interpretation of the Native understanding using Whiteheadian terms, the bundle itself is a structured society with each item a subordinate society to the whole. Each subordinate society retains its own general characteristic and its own relationship within its wider society, and would do so even if separated from the rest. However, when placed together in the society of the bundle, something different and greater is created. Once placed together as a bundle for whatever reason, a new society is manifest, which from that point on has a serially ordered history of inheritance. Each member of the bundle 'society' inherits its ongoing defining characteristic from the other members of the society. In the same way that a human body becomes greater than the sum of its organs, cells, and molecules to the point of achieving life and personhood, the bundle takes on a greater role, power, and meaning with the objects placed together. The bundle becomes a wider society of numerous subordinate societies in which each presupposes the defining characteristic while retaining its own diverse interconnectedness with its own societies in a heterarchical manner. The bundle society, then, not only represents, but *is* in a very real ontological way the totality of relationships and alliances the bundle carrier and community has with creation. From a Euro-American non-relational perspective the bundle gets its symbolic meaning, sacredness, and hence power, from its ritual use within the culture and loses it once it is no longer used in that way. Once removed from ritual practice the bundles immediately become merely a collection of inert individual objects. This attitude has, in the past, resulted in the commodification of ritual objects, such as the bundles, as described by Lokensgard.[72] Once separated from ritual use, in this perspective, it no longer has value except as an object of study as a primitive

[72] It should be noted that there are certainly ritual objects in Euro-American society which are not understood in this way. For instance, in some forms of Christianity 'sacramentals' are objects which retain their sacredness after being consecrated, or blessed, even when not in ceremonial use, such as 'Holy Water.' This possibility, from Lokensgard's perspective, did not appear to have transferred to objects considered sacred by Natives.

ancient artefact. From an Indigenous relational perspective, however, once formed, a bundle *is* that which it 'represents' and henceforth takes on a 'life' and 'personhood' of its own. The Blackfoot Beaver Bundle *is* Beaver-bundled-up whether in a ritual context or not, and whether still in the possession or not of the appropriate bundle carrier. The rituals and ceremonies renew and maintain the relationship with the bundle as a source of knowledge and spiritual guidance, but it has taken on its own 'life' and personhood. Therefore, the bundle is deserving of respect and reverence at all times and places, even when appropriated and removed from the Native context, such as being placed in museums.

## 5.3 Comparing Life and Personhood

### *5.3.1 Understanding Life*

There is a fundamental defining characteristic of medicine bundles and their contents, and by extension the whole Indigenous understanding of a 'living' natural world, that is more difficult to accommodate in Whiteheadian thought. Native North Americans who are custodians of medicine bundles understand them to be alive and have personhood in their own right. The individual objects—which from a Euro-American view are inanimate and therefore inert—have life through the non-human or spiritual beings they 'represent.' The medicine bundle itself, as a collection of objects placed in relation within a sacred bundle, takes on its own life and personhood. Personhood is attributed to bundles, and their 'inanimate' contents, because they are understood as participating in the world socially and with intent.[73] Kenneth Lockensgard states that "Medicine bundles embody and make present to humans many of the "other-than-human" beings who can relate socially with humans and offer their beneficence."[74] That

[73] Lokensgard, *Blackfoot Religion and the Consequences of Cultural Commoditization*, 75.
[74] Ibid., 14.

other-than-human beings, including inanimate objects, could be considered 'persons' who are 'alive,' is indicative of how Indigenous people understand all nature as alive and available for reciprocal social relationship.

Whitehead also rejected the notion of nature as inert and lifeless. He refused to separate physical existence from 'mental' existence and stated that "neither physical nature nor life can be understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of 'really real' things whose interconnections and individual characters constitute the universe" (MT15). To Whitehead every actual occasion is dipolar in that it has both physical and mental constituents in the process of its actualization. One pole cannot be separated, or even understood except in an abstract way, in isolation from the other, although one may be more dominant than the other thereby achieving more or less 'life.' In *Process and Reality* Whitehead states that there is no absolute gap between 'living' and 'non-living' societies, and that "a society is only to be termed 'living' in a derivative sense" in that it must include 'entirely living' actual occasions that exhibit conceptual novelty (PR 102). It should be reiterated here, though, that 'life' does not equate to 'consciousness.' Consciousness and self-awareness are only attributes of high level 'living persons' such as humans and possibly other higher life forms. Whitehead states, "The root fact is that 'endurance' is a device whereby an occasion is peculiarly bound by a single line of physical ancestry, while 'life' means novelty introduced in accordance with the Category of Conceptual Reversion" (PR 104).[75] Simple difference between the past and present, when not accompanied by the introduction of conceptual novelty, can be better understood as merely 'change.' According to Birch and Cobb, "Change in general in the physical world is described as entropy."[76]

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[75] Conceptual Reversion, as discussed in more detail in Section 4.6.1, is the valuation of previously prehended subjective eternal objects which are possibly then 'reverted' to different eternal objects, thus introducing creative conceptual novelty.

[76] Birch and Cobb Jr., *Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community*, 184,85.

Whitehead says that something is 'alive' when "in some measure its reactions are inexplicable by *any* tradition [efficient cause] of pure physical inheritance" (PR 104). Therefore, to be alive means to be able to introduce something that is not simply a result of conforming to the past actual world. This is 'creative activity' and is a central characteristic of experience. The process of concrescence, or coming-to-be, is itself a creative activity so creativity can be attributed to all actual occasions to some degree. It is also that which determines the amount of life a particular actual occasion or society enjoys. To be 'more' alive is have an increased quantity of, and more complex, alternative choices that produce increased novelty. To be 'less' alive is to have fewer choices, even to the point of utter negligibility. On one end of the spectrum are human beings who have a high capability for choice, complexity, and 'conceptual experience' (MT 166), and on the other end are what are considered 'inorganic' entities, such as the components of a rock, which have no choice but to simply, and overwhelmingly, pass on physical and conceptual data as it has been inherited from the entity's past actual world. Inorganic structured societies, such as rocks, are 'mere aggregates' and do not in themselves experience or have 'life' as far as we can discern. For inorganic aggregates the possibility for creative 'mental' activity is negligible, if it exists at all.[77] In fact, as a mere aggregate the inorganic nexus itself has no central controlling occasion that would allow it to respond to its environment in a unified way, as opposed to simply the individual experience of its subordinate societal members.[78] Whitehead says that "In the case of inorganic nature any sporadic flashes [of conceptual mentality] are inoperative so far as our powers of discernment are concerned" (MT 168). This does not mean,

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[77] Invariably, as in MT 167-8, Whitehead qualifies the possibility of conceptual novelty in 'aggregates,' like rocks, and 'democracies' like plants, with phrases such as "as far as our powers of discernment are concerned." He appears to hesitate in categorically stating that plants and inorganic aggregates do not have conceptual novelty or a dominant occasion which facilitates a unity of response, just that they appear not to have as far as we can discern so there is no reason for us to assume they do.

[78] For a more comprehensive discussion on life and person see Section 4.6.1 and 4.6.2.

however, that inorganic nature is inert; just that any unified response is difficult to discern because of its negligibility, so creative activity appears to be limited to those entities that make up the aggregate, not the aggregate itself.

By classifying 'life' as having characteristics that are in their most basic form attributed to some degree to all actual occasions, Whitehead's metaphysic appears to support the position that 'life' exists in all of nature. For the most part, however, he is simply rejecting the idea that nature, as in the actual entities that make up the world as we know it, is inert and that there is separation between the 'mental' and 'physical' aspects.[79] He proposes that the actual occasions that constitute 'reality' all experience in some fashion. In fact, they *are* instances of experience. But although there are no sharp dividing lines, there is a gradation in intensity of life from the responsive experience of microscopic events to the complex mental life of human beings. Inorganic aggregates may be composed of actual entities and subordinate societies that experience to some degree, but the aggregate itself lacks the organizing characteristic that would classify it as a living society. By analogy, a herd of cows may be composed of multiple living animals but the herd itself is not a 'living' entity, simply an aggregate of cows. There is no organizing principle within the herd as a whole that exhibits 'life' as we would discern it. But even in this analogy we begin to see the grey areas that Whitehead speaks of. We often speak about a herd of animals, flock of birds, or schools of fish, acting 'as if' it were a living thing.[80] The same applies even more so to insects like ants and bees, which appear to operate with the hive mind of a single living organism. The difference between a living organism and inorganic nature is only a matter of degree to Whitehead, but he also stated that "it is a difference of degree which makes all the difference—in effect, it is

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[79] Note that 'physical' in this sense is not material physicality but the 'physical pole,' which is constituted by the initial phase of conformity to the antecedent actual world.

[80] One just has to observe a mumuration of starlings in coordinated flight to believe that an aggregate can have a unified response to its environment.

a difference of quality" (PR 179). In any case, the point is that because reality is constituted by 'occasions of experience,' no aspect of nature can be thought of as inert, even though there may be a gradations of 'life' from negligible to intense.

Whitehead categorizes occurrences in nature into six rough divisions. The first, and most complex, is humans; the second is all animal life other than human; the third is all vegetable life; the fourth is single living cells; the fifth is large scale inanimate objects; and the sixth is microscopic "happenings on an infinitesimal scale, disclosed by the minute analysis of modern physics" (MT157) . These are 'rough' divisions because as pointed out, he did not ascribe any ontological difference, and therefore no clear cut divisions, between them. Microscopic events, such as molecules, atoms, and subatomic events, exhibit a fair amount of activity and seem to take account of, and respond to, their environment. Whitehead states that they have "lost all trace of the passivity of inorganic nature on a larger scale" (MT 157). At this level there is a certain amount of novel 'mental' activity, mostly in response to the immediate environment, in addition to genetic continuity of physical data. Inorganic nature, on the other hand, is simply the "passive acceptance of necessities derived from spatial relations" (MT 157). What is missing from this mental activity is the conceptual reversion that would instigate the novelty that is necessary for 'life.' Single cell organisms, on the other hand, have an 'organized republic of molecules' consisting of both inorganic societies and 'entirely living' nexus. Vegetable life has an organized republic of living cells, which makes it a living society, but one that nevertheless lacks the central direction of animal life (MT 157). As compound individuals, as Hartshorne and Griffin call them, animals have such central organization and a certain level of conceptual experience. Humans, and possibly some other higher grade animals, have the central organization and direction of animal life but also exhibit the complexity that allows for conscious awareness that denotes 'personality.'

Therefore, with this definition of 'life,' an object, such as a medicine bundle, would not be capable of independent life, even though it may be understood as forming a Whiteheadian 'society' in the same manner as human communities are understood to be societies. Nor would the individual objects, or subordinate societies, of the bundle have life. None of the structured societies involved would exhibit the conceptual novelty, nor have the entirely living nexūs required for it to be discernible as being alive. Although Whitehead certainly considers a rock a society, and one that is composed of actual occasions which 'experience' in a certain fundamental sense of the word, he did not believe that inorganic aggregates such as rocks have the ability to make alternative choices which would result in the novelty that characterizes life as he understands it; at least not in a way which we are equipped to discern.[81] Even the items that may be in a medicine bundle—such as feathers, fur, teeth, plants, or claws—which were once a part of a living society no longer count as living. Because they no longer exist in the special environment of the living society from which they come, the nexūs[82] which once provided the novelty required for life no longer exist in a dominant fashion. The societies that were once dominated by entirely living nexūs are now dominated by the subordinate societies that endure as physical 'objects.' The cellular membranes may still exist, exhibiting temporal endurance and spatial extension, but conceptual novelty is no longer dominant. The once living society now exists as a mere aggregate in the same way as do inorganic societies like rocks. The objects themselves would be considered merely members of a 'class' rather than members of a larger society.

Neither the individual objects, nor the bundle as a whole, then, are living societies in the Whiteheadian sense. Therefore, although these societies may have 'personal order' (PR 34) they also cannot be considered to be 'living persons' in either a Whiteheadian or

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[81] Once again qualifying this statement in the same way that Whitehead himself tended to.
[82] Groups of internally related actual occasions.

Euro-American sense. Although life is a requirement for personhood as far as Whitehead is concerned, not everything that is alive has enough life to have a living personality (PR 107). Although as Whitehead says, we could imagine that even the lowest forms of 'life,' such as single cell organisms, could be understood as having a rudimentary form of personhood, self-consciousness is the direct awareness of oneself as a person (PR 107).

To Whitehead, therefore, life and personhood can be thought of as a gradation of creative activity: "Thus life is a passage from physical order to mental originality and from pure mental originality to canalized mental originality" (PR 107-08). Although a typical modern perspective would draw more distinct lines between forms of life, and experience would be considered a characteristic of living entities only, it is common to think of single cell organisms as the most rudimentary form of life and humans the most complex. Vegetation is also normally understood, however arguably, as a collection of living cells which may in complex ways work together for the good of the entire plant, but would exhibit no unified 'mental' activity or awareness. In our society personhood, although extremely controversial in some ethical matters and difficult to define, would normally be reserved to those entities with complex mental activity that entails continuous self-consciousness, or potential self-consciousness, and exhibits traits like self-awareness, freedom of will and choice, ability to formulate plans and act on them, desires, and other such complex mental ability. In general, then, although arrived at in a different way Whitehead's conception of which entities could be considered to have life and personhood corresponds fairly closely with those entities contemporary Western society thinks of as having biological life and consciousness. A more theological interpretation, however, especially Christian, may stress the inclusion of 'soul,' with its

inherent reference to the divine, for any adequate definition of 'personhood.'[83] In any case, neither a standard Western nor Whiteheadian perspective would typically attribute both life *and* self-aware personhood, as they understood these concepts, to lower animal life, plants, and inorganic objects.[84] Therefore, neither would these natural entities be considered candidates for personal social interactions as we would normally understand them. Although from a typical Euro-American perspective it is certainly the case that a human could physically study these nonindividualized societies, thereby participating in a type of external (sense perception) subject-object relationship to gain knowledge about the entities themselves and their immediate environment, the personal, reciprocal social relationship of the type engaged in between humans would not be considered possible.

It is important to reiterate at this point that the purpose of this comparative exercise is not to attempt an explanation of all individual Native interpretations of their worldview. As stipulated at the beginning of this chapter, it is enough for my purposes to see whether a Whiteheadian process perspective gives us the tools to better understand the fundamental Indigenous experience. But it is also important that the concepts being compared have sufficient similarities to be considered viable comparisons. The English words 'Life' and 'Person' as defined by Whitehead or typically understood by Western Euro-American society do not appear to accurately depict the concepts as they are traditionally understood by Indigenous peoples, especially when referring to ritual objects such as medicine bundles, or the natural objects from which they are formed. As discussed in a preceding chapter words such as 'life' and 'person' are examples of terms introduced by the dominant colonizing culture that translate foreign Indigenous

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[83] Whitehead explicitly denies the doctrine of an 'enduring soul' as being the essence of life (PR 104), but that in itself does not necessarily exclude an inherent connection to the divine. Because the primordial nature is the source of all order and originality, God is essential to life.

[84] Although they are all experiencing subjects (or subjects of experience), and most would have some semblance of life, they do not have the dominant occasions required for 'personhood' *and* conscious self-awareness.

understandings into their own perspective. Once imposed, the Indigenous experience is then defined and understood through the conceptual lens of the Euro-American society. Even when the terms are used in the Indigenous context, they are understood in the Euro-American manner, causing great confusion and misinterpretation. This, I believe, is one of the reasons why Bastien found it necessary to conduct her research in her native language in order to convey the concepts accurately. She then subsequently translates these concepts into English, but not without some difficulty and loss of meaning. From a Whiteheadian perspective, there is error introduced in the way the English terms 'life' and 'person' symbolize the meaning of the concept understood from an Indigenous perspective.[85] In her article ""Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment and Relational Epistemology" anthropologist Nurit Bird-David argues this point:

> Modern positivistic ideas about the meaning of "nature," "life," and "personhood" misdirected these previous attempts to understand the local concepts. Classical theoreticians (it is argued) attributed their own modernist ideas of self to "primitive peoples" while asserting that the "primitive peoples" read their idea of self into others![86]

This resulted in pre-judging the attributing of 'personhood' and 'life' to natural objects by understanding it as 'animism,' and rejecting such as childish understanding by primitive peoples who could not tell the difference between animate and inanimate objects, as posited by E.B. Tylor; or simply, as suggested by Stewart Guthrie, as the mistaken attribution of life to the non-living.[87] Bird-David argues that the classic concept of 'animism,' as coined by Tylor in the nineteenth century, needs revisiting to stress its epistemological aspects rather than viewing it 'merely' as an ontological worldview. According to Bird-David these two, the epistemological and ontological, cannot be

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[85] The same words are being used but are 'symbolically referencing' different realities or realms of meaning.
[86] Bird-David, ""Animism" Revisted: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," S68.
[87] Ibid.: S69-70.

separated in the context of Indigenous hunter-gatherer societies. The question then, for the purposes of this exercise, is whether a Whiteheadian perspective can interpret the Indigenous experience as it is self-understood, not necessarily how it is translated into English and Western categories and thus conceptualized by the dominant society.

What do Indigenous people mean when, using a Euro-American language, they say that 'nature is alive,' or that a medicine bundle is a 'person' which interacts and actively participates in ceremony and ritual? What does it mean to be a 'rock person,' or one of the 'winged people,' or 'four-legged people?' How does one go into reciprocal social relationship with, or create alliances with, or gain knowledge from, entities which the dominant society considers inorganic and lifeless, or at most, unconscious brute animals? These are just a few of the questions that have been addressed from an anthropological perspective by scholars such Nurit Bird-David, Tim Ingold, and A. Irving Hallowell, but may be clarified further if viewed from a Whiteheadian perspective.

### *5.3.2 Understanding Personhood*

As a non-Indigenous person I am not in the position to interpret all the nuances and layers of meaning within Native words and concepts. Based on the writings of Native scholars I can, however, identify a few key characteristics to which they appear to be referring that may be elucidated when viewed from a process perspective. For instance, when the English word 'life' is used in a traditional North American Indigenous context the key, and perhaps necessary, characteristic appears to be divine immanence or 'spirit.'[88] By virtue of this spiritual immanence, it is also possible to go into internal, in addition to external, relationship with non-human entities and gain knowledge beyond that which is immediately available from normal, external, spatiotemporal, sense perception. In fact, in a relational metaphysic the internal, ontological relationship always

[88] To use another common translation of an Indigenous concept.

exists, but it is possible to become more cognitively, and actively, aware of the relationship. These active relationships also appear to have intent or 'aim' and therefore require reciprocity in a similar fashion to external, human, social relationships. By virtue of this intentional, reciprocal relationship, the concept which describes these entities has been translated as 'people' with 'personhood.' Although the difference might be subtle, it is important. From a Euro-American view entities can enter into reciprocal social relationships *if* they are alive, have self-consciousness and intention, and are therefore 'persons.' It appears to me, and this is reinforced by various Indigenous scholars, from an Indigenous view, an entity is a 'person' *because* it is capable of going into intentional reciprocal relationship, which could also be described as actively participating in the relationship that already exists, and *because* divine spirit is immanent. Nurit Bird-David states that from this perspective Indigenous people:

> ...do not first personify other entities and then socialize with them but personify them as, when, and because we socialize with them. Recognizing a "conversation" with a counter-being—which amounts to accepting it into fellowship rather than recognizing a common essence—makes that being a self in relation with ourselves.[89]

Before we can understand Indigenous epistemology and how it is interconnected with ontology, it is important to come to an understanding of what it means to be capable of going into social relationship, and therefore be 'animated' in an Indigenous sense. Cajete says the term animism, as it is used in Euro-American society, is an "anthropologically defined, superficially understood, and ethnocentrically biased term used to categorize the Indigenous way of knowing the world."[90] From Cajete's Indigenous perspective, however, 'animism' simply means that everything in nature has something to teach humans. Because of their inclusive and 'spiritual' definition of what it

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[89] Bird-David, ""Animism" Revisted: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," S78.
[90] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 21.

means to be 'alive,' everything in nature is viewed as having its "own unique intelligence and creative process."[91] This not only includes the obvious animate entities, but also rocks, mountains, rivers, and places.[92]

As mentioned earlier, Nurit Bird-David also wants to re-think the classic definition of 'animism' as originally defined by E.B. Tylor in his 1871 influential work *Primitive Culture*[93] Bird-David does not view animism, as does Tylor, as merely a childish religious ontology that erroneously attributes life, divinity, and 'soul' to inanimate natural objects such as trees, mountains, and celestial bodies. Rather, she posits these beliefs, traits, and their associated practices as a plurality of relational epistemologies; a plurality because rather than being a single shared epistemology, they are expressed in a diverse and complex multitude of ways around the world with perhaps the only common link being their relational foundation.[94] Bird-David uses the Nayaka hunter-gatherer society of southern India to illustrate her position but refers to Irwin Hallowell's work with the Ojibwa of northern Manitoba as the starting point in her reassessment. She states that Hallowell's contribution is "to free the study of animistic beliefs and practices first from modernist person-concepts and second from the presumption that these notions and practices are erroneous."[95] Hallowell noted that for the Ojibwa the concept of 'person' was an overarching category with human person and non-human persons as subcategories. This, of course, allows for a definition of what is meant by 'personhood' that differs from a typical modernist Cartesian approach. To Bird-David this means to think of a person as a 'dividual' rather than an 'individual.' Deriving the concept from the work of Marilyn Strathern, the 'dividual' is a person constitutive of

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Bird-David, ""Animism" Revisted: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," S67.
[94] Ibid.: S68.
[95] Ibid.: S71.

relationships, rather than an individual as a single separate entity, irrespective of any relations.[96] She states:

> When I individuate a human being I am conscious of her "in herself" (as a single separate entity), when I dividuate her I am conscious of how she relates to me. This is not to say that I am conscious of the relationship with her "in itself," as a thing. Rather, I am conscious of the *relatedness* with my interlocutor *as I engage with her,* attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens simultaneously and mutually to me, to her, to *us.*[97]

To Bird-David then, Indigenous people such as the Nayaka and the Ojibwa, and by extension many other Indigenous people throughout the world, live in a social environment that 'dividuates' the other, whether they are human or not. Persons are those who are shared and related with in a reciprocal manner, with these relationships often being thought of in kinship terms. Kinship in this sense is not just a product of blood or biological lineage but something established by recurring social relationships that are made and remade.[98] Persons are *made* in the process of relating, whether between humans or with the natural environment, the maintenance and renewal of which is crucial to self-identity. Indigenous people do not, as Durkheim has suggested, regard entities as persons and only subsequently as relatives, but *"As and when* and *because* they engage in and maintain relationships with other beings they constitute them as kinds of persons: they make them "relatives" by sharing with them and thus make them persons."[99] It is the process of being in relation which identifies them as persons and kin. In contrast to a modernist epistemology which consists of totalizing schemes of separated essences that thinks of knowledge as "having, acquiring, applying, and improving representations of

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[96] Ibid.: S72.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.: S73.
[99] Ibid.

things in the world," in a relational animist epistemology the objective is "understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer."[100] This epistemological understanding of coming-to-know through the generation and/or renewal of relationships will be further explored in the following chapter.

Although Bird-David's position certainly appears consistent with, and goes a long way towards supporting, a Native understanding of 'person' and social relationships with the natural world, it does not seem to fully take into account the *internal* relatedness that is prevalent in both a Native and Whiteheadian metaphysic. The relational epistemology that Bird-David refers to appears to describe the process of going into relation and the knowledge gained by doing so, along with the acknowledgement of personhood that goes along with such social relations, but shies away from any mention of the 'spiritual' nature or divine foundation to universal relationality which appears so important to most, if not all, Indigenous cultures. She stops at the kind of external spatiotemporal relations that, although certainly important in understanding Indigenous epistemology, only relates to the process of knowing associated with attention and perception of the dynamic interrelated processes of the natural environment, inter-human interactions, and only those internal relations directly derived from such. From both a Native and Whiteheadian perspective external perception and the relatedness derived from such spatiotemporal perceptions are secondary forms of relating to the world, the primary form being the internal, ontological relatedness constituted by the mutual immanence of all actual entities, including God, which constitute the 'world.'[101] Although Bird-David's thesis still holds, I believe, in order to grasp the depth and richness of both the ontology and

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[100] Ibid.: S77.

[101] Internal perceptions, or 'perceptions in the mode of causal efficacy' as being a primary mode of perception in process thought is discussed in more detail in the following chapter in the form of naturalism David Ray Griffin has termed 'Naturalism$_{ppp}$.'

epistemology of Indigenous peoples, as well as whether Whiteheadian metaphysics can help us understand it better, a more serious accounting of this aspect of the Native experience is required.

### 5.4 Divine Immanence

As far as Native scholars such as Bastien are concerned, spiritual energies are "the ultimate substance of the universe from which all life forms originate."[102] To the Blackfoot, these energies ultimately derive from *Ihtsipaitapityo'pa,* or the 'Source of All Life.' In many Native North American cultures this term is translated and spoken of in English as 'Creator' and thought of theistically, but it would be a mistake to assume that what is meant is the classical theism of Christianity or Greek philosophy.[103] *Ihtsipaitapityo'pa* is "the great mystery that is in everything in the universe. *Ihtsipaitapityo'pa* lives in every form of creation, as all life forms contribute and participate in life."[104] According to Lokensgard, traditional Blackfoot believe that the beings that make up the natural world, both inorganic and organic, are capable of acting intentionally toward others as persons because they receive their life and volition from *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* . The divine force is associated most directly with the Sun as the greatest manifestation of *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*'s energy, and as the most powerful and obvious source of life-giving rays which pervade the entire world.[105] It is because of this pervasive connection that "nearly everything, human and otherwise, is considered animate and, potentially, a person."[106] In Blackfoot, these living beings, which ultimately derive their life from *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* by way of the Sun whether directly or indirectly,

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[102] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 3.
[103] Perhaps a more Vedantic metaphysical understanding is in order, but a detailed comparison is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[104] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 77.
[105] Lokensgard, *Blackfoot Religion and the Consequences of Cultural Commoditization*, 16-17,78.
[106] Ibid., 17. In this particular Indigenous view not *everything* is considered alive—some rocks are just plain inanimate rocks, for instance.

are collectively known as *matapiiksi,* with *matapi* (singular) being the general term for a living being, in whatever form.[107] *Matapi* is, however, a much more nuanced term than can be simply translated as 'living being,' and one that as yet, according to Blackfoot Native Allan Pard as quoted by Lokensgard, has not been debated and discussed adequately within the Blackfoot community to determine an exact translation.[108] The concept is just taken for granted within the Blackfoot culture. Any discussion of 'living being' and 'person' in the Blackfoot sense, therefore, can only be discussed in English in general ways that fail to fully capture all the nuances. However, what can likely be more accurately said is that, in Lokensgard's words: "Persons, in the Blackfoot sense, are living beings, who are interrelated by virtue of the animacy they receive from Sun and who recognize and act upon their interdependence," and "All "persons," whether they are Blackfoot or not, are those who act reciprocally, generously, and with a mind toward the community."[109]

The Lakota also understand 'life' as spiritual force permeating every entity in the natural world, thereby making them sacred in their own right, deserving of respect and reverence, and potentially capable of going into intentional social relationship. In 1911 Dakota Charles Alexander Eastman stated:

> We believe that the spirit pervades all creation and that every creature possesses a soul in some degree, although not necessarily a soul conscious of itself. The tree, the waterfall, the grizzly bear, each is an embodied Force, and as such an object of reverence.[110]

For Deloria Jr., by viewing all creation as living in some sense, with all entities interconnected with one another, the Indigenous perspective that understands all creation

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[107] Ibid., 77.
[108] Ibid., 78.
[109] Ibid., 78,79.
[110] Charles Alexander Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), 4.

as 'related' is not only a practical methodological tool but also has underlying ontological presuppositions about the nature of reality itself. Deloria explains this aspect of Indigenous ontology by describing a spiritual universe that is more fundamental than the physicality of the natural world. He unequivocally rejects the Newtonian 'billiard ball' substantive way of viewing the universe and equates his use of the term 'spiritual' to a view that he feels is more conceptually Platonic, fundamentally consisting of conceptual ideas, 'mind,' or energy.[111] To American Indians, states Deloria, the substance of the world is relationships.[112] Like many process philosophers, and Whitehead himself, he argues that a relational metaphysic is better able to accommodate both a post-modern scientific understanding as well as a wider diversity of human experiences. He says that many of the out-of-the-ordinary events attributed to ancient medicine men are considered fantasy because they are evaluated from a narrow materialistic framework.[113] Deloria argues that rather than this non-substantist, relational mind/energy/quantum view being the culmination of philosophical and scientific inquiry, as it is in Euro-American historical thought, it was the beginning from which the Native daily life stemmed. He says:

> We have already seen that tribal peoples observed the world around them and quickly concluded that it represented an energetic mind undergirding the physical world, its motions, and provided energy and life in everything that existed. This belief, as we have seen, is the starting point, not the conclusion.[114]

He uses the Muskogee and the Omaha beliefs as examples of how Natives understand the universe as manifesting mind and energy in all things, both animate and what is normally considered inanimate. The Omaha example, according to Deloria,

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[111] Vine Deloria Jr, *The World We Used to Live In* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 194.
[112] Ibid., 201.
[113] Ibid., 194.
[114] Ibid., 197.

summarizes the beliefs and practices of many tribes. He quotes a portion of a poem by Fletcher and La Flesche from their 1911 work *The Omaha Tribe* to illustrate his point but the entire poem suits even better:

> An invisible and continuous life
> permeates all things, seen and unseen.
> This life manifests itself in two ways:
> first, by causing to move;
> all motion, all actions of mind or body,
> are because of this invisible life;
> second, by causing permanency
> of structure and form,
> as in the rock, the physical features
> of the landscape, mountains, plains, streams,
> rivers, lakes, the animals and man.
> This invisible life
> is similar to the will power
> of which man is conscious
> within himself,
> a power by which things are brought to pass.
> Through this mysterious life and power
> all things are related to one another
> and to man;
> the seen to the unseen,
> the dead to the living,
> a fragment of anything to its entirety.
> This invisible life and power
> is called wakon'da.
> (adapted from Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:114)[115]

[115] Robin Ridington, "Voice, Representation, and Dialogue: The Poetics of Native American Spiritual Traditions," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lee Irwin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 110.

This poem, in itself, could be the subject of extensive process analysis because of its conceptual parallels between *wakon'da* and the primordial nature of God.[116]

So too, according to Deloria Jr., did the Lakota conceive all things as fundamentally mind, intelligence, reason, and spirit; and as inherently interconnected through the immanence of this life energy. In fact, according to Lakota artist Arthur Amiotte, the Lakota believe that all things in the world have four souls, or at least spiritual aspects which have been translated into the Christian concept of the 'soul.' [117] These are the *Niya* (life breath), *Nagi* (ghost form), *Sicun* (spirit-power), and *Nagila* (embodied cosmic energy). For the Lakota these four spiritual aspects account for the unity and relationality of all creation. As part of 'spirit' they are derived from *Wakan Tanka* (The Great Mysterious) but have different functions. The *Niya* is what infuses all creation with life and is that which can access or travel in the spiritual realm to interact and gain knowledge. The *Nagi* could be considered the mirror image form of the physical reality that retains the personality and characteristics of the physical counterpart. The *Sicun* is each entity's spiritual power which may include knowledge or special healing powers.[118] It is what gives ritual objects, such as those in a medicine bundle, their power because this power is retained even when separated from the whole. An eagle feather, although losing its *Niya* would retain its *Sicun*, and therefore still retain its original power. It is the *Nagila* which is the common cosmic spiritual essence (*Taku Skan Skan*) which underlies all creation. As Brown says "It is the original source of all things, the divine essence of life...it is the sacred thread that binds all things and makes things relatives to each other."[119]

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[116] Refer to Section 4.7 to appreciate the parallels between the content of this poem and the subjective and objective eternal objects that are envisaged and ordered in the primordial nature of God and presented for ingress to all entities in the world.
[117] Arthur Amiotte, "Our Other Selves : The Lakota Dream Experience," *Parabola* 7, no. 2 (1982): 27.
[118] Brown, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*, 89.
[119] Ibid., 90.

Although these are just a few examples from a small selection of Native cultures, for many Native and non-Native scholars equating capacity for 'life' and intentional relationships with divine immanence is a general ontological understanding expressed by most if not all Indigenous cultures. It is not just, therefore, that the divine infuses all creation with 'life' by virtue of its spiritual immanence; it is the foundation of the relatedness of all creation and that which makes it possible to have social relations. Emily Cousins states it thus:

> Since the land is comprised of living beings, most Native American cultures have a tradition of entering into relationships with the land. Relating to non-human beings is possible because, unlike Western categories which draw dichotomies between human and animal, animate and inanimate, natural and supernatural, most Native American traditions stress interrelatedness among all things. This relatedness is most often rooted in the perception of a shared spiritual reality that transcends physical differences. Some believe this common essence is the life breath, others refer to it as the presence of the Great Spirit.[120]

All created forms, then, have a spiritual essence and are thus alive, and rather than being physically and spiritually isolated are interconnected on an ontological level.[121] Trudy Griffin-Pierce, for instance, states that for traditional Native Americans "All things, including those considered by some to be inanimate, possess a spiritual life force or sacred power."[122] Lakota Elder Black Elk also described all things as having divine immanence, although in a way that made it clear—there may be possible Christian influence here—that the Great Spirit, while fundamental to all things, also transcends the world.

> We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and

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[120] Cousins, "Mountains Made Alive: Native American Relationships with Sacred Land," 500.
[121] Ibid.: 503.
[122] Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Native Americans: Enduring Cultures and Traditions* (New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers, 1999), 93.

> the winged people; and even more important, we should understand that He is also above all things and people. (Black Elk)[123]

According to these sources then, the Indigenous understanding of life, personhood, and relatedness is derived from the *internal* relations facilitated by spiritual, or divine, immanence. It is by virtue of this spiritual immanence that something is considered 'alive' in the Indigenous sense. It is also by virtue of this universal immanence that all things are interconnected, and because interconnected, able to enter into relationship with others in an intentional way, thereby being considered persons. It is by going into relation that personhood is created and defined *as* they are being related to.

I am proposing, therefore, that the diverse and complex Indigenous concepts, which have been translated into English as 'life,' and 'person,' have parallels in a Whiteheadian metaphysical understanding. In Whitehead's process philosophy the primordial nature of God, as the envisioning and ordering of all forms of potentiality, is the foundation and source of all life. If, as described earlier, having more or less life means having more or less potential for creative novelty and all actual occasions have some such potential even though the mental pole may be negligibly active, then we have a process basis for understanding the Indigenous concept of all nature as 'alive' by virtue of divine immanence. Life, in this definition, becomes a concept based on a non-physical 'spiritual' immanence shared by all actual entities, rather than a particular physical biology.

In their book *The Liberation of Life*, Charles Birch and John Cobb Jr. discuss an ecological model of the world based on Whiteheadian metaphysics which grounds an analogous position. As is the case in Indigenous ontology, their model assumes no dualism between the inorganic and organic, or the living and non-living.[124] Rather, they

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[123] Joseph Epes Brown, ed. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma,1989), xx.
[124] Birch and Cobb Jr., *Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community*, 89.

argue for an event-based ecological model of internal (ontological) relations in which entities "are what they are because of the environment in which they are found."[125] No event, in this model, occurs and *then* relates to the world, but is itself a synthesis of other events.[126] As Shawn Wilson has suggested, things *are* the relations they hold. But Birch and Cobb also differentiate between 'life' and 'Life.' To them, Life is more than just the multiplicity of biologically alive entities but is the source of novelty and creation. In a similar way to how the Blackfoot identify *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* as the Source of Life, so too do Birch and Cobb theologically identify Life with God. They do so because based on their Whiteheadian interpretation of God, the divine is not only immanently present in the world as the life-giving principle but is itself alive.[127] Rather than simply a general description of the collective of all biologically alive entities, Life is the central religious symbol that they describe as "a cosmic power working everywhere that conditions will permit for the enrichment of experience."[128] Life, then, is that universal force which permeates all existence and gives life and animation. For Birch and Cobb, "it is the immanence of the divine Life within us that makes us alive."[129]Although everything in an event based relational universe is interconnected in an ontological way, by Life conditioning actuality in order to permit 'enrichment of experience' and 'creative novelty,' it is also that which allows for the potential for intentional reciprocal relationship rather than merely mutual immanence. It is only by having the potential for such creative novelty that an entity could 'choose' to go into social relationship with intention.[130]

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[125] Ibid., 94.
[126] Ibid., 95.
[127] Ibid., 195.
[128] Ibid., 178.
[129] Ibid., 199.
[130] Once again, perhaps this can be understood as becoming actively aware of, and participating in, the existing ontological relations.

Birch and Cobb acknowledge that the power of Life is "not limited to clearly living things," and reiterate the Whiteheadian idea that there is no definite division between living and non-living things and that 'Life' can be thought of as "exerting its gentle pressure everywhere."[131] This does not, however, necessarily mean that they would extend this potential for creative novelty to the same natural entities as do Indigenous peoples. It is unlikely that Birch and Cobb would consider that a mountain, rock, or tree would inherently have the capacity for Life necessary for intentional social relationship; the greater the capacity for richness of experience, the greater the capacity for Life and therefore the greater the intrinsic value. As a mere aggregate with limited, if any, capacity for enriched novel experience, a rock would have no capacity for Life, although the individual molecules that it is composed of might. The same would be said about the inanimate objects in a medicine bundle. Nor would they consider the medicine bundle to have its own capacity for Life outside of that which its individual members might have. This does not necessarily, however, detract from the helpfulness of the concept of Life, as described by Birch and Cobb based on Whiteheadian philosophy, to illuminate how Indigenous peoples understand divine immanence as the source and ground of Life. It appears that Indigenous people would extend a greater capacity for Life to more diverse entities than would Birch and Cobb, or even Whitehead, but the concept of divine immanence as 'Life' which permeates all of creation thereby establishing the capacity for life, intentional relationships, and personhood, remains—there is merely interpretive disagreement as to which entities have the requisite capability. Although both might agree with the idea that there is a gradation of Life and animacy among living and non-living entities, at what point along that gradation any particular entity exists is an interpretive point which would ideally become a subsequent topic of inter-cultural or

[131] Birch and Cobb Jr., *Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community*, 189.

inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, although typical Whiteheadian interpretations have difficulty attributing full life and personhood to some entities in the world that Indigenous peoples might, Whiteheadian concepts once again give us the tools to understand how and why this might be understood as possible.

Until now the discussion of life and divine immanence has been largely centered on the primordial nature of God, which is God's 'conceptual nature' constituted by prehensions of eternal objects. It is the primordial nature that makes possible conceptual reversion, as well as the 'initial aim' supplied by God, which is necessary for enriched experience and creative novelty as described by Birch and Cobb. Whitehead states:

> It must also be noted that the pure mental originality works by the canalization of relevance arising from the primordial nature of God. Thus an originality in the temporal world is conditioned, though not determined, by an initial subjective aim supplied by the ground of all order and of all originality (PR108).

This "ground of all order and of all originality" is the eternal and infinite primordial nature of God as it is presented to each occasion of experience. The comments from Native studies scholars have shown us that in their view divine immanence is also fundamental for the interrelatedness of creation. Although we have seen from both Indigenous scholars and Whitehead's philosophy that in an event based relational ontology 'things' *are* constituted by their relations, Indigenous scholars also speak of relatedness by virtue of divine immanence. In the Lakota, for instance, the *Niya* is that spiritual aspect which infuses all creation with Life, but it is *Nagila* that is the common cosmic spiritual essence that underlies all creation and is the basis for spiritual interconnectedness. As spirit, both would be considered merely different aspects of *Wakan-Tanka,* present in all that is. As I have quoted earlier, scholars such as Cousins, Bastien, Brown, Fletcher and La Flesche, Atleo, and Deloria Jr. have illustrated that this is not an uncommon understanding in Indigenous societies. As stated above, from a

Whiteheadian perspective, the conceptual pole, or primordial nature, of the dipolar God as the ground of all order and originality, conditions and partially formally constitutes all actual entities, by virtue of the initial aim and ingression of eternal objects. When an actual occasion prehends all other actual occasions in its actual world, it is prehending both the physical and conceptual poles of those entities, thereby prehending all eternal objects which are relevant to each occasion. In this way the primordial nature of God could also be considered fundamental to the inter-relatedness of all creation. However, this interconnectedness could also be considered derivative of the physical pole, or consequent nature, of God.

It was discussed in some detail earlier that the consequent nature of God is that which is 'consequent' to God's prehension of the evolving finite world of actual entities.[132] God's physical pole is the prehension of all actual entities in the world which is then 'woven' onto God's primordial concepts and thereby "loses nothing that can be saved" (PR 346). God then passes back into the world via each actual entity's initial aim so is thereby included as "an immediate fact of relevant experience" (PR 351). This divine immanence in the initial aim of all actual occasions provides a 'lure' towards increased novelty, complexity, intensity of experience, and hence value.[133] God, then, is prehended by each actual entity as the past actual world is felt, and in the initial phase of the subjective aim.

This interpretation of how Whitehead describes the relationship between God and the world provides a number of conceptual tools to help understand the 'spiritual' aspect of Indigenous ontology. First, it is consistent with an Indigenous understanding of 'life' being derived from divine immanence. It is by virtue of the capacity for 'Life' as defined

[132] For a more detailed discussion on the consequent nature of God and the issues concerned with how it is related to the world, refer to Section 4.8.
[133] Once again, refer to Section 4.8 for a more detailed discussion.

by Birch and Cobb and derived from God that allows for the 'experience' enjoyed by all actual occasions, and the increased novel creativity exhibited by those with greater capacity for choice and complexity. Nature being alive, in this sense and in the sense described in both *Process and Reality* and *Modes of Thought*, is fully derivative of God as God is universally prehended by actual occasions in the evolving temporal world. Secondly, universal interconnectedness and relativity can not only be understood as mutual immanence between actual occasions, but also through the initial aim supplied by God. All actual entities, in their objective immortality, achieve everlasting immediacy in the unity of the eternal present of God's completed actuality, which then 'passes into' the evolving world. All entities in the world, therefore, are interconnected not only by their own prehension of their own actual world, but also by virtue of their unity within God's actuality as it passes back into the world.[134] Thirdly, God's relationship with the world, as well as Whitehead's realist perspective of the past, is a basis for a process understanding of Indigenous epistemology. The entirety of the past, in the Whiteheadian view, is objectively real for each actual entity, although with diminishing intensity, yet 'present' in an everlasting and immediate way in the unity of God's experience which then passes back into the world, relevant to each new occasion. This, as discussed in the next chapter, is critical to an understanding of Indigenous epistemology.

> Many Elders will say that we are related to everything on earth. Some people think that when we ask them to pray to the Grandmothers and Grandfathers that it is their biological ancestors we are talking about. We do acknowledge our Grandmothers and Grandfathers in our lineage. We put them in a place of respect and love. But the Grandmothers and Grandfathers are also everything here on earth. As I was growing up I was always told that all of these things that were here before me, that they are all Grandmothers and Grandfathers to me: Grandfather Sun,

[134] Although not a commonly accepted interpretation, William Christian went so far as to suggest it is only through prehension of God that the past actual world is prehended. See: William Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1959), 327ff.

> Grandmother Moon, Grandfather Stars, the thunder beings, the rock beings, the mountains. They are the old, old ones. They are in essence my Elders, my Teachers. And the Creator above all, who created all of those things to give me an essence of my spiritual life.
>
> We recognize all things in life and that all things have life, and so that is why we call them beings. We are human beings, so they are plant beings, rooted beings, universe beings, sky beings, thunder beings. We are human beings on this planet and we are the two legged, but everything out there—we acknowledge that they are part of us, part of our life, part of who we are, and we are part of them.[135]
>
> (Traditional Cree Elder Pauline Johnson—Fishwoman)

[135] Quoted in Jaki Daniels, *The Medicine Path: A Return to the Healing Ways of Our Indigenous Ancestors* (Calgary, AB: Soon to be published, 2012).

# Chapter Six: **Ontology Equals Epistemology**

> "In each relationship, in each moment in time, in each thought, in each word, and in each action is a teaching, which contributes to an intricate balance of a cosmic universe."[1] (Betty Bastien)

> "Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology."[2] (Shawn Wilson)

It was stated earlier that by viewing all creation as living in some sense, and relationally interconnected, the common native phrase 'We are all related' becomes a practical methodological tool, but the phrase also has underlying ontological presuppositions about the nature of reality itself.[3] If reality *is* constituted by relationships, which was noted earlier as being a principle fundamental to an Indigenous worldview, then epistemology is inherently connected to actively establishing, maintaining, participating in, and gaining knowledge about and through, these relationships. In a relational worldview, therefore, ontology and epistemology merge. One cannot be understood in isolation; without reference to the other. If a relational metaphysic is presupposed, it is through the relationships that one can come to know about the nature of reality. Shawn Wilson agrees and says that because an Indigenous understanding of reality is that it is constituted by relationships, and sets of relationships, "reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology."[4]

## 6.1 Process of Knowing

The dynamically changing nature of such an ontology, in which the unfolding universe is always in process *as* dynamically changing relationships, facilitates an epistemology that is a process of coming-to-know, of gaining new knowledge in ever-

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[1] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 79.
[2] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 73.
[3] Deloria Jr, *Spirit and Reason*, 34.
[4] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 73.

changing circumstances. In this view knowledge is not merely something which can be passed from one person to another as if it were a *thing* or a commodity that is consistent no matter the context or circumstance. It is something that must be re-known in a new way in each new context. Although it can certainly be 'passed on,' knowledge that is not contextualized in the new circumstances, with the current state of relationality, can only be provisional until it is re-known in each moment. Otherwise there is the danger of committing 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness,' as well as the fallacy of 'simple location.'[5] Knowledge in this substantist view could be reified as some-*thing* which in every case, context, position, and time, would be identical. In a process relational ontology, no-*thing,* including concepts, can be understood in this fashion. Rather, knowing *about* something incorporates that which was known before, combined with that-which-is-coming-to-be as it self-determines, as both known and knower are in new relation to each other and everything else. In this way it is a process renewed in each moment. To Whitehead, 'mere knowledge' is nothing more than a high abstraction (AI 4). Conscious knowledge is essentially a "conscious discrimination of objects experienced" which is always accompanied with emotion and purpose (AI 4, 175). It is a constant interplay between a subject and object; a relational interplay which is the 'stuff' that constitutes reality (AI 175). He says that the first principle of epistemology should be: "that the changeable, shifting aspects of our relations to nature are the primary topics for conscious observation" (MT 29).

Knowledge in this sense is always accompanied by, or is grounded in, experience. In fact, because reality is constituted by individual occasions of experience, in every act

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[5] I noted earlier in this thesis that the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' is when one mistakes an abstract belief, concept, or idea, for a concrete matter of fact in reality (SMW 51). Whitehead referred to this fallacy in reference to his rejection of 'simple location,' which suggests that concrete physical objects can be referred to simply in terms of spatial and temporal coordinates, without reference to their relations to other spatial/temporal extensions (SMW 72).

of experience there are objects for knowledge (PR 156). It is through 'intellectual functioning,' or reasoning, that the experience becomes knowledge. All conscious knowledge, for Whitehead, is a result of a process of interpretation of experience. For Whitehead, direct perception—or 'perception in the mode of casual efficacy'—from which primary data for knowledge is derived, is the primary mode of perception. As discussed earlier, the physical pole, which is the initial phase of each actual entity that makes up reality, is constituted by the prehension of that entity's actual world. That actual world is itself constituted by the network of relations that forms the entire objective past world relevant to the subject. Each new actual entity prehends a different actual world as relationships between entities dynamically change. But each actual world contains all that is knowable in an 'objective' sense because it is derived from the entire objective past relative to each entity. Therefore, 'objective knowledge' is derived from the prehension of past relationships in the form of actual entities that have reached satisfaction and therefore achieved 'objective immortality.' Whitehead says that in his philosophy of organism, "the knowable is the complete nature of the knower, at least such phases of it as are antecedent to that operation of knowing" (PR 58). The subject, or knower, at this initial conformal phase of concrescence is constituted by that which is objectively knowable. Once each actual world is prehended, however, the 'mental' phases of concrescence come into play, involving valuation, comparisons, propositions, and reconciliation of contrasts (apparent incompatibilities), as well as the ingression of eternal objects that introduce novel originality to the new entity, which results in some degree of self-determination.[6] It is through these latter interpretive stages of coming-to-be that data derived from the relations that constitute the antecedent actual world are interpreted and made consciously available. It is also in these latter phases that secondary

[6] See previous discussion on the phases of concrescence and conceptual reversion in Section 4.1 and Section 4.7.1 on eternal objects.

modes of perception derived from the senses provide a 'presentational immediacy' to what has been already prehended about the world.[7]

From a Whiteheadian perspective then, knowledge is primarily a coming-to-know through mental reflection of 'objects,' both physical and conceptual, that are available through prehension of the antecedent actual world, including God, through prehension of eternal objects during the comparative stages of the mental phase**,** and through the presentational immediacy provided by sense perception. Because the actual world is constituted by a network of relations which is different in each moment, the world must come to be known anew. This knowing about the nature of things, in an active sense, involves awareness, reflection, interpretation, comparison, and valuation of the relations which make up each entity's actual world, some but not all of which are brought into immediacy through the secondary mode of sense perception.

Similarly, F. David Peat says that to a Native person, knowledge:

> …cannot be accumulated like money stored in a bank, rather it is an ongoing process better represented by the activity of coming-to-knowing than by a static noun. Each person who grows up in a traditional Native American society must pass through the process of coming-to-knowing, which, in turn, gives him or her access to a certain sort of power, not necessarily power in a personal sense, but in the way a person can come in relationship with the energies and animating spirits of the universe.[8]

Peat understands indigenous methods of gaining knowledge about the natural world, or Indigenous Science as he calls it, as a dynamic and living process, which is "an aspect of the ever-changing, ever-renewing process of nature."[9] The truth of something from an

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[7] Presentational immediacy is the mode of perception by which "the contemporary world is consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations" (PR 61). It is that which provides "clear, distinct consciousness of the 'extensive' relations of the world" (PR 61) such as the 'material' objects in space and time. In other words, our senses provide the data that gives clarity and immediacy to the world around us.

[8] Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 55.

[9] Ibid., 5.

Indigenous epistemological perspective is not fixed, but rather is what Gregory Cajete calls an "ever-evolving point of balance, perpetually created and perpetually new."[10] It is an epistemological method that does not deal with things in isolation because of the inherent interconnectedness of both the knower and all that can be known. This inevitably results in personal transformation as a result of actively participating in the relationship.[11] Coming-to-know thus involves a dynamic transformation in which the content of knowledge itself changes as the relationships change, and in which personal transformation results from the ever developing relationship between the knower and known during the process of self-determination.[12] As Atleo has proposed in his theory of *Tsawalk*, things cannot be known in isolation but only when all relational variables are taken into account.[13]

Indigenous epistemology then, presupposes a relational worldview which in turn necessitates a relational epistemological method. Because 'things' are largely their relationships, coming to know them is coming to know their relationships to oneself and everything else. Knowledge that is 'passed on' must be known anew in a process of knowing. But the outlook that 'We are all related' inherent in a relational ontology also becomes a methodological tool for obtaining any *new* knowledge, not just that which was previously known. In order to consciously come-to-know something for the first time, one must look for and acquire new relationships between things, or speaking more accurately, intensify and focus on specific relations that were previously ignored. Learning about the natural world, by extension, becomes a matter of searching for, acquiring, maintaining, and renewing relationships.

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[10] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 19.
[11] Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 5,8.
[12] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 5.
[13] Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 118.

Becoming aware of the relationships implied by such an ontology/epistemology, however, is not merely a matter of focusing on the external spatiotemporal relations provided by physical senses. As previously discussed, according to Whitehead physical sense perception is a secondary mode of gathering information and knowledge. In the same way, in an Indigenous epistemology it is the cognitive awareness of internal, or ontological, relations that is the primary source of knowing.[14] This internal source of knowing is often translated into English, as 'spiritual,' 'spirit,' 'dreaming,' or the 'spirit world,' because of its interconnectedness not only with the natural world but also the divine mystery.[15] Gregory Cajete also equates 'spirit' with these ever changing internal relations, and says that at its highest levels of expression, Native science or epistemology is essentially a system of pathways for reaching this "perpetually moving truth or "spirit.""[16]

According to Cajete, Native science—a term also used by Peat, Deloria, and Atleo to describe Indigenous ways of knowing—is a metaphor that encompasses a wide range of both internal and external exploration:[17]

> Native science is a metaphor for a wide range of tribal processes of perceiving, thinking, acting, and "coming to know" that have evolved

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[14] Throughout this thesis I will refer to those ontological relationships that constitute entities, as 'internal' relations. This is, I believe, consistent with how Whitehead refers to the term. Every actual occasion can be coordinately divided into its prehensions. These prehensions are internally related to the becoming subject. Similarly, I am using 'internal' perception to describe 'perception in the mode of causal efficacy,' synonymously referred to as 'prehension.' External relations, as I use it here, are the spatiotemporal relations that are available for empirical study. In the same way 'external' perception is that derived from external senses that provide 'presentational immediacy.' This is less rigorous than a comprehensive analysis of internal and external extensive relations in Whitehead's scheme, but more in keeping with what is appropriate when discussing Indigenous perspectives.

[15] Unless otherwise indicated I will follow Cajete and Deloria Jr. and assume this particular usage of the term 'spiritual' and its derivatives—that it refers to the network of internal ontological relations between natural entities, grounded in the divine.

[16] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 19.

[17] Along the same line as the previous explanation of 'internal' and 'external,' 'internal' exploration would be the contemplation of the ontological relations that constitute reality, as well as 'mental' activity itself, while 'external' exploration would be the empirical study of the 'external' spatiotemporal relations, available to our senses.

> through human experience with the natural world. Native science is born of a lived and storied participation with the natural landscape. To gain a sense of Native science one must participate with the natural world. To understand the foundations of Native science one must become open to the roles of sensation, perception, imagination, emotion, symbols, and spirit as well as that of concept, logic, and rational empiricism.[18]

Internal perceptions, sensations, emotions, and conceptions are crucial to Indigenous ways of knowing. Although external relations to the natural world, acquired through sense perception, are certainly important as a source of knowledge about one's immediate environment, it is often taken by non-Native scholars to be the *only* source of legitimate information, which leads to much confusion and misunderstanding. From this Western, non-Native perspective which reflects the late modern materialistic/sensationist worldview, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) are derived from two sources: knowledge accumulated and transmitted through ancestral lineage in the form of teachings and narratives; and being aware of and interpreting, both consciously and unconsciously, the diversity of environmental cues through the physical senses. For instance a typical definition for TEK might be:

> …a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationships of living beings (including humans) with one another and their environment.[19]

Another is provided by David Newhouse when he says:

> For me Indigenous knowledge arises out of careful observation and careful thought carried out within a particular cognitive framework, reflective of an underlying mode of thought or cognitive orientation towards the world. It is also transmitted in a particular fashion under particular circumstances through particular people.[20]

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[18] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 269.
[19] (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000:1252) Quoted by Ibid.
[20] David Newhouse, "Indigenous Knowledge in a Multicultural World," *Native Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2004): 150.

According to Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, the most commonly used and accepted definition of TEK in Canada is that of Martha Johnson, the former executive director of the Dene Cultural Institute in the Northwest Territories:

> …a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use. The quantity and quality of traditional environmental knowledge varies among community members, depending upon gender, age, social status, intellectual ability, and profession (hunter, spiritual leader, healer, etc.). With its roots firmly in the past, traditional environmental knowledge is both cumulative and dynamic, building upon the experience of earlier generations and adapting to the new technological and socioeconomic changes of the present. [21]

Here are clear examples of the 'epistemic violence' that the dominant colonializing society has done to subaltern Indigenous ways of knowing. Regardless of how the Indigenous cultures themselves understand or describe their own epistemological method, definitions are invariably framed within the conceptual and language structures of the dominant Euro-American narrative, thereby making the Western scientific method the standard against which TEK is evaluated.[22] In the typical Western substantist view, says McGregor, TEK represents a specific body of knowledge that may be useful to the wider society as an alternative to Western science, but not consonant with it.[23] It is knowledge that is not typically available using normal Western scientific methods, but can be appropriated for use by the wider society. One of the major difference between this perspective and the Indigenous view is that this 'body of knowledge' is something that can be separated from the lived experience of the people and remain useful and relevant. But as McGregor says: "TEK is not just knowledge *about* the relationships with Creation

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[21] Quoted by Deborah McGregor, "Coming Full Circle," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3&4 (2004): 385.
[22] Ibid.: 397.
[23] Ibid.

it *is* the relationship with Creation; it is the *way* that one relates."[24] It is action-oriented in a participatory manner and cannot be separated from the people or the land from which it springs without doing violence to the knowledge, the relationships inherent to the knowledge, and the people themselves.

All of the above non-Native definitions emphasize the transmission and accumulation of knowledge through external spatiotemporal relationship with the natural world and biological ancestors, which are certainly an important part of culturally derived knowledge systems, but say nothing of the ontological relatedness recognized in a radically relational ontology/epistemology. TEK is itself a recent construct of the mainstream society, developed and grown over the last three decades, largely as an effort to recognize and extract the environmental knowledge of Native peoples.[25] However, because of its inherent emphasis on universal relationality, as known and experienced through both internal (spiritual) and external (sense perceptual) relationships with the specific environment in which they live, McGregor feels that *all* knowledge in the Indigenous context could be considered ecological.[26] In this context, therefore, TEK as a body of knowledge is essentially an empty concept that, outside the epistemological framework of the mainstream Euro-American society, has no discrete meaning. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) itself defies categorical definition because of its very nature in that different environmental locations and conditions result in different relationships, and therefore different particular strategies in acquiring and accessing information. There is no monolithic 'Indigenous Knowledge' separate from the people and the land that can be applied to all Indigenous people. Any attempt at identifying instances of Indigenous Knowledge must inherently be tied to the people involved and their own particular

[24] Ibid.: 394.
[25] Ibid.: 385,402.
[26] Ibid.: 389.

relationships with the land and wider universe. Indigenous knowledge, therefore, is unique to each given culture, and acquired by the local people through daily experience with particular land and environment.[27] Conversely, non-Native TEK methods consist of separating the people from their knowledge so it can be documented and categorized in standard Western research structures as 'data' or 'statistics,' thereby destroying the Indigenous context.[28] Categorical definitions that seek to separate and reify IK in this manner from within a non-relational ontology cannot help but do epistemic violence to Indigenous cultures.

Rather than attempting such objective definitions, the best that can be done, according to some Native scholars such as McGregor, Battiste, and Henderson, is a general description of how Indigenous Knowledge might be commonly conceived.[29] For instance, Anishinaabe environmental activist Winona LaDuke describes it in terms of culturally *and spiritually* (or internally related) based ways in which Indigenous peoples and the environment inter-relate.[30] Battiste and Henderson summarize their own conception by stating:

> Perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, the ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands…All aspects of knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned…. To the indigenous ways of knowing, the self exists within a world that is subject to flux. The purpose of these ways of knowing is to reunify the world or at least to reconcile the world to itself. Indigenous knowledge is *the way of living* within contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and

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[27] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 55.
[28] McGregor, "Coming Full Circle," 398.
[29] Ibid. 390
[30] Ibid.: 394.

> reconciling opposing forces….Developing these ways of knowing leads to freedom of consciousness and to solidarity with the natural world."[31]

Unlike non-Native descriptions of Indigenous epistemology, Native descriptions emphasize not only the lived experience of being in relation but also both the internal (ontological) and external (spatiotemporal) nature of those relationships as a complex whole. Such an attitude is also reflected in Whitehead's understanding of the inclusiveness of reality and the relationship between the experiencer and that which is experienced. Jorge Luis Nobo states that:

> As Whitehead understands it, concrete human experience, *in each of its concrete moments,* is *not* an external relation between someone experiencing and something experienced (AI, 233). It is, instead, an *integral inclusive reality* within which, as aspects of itself, there are differentiated, among others, the human organism from his or her environment, the human subjectivity from the human body, the subjective response from the object responded to, the subjectivity added from the objectively given, the self-determining from the other-determined, the private from the public, the present from the remembered past or the anticipated future, and, more generally, the experiencing from the experienced.[32]

These dichotomies are differentiated but from within an "integral inclusive reality" which would be what Whitehead terms the 'extensive continuum.' To Whitehead, the 'extensive continuum,' which makes up our physical universe, is an integrated whole of both internal and external extensive relations:

> But this scheme of *external* extensive relationships links itself with the schemes of internal division which are *internal* to the several actual entities. There is, in this way, one basic scheme of extensive connection which expresses on one uniform plan (i) the general conditions to which the bonds, uniting the atomic actualities into a nexus, conform, and (ii) the general conditions to which the bonds, uniting the infinite

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[31] Quoted by Ibid. 390 from Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*, Purich's Aboriginal Issues Series (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2000), 42.

[32] Nobo, "Whitehead and the Quantum Experience," 224.

> number of coordinate subdivisions of the satisfaction of any actual entity, conform. (PR 286)

From both an Indigenous and Whiteheadian perspective, then, knowledge is derived from not only perception of the physical world through external senses, but also 'internal perception' of the ontological relations which constitutes the knowable universe. Typically, however, when faced with situations which defy definitive explanation from within the normative Western paradigm, non-Native scholars typically resort, as one would expect, to the dominant Euro-American narrative to try to understand the Indigenous epistemological method.

One example worth discussing in detail is that of Rupert Ross, a retired Crown Attorney whose territory was the remote Native communities of Northern Ontario. Ross relates a story of how he first had personal experience with an Indigenous type intimate connection to the natural world.[33] After eleven summers of being a fishing guide in Northern Ontario while he pursued his education, Ross had become amazed at the ability of the Native guides to not only predict the type of day it would be, but also which of the various fishing spots would yield the best results. He notes that when asked how they were able to do this the answer was invariably couched in emotional terms such as, "I just had a good feeling about those spots."[34] After years of practice and familiarity with the lake and the environment, Ross increasingly became better at becoming aware of, and interpreting, the variables associated with determining such predictions, a manner of thinking which he calls 'pattern-thought' because it appears to involve conscious and unconscious recognition over time, of environmental patterns.[35] Eventually, without knowing how or why, Ross also began to experience 'hunches' and 'feelings' about where to go, without recognizing any obvious physical patterns or cues. This largely

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[33] Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006), 81ff.
[34] Ibid., 83.
[35] Ibid., 81.

involved getting a 'feel' for the day, visualizing the various fishing spots that he might visit, and then seeing how his 'feelings' of the day changed according to how he imaged being in each location. Although he finds it difficult to describe or understand, he still attributed such feelings and 'hunches' to an increase in complex sense-perceptual variables which he was unconsciously processing to make each prediction, even though he got these hunches by internally visualizing rather than being physically present at each location. Because he was not physically at these locations, he was still back at the lodge, he was not capable of perceiving the patterns and cues he associated with 'pattern-thinking' except through his imaginative imaging.

His story culminates in an event in which he guided a couple of clients to a particular spot on the exposed north side of the lake. As the day progressed he started having a 'bad feeling' about being in such a location even though, upon reflection, there was no indication of a reason for such a feeling. He could detect no changes in the sky, air, temperature, or any other environmental cue which he could associate with such a feeling. Nevertheless, he had learned to appreciate these 'hunches' so moved to a more sheltered location closer to base camp. After continuing to have bad feelings, still without obvious external reasons, and much to the chagrin of his clients, he moved even closer to camp. When a freak hail storm suddenly erupted that, if they had not been so close to a sheltered location, would have been disastrous, Ross was able to easily make it to a safe harbour.[36] To Ross, this is the closest he feels he came to the hunter-gatherer ability to be in tune with the environment. Although he is unable to identify the variables that led to his feelings and predictions, Ross, as a product of normative Western rationality, could only explain such experiences from within the Western scientific paradigm. If the external variables could not be identified, the reason *must be* that they were largely

[36] Ibid., 81ff.

unconscious, significantly complex, but still physical, sense perceptions. Although the 'feelings' were internally generated by his unconscious mind, according to Ross the variable relationships that served as data could only have been perceived from external physical senses.[37] Even after years of working within the Native lifeworlds, Ross had little choice but to interpret this 'Indigenous' experience from the perspective and epistemology of the dominant Master Narrative which gives external perceptions and relations primacy.

Even if the normative Western substantive perspective was considered sufficient to explain this particular example, using Ross' 'pattern thinking' model, the explanation becomes more problematic when faced with new or unfamiliar circumstances, rather than familiar repetition over time. A case in point is one Ellen Bielawski refers to that was set up to provide data on how the Inuit construct knowledge. Bielawski, who worked as research associate for the Arctic Institute of North America, has argued that the two forms of gaining knowledge, Western scientific and Indigenous, are in conflict with each other in a way which is detrimental to both cultures.[38] She refers to the findings of The Traditional Knowledge Working Group, which was created by the Government of the NWT in order to integrate traditional knowledge into policy, which comments on the difficulties that arise from the misunderstanding of the nature of Indigenous knowledge by Western Arctic scientists:

> The lack of common understanding about the meaning of traditional knowledge is frustrating for those who advocate or attempt in practical ways to recognize and use traditional knowledge. For some, traditional knowledge is simply information which aboriginal peoples have about the land and animals with which they have a special relationship. But

[37] Ibid., 81.
[38] Ellen Bielawski, "Inuit Knowledge and Science in the Arctic," *Northern Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (1992): 2.

> for aboriginal people, traditional knowledge is much more. One elder calls it "a common understanding of what life is about." [39]

The particular circumstances of the study were, in 1953 and 1955, when the Government of Canada resettled Inuit into an unfamiliar and uninhabited environment. Such a circumstance allowed no past knowledge of the local environment to be helpful or relevant. Although she points out that Nunavik oral histories are nearly silent on epistemological matters, she says that when they have lost context for their knowledge they do provide clues as to their epistemological methodology. In a simple yet enlightening example, she describes how when one hunter was asked how he had figured out the location and movements of caribou herds in this unfamiliar territory he looked at her oddly and said "Because we are Inuit, we can do that."[40] This example is typical of how Indigenous people themselves understand their epistemology differently than do the Western scientists. Implied in the hunter's response, and Bielawski's article, is that such knowledge involves more than "simply information which aboriginal peoples have about the land and animals with which they have a special relationship"[41] The Inuit, in this case, had no opportunity to physically investigate the land and animals sufficiently to make an assessment. From an Indigenous perspective it was the Inuit ability to become aware of the internal connection to the land and animals that allowed the hunter to intentionally gain information directly, thereby knowing the location of the Caribou.

Another example that illustrates this understanding is that of the discovery and preparation of the nerve poison *curare* by Amazonian Natives, and how they describe learning the process. When asked, the Tukano of the Colombian Amazon say that "the

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[39] Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the Northwest Territories 1991:11Quoted by Ibid.
[40] Ibid.: 4.
[41] Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the Northwest Territories 1991:11Quoted by Ibid.: 2.

creator of the universe invented curare and gave it to them."[42] Such information is normally transmitted to the Tukano by the powerful plant hallucinogen *ayahuasca.* Curare is a powerful muscle-paralyzing agent which Indigenous people of the Amazon have used for millennia. It is used on blow-gun darts both for killing tree-borne animals and causing them to relax their grip on tree branches and fall to the ground rather than remain stuck in the trees. Monkeys tend to wrap their tails around branches and die out of reach if struck with untreated arrows or darts. According to anthropologist Jeremy Narby, there are forty types of curare in the Amazon, made from seventy different plant species.[43] He says:

> To produce it, it is necessary to combine several plants and boil them for seventy-two hours, while avoiding the fragrant but mortal vapors emitted by the broth. The final product is a paste that is inactive unless injected under the skin. If swallowed, it has no effect.[44]

Narby speculates that it hardly seems probable that this is an example of trial and error, as would be the typical non-Native explanation. With the amount of time necessary to simmer the concoction while its vapours are severely poisonous it would likely take only a few deaths to halt the experimentation. Without foreknowledge that somehow the preparation would eventually pass that deadly phase and become inert until injected, it is unlikely, from Narby's point of view, that the trial would continue for seventy two hours. Narby concludes: "It is difficult to see how anyone could have stumbled on this recipe by chance experimentation…Besides, how could hunters in the tropical forest, concerned with preserving the quality of the meat, have even imagined an intravenous solution?"[45] How could they envision, and then implement in such a fashion, a solution that would kill the animal through injection, yet not poison the meat? The Indigenous explanation that

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[42] Jeremy Narby, *The Cosmic Serpent* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 40.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

this knowledge was gained from the divine through awareness of internal relations with the natural world is not ruled out in a relational ontology/epistemology. For many Indigenous people this type of information comes from the Creator, through the plants themselves, often through dreams and visions. Deloria Jr. says that the people had no reason to doubt that these types of dreams were true spiritual experiences because of how the content was always verified in daily life.[46] He states: "If a plant told them how to harvest it and prepare it for food or use as a medicine, they followed the plant's directions, and they always found the message to be true**."**[47] Cajete says that Native people traditionally believed that because of the spiritual energy inherent in all aspects of the natural world that plants have their own volition.[48] Coming to know about the plants was coming to understand their essence and was derived from intuition, feeling, and relationship. He says, therefore, that the "Native use of plants for food, medicine, clothes, shelter, art, and transportation, and as "spiritual partners," was predicated upon establishing both a personal and communal covenant with plants in general and with certain plants in particular."[49]

It is clear that although having a strong external, spatiotemporal, relationship to the natural world, especially the local land and environment, is a large part of what it means to be Indigenous to most, if not all, Indigenous peoples, the *internal* relationships and knowledge that is gained by actively participating in such relationships, which can then be applied to *external* existence, are equally, if not more, important. To some, such as Cree scholar Willie Ermine, this internal focus defines Indigenous epistemology. He says: "those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that

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[46] Deloria Jr, *The World We Used to Live In*, xxv.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 110.
[49] Ibid.

might be termed Aboriginal epistemology."[50] He goes on to state, "in their quest to find meaning in the outer space, Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. This inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being."[51] The "universe of being within each person" refers to the vast network of interconnected ontological relations which defines reality and one's place in that reality within the Indigenous worldview. But in the Indigenous view, as for Whitehead, this 'inner space' is often not considered a separate network of relationships from the external world. It is the vast relational network as a whole, both internal and external, that comprises the totality of the natural universe. For Bastien, it is experiencing the universe as an integral whole that allows for the knower to become one with the known, resulting in a perception of the 'other' as an extension of oneself.[52] It is through this perception of unity that the relationships generate the intuitive knowledge of the 'other.' For Atleo as well, it is the Science of Tswalk, or 'oneness,' that best illustrates the Indigenous metaphysical understanding of the unity of the natural world, both physical and spiritual.[53]

To summarize, then, according to these scholars, apprehension of other entities and their relationship to oneself and the world, through focusing on the 'inner space' of the universal network of internal relations is central to Indigenous epistemology. Such an epistemology is not ruled out in a Whiteheadian process perspective. Through his work on parapsychology David Ray Griffin has concluded that it is entirely possible, from within a Whiteheadian metaphysic, to become cognitively aware, whether consciously or

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[50] Willie Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," in *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 102.
[51] Ibid., 103.
[52] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 97.
[53] Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 10.

unconsciously, of the prehensions of another actual entity in this manner.[54] An entity in concrescence is constituted initially by its prehension of, and conformity to, the immediate past world, which, due to intensive relevance,[55] normally consists predominantly of its own historic route of occasions. However, because it is in fact prehending and conforming to *the entirety* of its own actual world, which includes all other entities (and the previous prehensions in their own inherited genetic lineage) there is no reason why one could not become consciously aware of what other entities are prehending. Griffin calls this 'retroprehensive inclusion' and states that there even seems to be the possibility that "one might prehend the prior experiences of others *as if they were one's own.*"[56] In other words, although he is specifically referring to the practice of 'mediumistic messages,' one person could possibly become consciously aware of what another knows and feels in both the immediate and distant past. Although the past fades in intensity, the events in the past are still objectively actual and partially constitute new entities, even though they may not exert as strong a causal efficacy as the more recent past. Past occasions, therefore, are as "fully actual as present ones, and the remote past exists as objectively as does the immediate past."[57]

What Griffin rather redundantly calls 'retroprehensive inclusion,' refers to direct, non-sensual "prehensions of occasions of experience belonging to the life of another person."[58] Due to 'intensive relevance,' remembering our own past experiences may be

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[54]Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective." David Ray Griffin, a noted and celebrated Whiteheadian philosopher and theologian, has, with some controversy, studied claims of parapsychology from a process perspective.

[55] See more detail on intensive relevance in Section 4.1.

[56] David Ray Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 155-56.

[57] Ibid., n95.

[58] Ibid. Griffin points out that because *all* prehensions are of the past, the 'retro' aspect is actually redundant. To avoid this redundancy I will interchangeably use the term 'prehensive cognition' to refer to the ability to become cognitively aware of the prehension of entities, whether one's own past, or that of other entities.

quite different from remembering, or prehending, the past of other entities, but these types of perceptions are, in Whitehead's metaphysic, not absolutely different in kind, just in intensity.[59] Nor is it important whether the other actual entity is a human or not.

In a Whiteheadian metaphysic, typically a conscious subject, such as a human person, is cognitively aware of some of what is immediately presented to it through sense perception as well as those aspects of its actual world which are intensively relevant to it and have not faded into obscurity—those things which are remembered. In other words, although there are two modes of perception—direct perception through prehension of the actual world in the mode of causal efficacy, and sense perception in the mode of presentational immediacy—it is sense perception of which we are most distinctly conscious. Whitehead says:

> Thus those elements of our experience which stand out clearly and distinctly in our consciousness are not its basic facts; they are the derivative modifications which arise in the process. For example, consciousness only dimly illuminates the prehensions in the mode of causal efficacy, because these prehensions are primitive elements in our experience. But prehensions in the mode of presentational immediacy are among those prehensions which we enjoy with the most vivid consciousness. These prehensions are late derivatives in the concrescence of an experient subject. (PR162)

Because consciousness arises in the 'higher phases of concrescence' it always involves mental functioning in the form of judgement and comparison (PR 163). Consciousness is a result of being able to compare 'what is' with 'what could be.' Therefore, although a subject may have direct perception of the past objectively immortal actual world, it is not *consciously* aware of the actual world in its entirety. It is most aware of that which is intensively relevant to the particular historic route of occasions which constitutes the concrescing subject, and most *cognitively aware* of its own

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[59] Ibid., 155.

immediate past and what it perceives through its senses. This does not mean, however, that becoming consciously aware of other aspects is not possible. Each subject is also prehending the other entities in its world in their entirety, including their own physical and conceptual prehensions (hybrid prehension). In fact, as John Cobb Jr. says, the preconscious apprehension of reality includes to some degree "the totality of actuality and ideality."

> The preconscious apprehension of reality is indefinitely complex. The analysis of it could in principle never be exhaustive, for each experience involves, in some way and to some degree, however negligible, the totality of actuality and ideality. Consciousness focuses upon a small portion of experience. This focusing grants special importance to selected elements, which can be consciously valued and become influential in *conscious* decision making.[60]

Therefore, it is conceivable within a Whiteheadian metaphysic that a subject could focus on and become cognitively aware of not only aspects of its own past, or 'historical route,' but also virtually any aspect of the world, whether in the immediate past or the distant past, even if not perceived through the senses. The present becoming of any subject also includes a vector toward the future in that it constitutes what will become the objectively immortal past to which future occasions must initially conform. Therefore it would be possible to intentionally focus on, and thereby become aware of, probable outcomes in the future. This is, in fact, one of Griffin's alternate explanations for what he terms 'apparent precognition,' because pre-cognition itself cannot be incorporated into Whitehead's metaphysic.[61] Number eleven in Griffin's thirteen alternate explanations for apparent precognition is "*Direct unconscious knowledge of objective possibilities about the future."*[62] He notes that according to Whitehead objective

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[60] Cobb Jr. and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, 34-35.
[61] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 270.
[62] Ibid.: 274.

probabilities about the future exist in the present and can be directly intuited (PR 207).[63] However, he also points out—in explanation number ten—that the idea that the same information could be intuited directly from the divine nature is also not ruled out in Whitehead's thought. All actual entities and events in the world, after all, are prehended by God and never lose their immediacy.

For Griffin, there is no reason why such prehensive cognition would not apply to any other entity, including rocks, trees, non-human animals, and God. From a panexperientialist[64] perspective Griffin says that if the molecules of a rock have experience then "it is possible that they could incorporate memories of events that occurred in their proximity."[65] It is not necessary, therefore, that prehensive cognition involves conscious knowledge of a conscious being.[66]

Griffin's work in parapsychology, and its possible accommodation by Whiteheadian metaphysics, has led him into the study of human experiences that appear to be better explained and understood by a process philosophy than by a typical Western mechanistic, substantive ontology.[67] It is certainly not that Whiteheadian process philosophy forces one to accept all the possible consequences of a process perspective as necessarily true, but rather that such experiences are at least not ruled out as being

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[63] Ibid.
[64] For further discussion on 'panexperientialism' see Chapter Four section 4.1.
[65] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 258.
[66] Although Whiteheadian process philosophy appears to allow for this seemingly extreme view as expressed by Griffin, it is certainly not accepted by all process thinkers. Donald Sherburne rejected this possibility, particularly when it concerned the possibility of providence supplied by God in the initial aim, and stated that if this where the case, and people could be cognitively aware of the totality of actuality that they would be able to know things that were beyond the scope of normal sense perception. Sherburne, "Decentering Whitehead." Cobb responds that this is exactly the case, and that this appears to be a fairly common part of human experience. People often have such experiences and consider them hunches or divine guidance. It also allows for and interprets many cases of what has been known as parapsychology. Cobb Jr., "Sherburne on Providence." This will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
[67] See his two main works on parapsychology: Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective." and Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality*.

nonsensical *a priori*. It must be kept in mind that for Whitehead any metaphysical speculation must be able to interpret every element of human experience, thus setting a rigorous standard for such speculation (PR 3). Although interpretations of that experience may be simply propositions, judgements, and instances of 'symbolic reference,' which may be erroneous, the experiences themselves can never be considered false. From this standpoint it is the experiences themselves which must be accommodated, including the ability to make interpretations of such experience, not the 'objective' truth or falsity of any one particular interpretation.

Griffin addresses a wide variety of non-ordinary phenomena, but concentrates on a few fundamental aspects of a Whiteheadian perspective to help understand and possibly explain them. He argues for a version of naturalism that rejects any form of supernaturalism, and is also based on a post-modern process metaphysical view that refutes the materialism of typical modern and late modern worldviews.[68] Griffin's fundamental position is that the type of naturalism espoused by modern and late modern worldviews, which he calls $\text{Naturalism}_{\text{sam}}$ ('sam' symbolizing sensationist-atheistic-materialistic), is not able to address hard-core common sense notions (those that are presupposed in practice and cannot be denied without contradiction)[69] that all humans share, as well as a wide range of human experiences. The modern worldview, according to Griffin, rejects any form of perception that is not based on physical sense organs, does not find any form of purpose or moral value inherent in the universe (what he means by 'theos'), and insists that there are no actual things other than material ones. For Whitehead and Griffin, this type of naturalism has created all sorts of problems for

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[68] Griffin's most detailed argument for this form of naturalism is found in: Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism; a Process Philosophy of Religion*.

[69] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 235. 'Hard-core' common sense notions would include such things as the existence of other minds, and the external in which we live. Publically negating such notions presupposes their existence, which is self-contradictory.

science because it "prevents the scientific community from providing rational explanations for a wide range of phenomena."[70]

Griffin argues instead for Naturalism$_{ppp}$ ('ppp' symbolizing prehension-panentheism-panexperientialism), which rejects supernaturalism and is better able to accommodate hard-core common sense notions and human experience. This type of naturalism includes: 'prehension', meaning that pre-reflexive, non-sensory perception is primary, with perception through sense organs secondarily providing presentational immediacy; panentheism, which is the position that 'all is in God,' yet God is in some way distinct from, or transcends the world (Whitehead's position is that God is immanent in the world as much as the world is immanent in God (PR 348)); and panexperientialism, which states that all occasions enjoy some degree of experience—in fact, in a Whiteheadian metaphysic *are constituted* by their experience. For Griffin, these fundamental Whiteheadian concepts better accommodate certain human experiences that are not explainable or accepted within modern and late modern worldviews.[71]

Central to Griffin's study on non-ordinary human experiences is the possibility of influence at a distance, both 'expressive' and 'receptive,' and apparent precognition.[72] Because each new occasion is its own process of coming-to-be, partially constituted by its prehension of the past actual world but still distinct from all other occasions, its

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[70] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism; a Process Philosophy of Religion*, 36.

[71] In this respect, Griffin describes in some detail the deficiencies of the Western mechanistic worldview and his position that Whitehead's process metaphysic better accommodates both hardcore commonsense notions and many extraordinary human experiences in his article: Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective."

[72] Expressive influence at a distance is if influence is exerted and repressive if influence is received. Ibid.: 228. From a Whiteheadian perspective, true precognition is nonsensical because although each moment is constituted by a concrete objective past and new novel choices, the future has not happened yet therefore cannot exert any causal efficacy. Linear causal efficacy from the past to the future and any degree of self-determination would be refuted if the future could be exactly determined, even by God. Besides, Griffin points out eleven alternate ways that apparent precognition could be explained and although some may appear fanciful and improbable, they are not nonsensical. Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 270.

particular temporal and spatial position is constituted by its relationship to all entities, both past and currently becoming. Therefore, in that sense, *all* influence is actually influence at a distance, although as Whitehead states, some may be more intensely relevant than others in a gradient continuum of effect. The amount of distance, whether temporal or spatial, becomes less important than it would be in a mechanistic worldview in which influence is impossible other than between contiguous events. Because each occasion of experience that is becoming is new, with its own spatiotemporal perspective, and all casual efficacy flows from the past to the present and future, all influence and perception is of objects that are not contiguous in either time or space. In contrast, one of the central tenets of a late-modern mechanistic worldview is that all causal action is by contact.[73]

Similarly, integral to the denial of the possibility of influence at a distance is the "sensationalist doctrine of perception, according to which we can perceive actualities beyond ourselves only by means of the bodily senses."[74] Sensationalist doctrines of perception must involve a chain of contiguous influences, via sense organs of some type, rather than direct perception of objects in the world. Yet, as Griffin also states, entities as simple as single cell organisms and individual atoms and molecules, somehow sense and react to their immediate environment even though they lack any type of sensual organs. We also experience many perceptions that do not entail sense organs. After all, as both Whitehead and Griffin point out, we do not perceive our sense organs, we perceive *with* our sense organs.

Pre-reflexive, non-sensory perception at a distance, which Griffin equates with Whitehead's term 'prehension,' allows for the possibility of gaining knowledge about any

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[73] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 226. It should be noted that new research into quantum entanglement appears to contradict the dominant mechanistic worldview.
[74] Ibid.: 222.

aspect of the world without spatiotemporal restriction. Therefore, it becomes easier to understand how the Inuit Native in the previous example was able to ascertain the migrating patterns of Caribou he had never seen, in areas he had never visited. By being able to focus and become cognitively aware of internal perceptions that are normally not consciously available, information that is distant in both time and space becomes accessible. A story told by Eliot Cowan in his book *Plant Spirit Medicine* describes how Indigenous specialists can become cognitively aware of the distant past, not only of themselves, but of others. Although this story is unverifiable in that Cowan describes it as merely an ethnographic account he studied as an anthropology student, it is consistent with the Indigenous understanding of the efficacy of knowledge gained from such internal reflection.[75] In the story an ethnographer had spent some time among the Aboriginal people of Australia and had heard about the skills of a particularly proficient tracker that were apparently so incredible they appeared fraudulent. Cowan relates:

> When he finally met the tracker, he challenged him to follow the trail of a long trek he [the anthropologist] had made with another aborigine years before. He was certain this was impossible and that no trail could remain after such a long time. The tracker was happy to take up the challenge, though, and the moment he was shown the starting point, he took off at a trot and ran the whole course of the journey without even pausing to examine the spoor. The anthropologist was humbled and apologetic. He asked the aborigine how he had accomplished this feat. "It was easy," the tracker replied. "I just went back to the time you made the journey and I ran alongside you."[76]

To the Indigenous specialist, in this case, accessing information from the past was no more difficult than 'remembering' what had happened a few moments ago to himself. In fact, he did not track the anthropologist at all but simply became cognitively aware of his objective past and followed alongside.

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[75] Eliot Cowan, *Plant Spirit Medicine* (Mill Spring, NC: Swan*Raven & Company, 1995), 53.
[76] Ibid.

Generally, when Griffin speaks of 'retroprehensive inclusion' of a human person's memories or identity he is referring to the possibility of prehending the 'dominant' or 'presiding' occasions that for Whitehead constitutes the psyche, soul, mind, or personal identity of the compound individual that is the complete person.[77] Prehensive cognition of the dominant occasions of such a compound individual, therefore, would be prehension of the mind and memories of the complete person, not just the individuals that make up the complex society. Conversely, prehensive cognition of non-individualized societies, as stated earlier, could bring knowledge of events that occurred to them as a society, as well as those that occurred in their proximity, but without the consciousness associated with more compound individuals. Prehending such entities, however, also includes prehending its entire actual world, including God, making the epistemological potential virtually limitless. That is not to say, however, that this knowledge is equally accessible or vivid, just that the possibility of such cognitive awareness at a distance is not ruled out in Whitehead's metaphysic.

### 6.2 Knowledge as Sacred

In an Indigenous epistemology, once relationships are actively established and maintained,[78] intuitive knowing occurs as one comes to understand one's own place in relationship to the 'other,' the divine, and the universe at large. Ermine says:

> Aboriginal people found a wholeness that permeated inwardness and that also extended into the outer space. Their fundamental insight was that all existence was connected and that the whole enmeshed the being in its inclusiveness. In the Aboriginal mind, therefore, an immanence is present that gives meaning to existence and forms the starting point for

[77] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 242. For more details on the Whiteheadian concept of 'person' and 'consciousness,' and the 'dominant occasion' that is present in an entity with consciousness see Section 4.6.2.

[78] Although the 'internal' relationships are always ontologically established, intentionally being in social relationship requires active participation. For instance, one may be biologically related to a sibling, but not have a social relationship without active participation. Actively participating in, and enhancing, relationships will be discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.

> Aboriginal epistemology. It is a mysterious force that connects the totality of existence—the forms, energies, or concepts that constitute the outer and inner worlds.[79]

As stated earlier, and verified by Ermine, this internal relational 'universe' is often translated as 'spirit' or the 'spirit world' because of the inherent element of divine immanence and relatedness. For some, like Gregory Cajete, 'spirituality' as such describes the "process of exploring and coming-to-know" the internal relations that are immanent in reality.[80] He says:

> Most tribes share basic understandings about sacred knowledge. These include the notion that a universal energy infuses everything in the cosmos and expresses itself through a multitude of manifestations. The notion also includes the recognition that all life has power that is full of wonder and spirit. This is the "Great Soul" or the "Great Mystery" or the Great Dream" that cannot be explained or understood with the intellect, but can be perceived and understood only by the spirit of each person.[81]

This experience of the divine through internal perception, or 'spiritual' connection, is felt "through a multitude of manifestations." It is the inter-relatedness of things, or mutual immanence as Whitehead says, that allows the divine to be felt through different aspects and processes of the natural world, making all knowledge as such 'sacred.' In the same way that divine immanence was considered the reason for how things are interrelated by the Lakota, by virtue of the fourth 'soul' called *Nagila*, so too is divine immanence necessary for 'knowing.' If it is the 'mystery' or 'spirit' that inter-relates reality, it is also necessary for epistemology. According to Ermine it is this force, or *Manitou* in some Algonquin languages, that allows for knowing to be possible.[82] He goes on to say that focusing on the inner 'spirit world' for knowledge and guidance is the

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[79] Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," 103.
[80] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 261.
[81] Ibid., 264.
[82] Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," 104.

"foundation of all Aboriginal epistemology."[83] In fact, it is through such relationships, considered a form of kinship, that connection to the divine itself is experienced. According to Bastien, such an ontological experience of the sacred generated by knowledge resulting from and within this complex system of kinship relations constitutes the *Siksiaitsitapi* epistemology and pedagogy.[84] This understanding illustrates the sacred nature of all knowledge, the sacred nature of all relationships, and the concept that it is through generating and renewing such relationships that the sacred is experienced; all relate to the ontological understanding of universal divine immanence.

From an Indigenous perspective, then, knowledge derived from coming-to-know the relationships inherent in reality is sacred because of divine immanence, in that by coming to know those relations one comes to be in active relation to the divine, and because the divine is the reason for such ontological interconnectedness. On the premise that something is 'sacred' if derived from, dependent on for its constitution, or in some other fashion interconnected with God, then certainly from a Whiteheadian process perspective all knowledge can be considered sacred.

The perspective that determines one's actual world is a result of the initial phase of the subjective aim, which is derived from God. The initial aim is a "direct derivate from God's primordial nature" (PR 67). The relational standpoint of an actual entity to all other actual entities is constituted by the initial aim: "Every actual entity in its relationship to other actual entities is in this sense somewhere in the continuum, and arises out of the data provided by this standpoint" (PR 67). At this initial conformal stage, what is objectively knowable is the actual world of the subject. Therefore whatever comes to be known is directly contributable to the perspective derived from God. So not

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 98.

only is what is knowable by any particular actual entity derived from God, so too is *how* one is related to all other entities.

Prehensions of the past actual world acquire subjective form, derived from the subjective aim, which determines *how* they are prehended. Also, Whitehead states that, "this subjective form is only rendered fully determinate by integration with conceptual prehension [of eternal objects] belonging to the mental pole of the *res vera* [truly existing thing- actual entity]" (PR 69). For something to become conscious knowledge requires intellectual functioning, which is a product of the conceptual pole and the integration of eternal objects that are ultimately derived from God.

Eternal objects, ultimately derived from God, are also required to gain knowledge of the common physical world we live in, through sense data, and conceptually connect contemporary things with past things:

> The bare mathematical potentialities of the extensive continuum require an additional content in order to assume the role of real objects for the subject. This content is supplied by the eternal objects termed sense data. These objects are 'given' for the experience of the subject. …
>
> These sense data are eternal objects playing a complex relational role; they connect the actual entities of the past with the actual entities of the contemporary world, and thereby effect objectifications of the contemporary things and of the past things. (PR 62)

I am suggesting that from a Whiteheadian process theology perspective it could be said that all knowing is ultimately derived from divine immanence in the world, and could therefore also be thought of as sacred. God's universal immanence is ultimately derived from the primordial nature as well as, according to some interpretations, the consequent nature.[85] As argued earlier, because of God's 'dipolar' rather than 'dual'

[85] The issues surrounding this interpretation are discussed here and in Section 4.8. In any case, this will be the interpretation I will be using in this thesis.

nature, it is impossible to speak of God as an actual entity without referring in some sense to both the primordial and consequent natures.[86] According to Whitehead's Ontological Principle, the 'reason' for anything must derived from an 'actual entity,' so whether God is conceived as strictly a unified actual entity, as does Marjorie Suchocki, or as a personally ordered society, as does Hartshorne, God's immanence in the world, as the primordial source of both subjective and objective 'eternal objects,' is the ultimate source of all knowing and therefore the foundation of epistemology. Because it is the eternal objects, envisaged and ordered in God's primordial nature, that are the forms, ideas, concepts, emotions, and all other potentials that actualize in the world, all knowledge is intimately connected to the divine. As Whitehead says, without intellectual functioning, conscious knowledge is not possible. Ingression of eternal objects, necessary for actually consciously 'knowing' anything, is derived from both God and the world in the form of 'hybrid prehensions.'[87] Physical prehension of the antecedent actual world entails both the physical *and* mental poles of the previous actual occasions that are relevant. The prehension of the data of a round, hard, brown, rock includes the concepts that give it characteristics such as roundness, hardness, and brownness. Although the eternal objects that constitute these characteristics do not come directly from God in each instance, having been prehended directly with the rock, they were ultimately derived from the primordial nature of God. Because they are derived, and therefore directly associated with God, they could be considered sacred in a theological sense. All knowledge could therefore also be considered originating through internal relatedness with the divine, whether with God directly or through the world.

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[86] See previous discussion on God in the World in Section 4.8.

[87] See previous explanation of hybrid prehensions in Section 4.6.2. Hybrid prehensions are those prehensions of an actual entity which includes both physical and conceptual prehensions.

### 6.3 Alliances and Compacts

Indigenous knowledge gained by focusing on internal relations was synthesized, as Ermine puts it, by being 'encoded' into community practices that also served to affirm the 'spiritual' aspect and therefore sacredness of these relationships.[88] The community, then, was the "repository and incubator of total tribal knowledge in the form of custom and culture."[89] In this sense everyday Native life in community becomes what Cajete calls a "primal pathway to knowledge of relationships with the natural world," which establishes and renews the relational contacts with plants, animals, and natural forces.[90] In addition to maintaining this worldview in everyday life, Indigenous rituals and ceremonial observation, often guided by a specialist particularly trained, or capable of deeper connections, were necessary for accessing extra knowledge through these internal relationships, and also affirming and maintaining them. In this way not only did the individual derive knowledge and maintain relationships through prayer and other cultural practices, so too did the community as a whole. Ermine states, "In Aboriginal epistemology, prayer extracts relevant guidance and knowledge from the inner-space consciousness. It is the optimal metaphysical idiom that is recognized in corporeal form as chants, dances, language, and meditation."[91]

According to Peat, creating, maintaining, and being responsible to the relationships that are involved in the process of knowing, happens:

> … through direct experience of songs and ceremonies, through the activities of hunting and daily life, from trees and animals, and in dreams and visions. Coming-to-knowing means entering into relationship with the spirits of knowledge, with plants and animals, with

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[88] Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," 104, 10.
[89] Ibid., 105.
[90] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 99. Once again it should be noted that these relationships are thought to already exist ontologically, but establishing an active participation is required.
[91] Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," 109.

> beings that animate dreams and visions, and with the spirit of the people.[92]

Because knowing is an ongoing process, the relationships entered into must, like any relationships, be maintained and reciprocated. Peat understands these as 'alliances' that are entered into between the knower and the known; the person and the spiritual, or internal, aspect of the entity, whether it is a plant, animal, or other aspect of the natural world.[93] These alliances require reciprocity in the form of ritual, ceremony, respect, prayer, and sacrifice. Quite naturally, a worldview that unifies internal and external relations into an undifferentiated whole, requires the same protocol and characteristics for internally derived relationships as it does for external ones. If respect and reciprocity is a requirement to maintain proper function and ongoing harmony at the public community level, so too is it necessary to formulate and maintain active internal relationships. This is especially true because of the sacred nature of going into relationship or alliance with any natural entity.

Griffin suggests that in order to be consistently successful in instances of prehensive cognition, which is how becoming cognitively aware of internal relations as a method of gaining knowledge would be understood from a Whiteheadian perspective, special relationships may need to be formed between entities. He acknowledges that prehensive cognition of remote objects such as rocks, trees, or other persons, does not rely on contiguous causal transfer and thus is generally not as intense as data from sensory perceptions.[94] Such perceptions do not normally rise to consciousness but are more often blocked by the intensity of other data. The fact that these perceptions *do* sometimes surface, however, is not a violation of some fundamental law but simply an

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[92] Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 65.
[93] Ibid., 67.
[94] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 257.

exception to how things normally work.[95] One explanation that he gives for why this happens as seldom as it does, is the possible necessity of a reciprocal relationship between entities. From a Whiteheadian panexperientialist perspective, all occurrences of prehensive cognition or influence are relational between individuals, each of which has some measure of self-determination. For Griffin, because these relationships suggest a persuasive rather than coercive influence, whether or not a reciprocal relationship exists between subjects involved in such occurrences might be a determining factor in how consistent and intense the influence is.[96] Although ontologically, as a product of universal relationality, the relationships will always exist, the intensity of any sort of cognitive awareness about or between them could change. He suggests that a 'sympathetic' relationship between entities might allow for more efficient and consistent results, which explains why some individuals or groups may be more successful than others, at different times, and in different circumstances.[97] As the intensity of the relationship varies, so too would the ability to connect, influence, or gain knowledge by means of it vary. Creating and maintaining such sympathetic relationships would enhance the possibility of success and consistency. In the same way that we are more cognitively aware of our own memories and past because that is what is most intensely relevant to us,[98] those relationships that are more intentionally relevant and focused upon through active participation would also be easier to establish and know.

This Whiteheadian perspective is consistent with, and helps elucidate, the Indigenous understanding that special 'sympathetic' relationships, or alliances, are necessary in order to have the intensity of cognitive awareness required for the gaining of knowledge through internal relations. Although daily life and experience may serve to

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.: 266.
[97] Ibid.: 267.
[98] Intensity will vary according to relevance and proximate relation to. See Section 4.1.

facilitate the awareness of the sympathetic relations, ceremonies and rituals specifically designed to promote and enhance the relationships and alliances that have been entered into should increase the intensity and consistency of any epistemological function. Specialists that are either especially gifted or specially trained could facilitate the active establishment, renewal, and maintenance of the special relationships through ceremonies and rituals.

Ongoing participation in traditional Indigenous daily life, which is based on the reciprocal relations with each other, the land, the rest of the natural world, and the transmission of traditional knowledge and narratives, serves to reinforce an ontology that recognizes the importance of maintaining sympathetic relationships. By treating the internal and external relations with the natural world in the same manner and with the same respect and reciprocity as social and kinship relations, the sympathetic nature of the relations are maintained. These relations are further created, renewed, maintained, and participated in through personal and communal practices, ceremonies, and rituals. By creating and maintaining the sympathetic nature, or alliance, the ability to connect and gain knowledge through the relationships is enhanced, increasing the chances for success and consistency. Bastien describes participation and engagement with the natural world as the creation and renewal of alliances and understands them as conduits through which knowledge is generated in Blackfoot epistemology.[99] The process of coming-to-know (*Kakyosin)* in the ontology of the *Siksiaitsitapi* (Blackfoot), according to Bastien, is based on the inter-relationships of these natural alliances.[100] Because spiritual energies, which originate from the Source of Life (Creator or *Ihsipaitapiiyo'pa*), are the ultimate constituents of the universe, both physical and conceptual, knowledge is also

[99] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 4.
[100] Ibid., 3.

fundamentally derived from spiritual connections.[101] These connections, or alliances, must be aligned with and continually renewed and maintained. By aligning with the spiritual energies, or cosmic energies as Bastien sometimes calls them, one also connects to the divine universal intelligence, or *Ihsipaitapiiyo'pa,* which ultimately creates "the possibility of accessing a web of kinship alliances that make up our universe."[102]

Cajete calls these alliances 'compacts' and says that Indigenous peoples considered them a necessary relationship between the people and the natural world.[103] Hence, those relationships they hold as key are reflected in their ceremonies and are particularized according to their environment. The compacts differ, therefore, in different locales, whether coastal, desert, plains, forest etc. Because of the process nature of reality, and the dynamically changing nature of relationships, compacts themselves are never static but require the traditions of communal construction and renewal.[104] He states a primary way of thinking and knowing involves coming to terms with the physical place where one lives:

> One has to know one's home, one's village, and then the land, the "earth upon which one lives." This is the physical environment—the hills, canyons, valleys, forests, mountains, streams, rivers, plains, deserts, lakes, and seas.[105]

Included here is learning about and creating compacts with the animals that live in the immediate area**.** Peat relates the story of how he was told that when the Blackfoot first came to the plains and foothills of Western Canada they could not hunt the buffalo because they had not yet entered into relationship with the spiritual 'powers' that are manifested through the animal.[106] The problem related, whether historically true or not,

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 4.
[103] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 81.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 277.
[106] Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 31.

was that they had never met such animals before and therefore had no hunters with the requisite relationship and alliance to allow them to hunt without disrespect. However, the Sioux to the south had received many sacred ceremonies and alliances following the appearance of Buffalo Calf Woman, who also gave the Sioux the Seven Rites.[107] Because they had an existing relationship with the buffalo through Buffalo Calf Woman, the Sioux**,** after creating a relationship with the Blackfoot, had the power necessary to introduce the Blackfoot to the buffalo, which helped them formulate the necessary alliance that allowed them to hunt. In essence, it was not until the Blackfoot hunters had been introduced to Buffalo by the Lakota and the necessary protocols established allowing the reciprocal relationship and respectful alliance to be maintained, that the Blackfoot hunters were then able to enter into the relationship necessary to hunt the buffalo and use the physical animal for food and shelter, as well as gain knowledge about the buffalo and its environment. By means of the introduction by the Lakota, the necessary connection was able to be forged to create and maintain what Griffin calls the 'sympathetic relationship.'[108] The dynamically changing relationship that Indigenous peoples had with the particular environment in which they lived required constant introduction and renewal.

Bastien says that, because of the reciprocal nature of relationships, it is the participation in, and renewal of, the alliances that actually generates knowledge.[109] In fact, for the knowledge gained by participating in these alliances to be understood, it must be lived and experienced. Bastien says:

> The understanding of the knowledge and wisdom that *Kaaahsinnooniksi* transferred to me through *Nitaisstammatsokoyi*

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[107] A detailed description of the narrative and the rites can be found in Black Elk's account in: Brown, ed. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*.
[108] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 267.
[109] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 3.

> ["what I have been shown or instructed"] is only achieved through my experiences; the depth of my knowledge is relative to understanding my place and responsibility among the alliances.[110]

So although Bastien, Peat, and Ermine, among many others, all speak of prayer, meditation, visions, and dreams as the root of the epistemological process, for the knowledge gained to be integrated and understood requires participation and experience, both through specialized cultural practices and rituals, and everyday life.[111] According to Brian Burkhart, experience is fundamental to Indigenous epistemology and is the primary difference between most forms of Western philosophy and Native philosophy, with notable exceptions such as phenomenology. Whereas Western philosophy typically views knowledge as propositional and formulaic in nature, resulting in the perspective that something can be true and justified for all times and in all places, Native epistemologies stress that knowledge is "knowledge in experience."[112] In this sense knowledge is 'lived' or 'embodied' knowledge that can never be separated from human action and experience.[113] Therefore, Indigenous knowledge, whether internally (mentally/spiritually) or externally (physically) derived, is "gained from experience and used in it."[114] It is not that propositional truths are not considered valid, just that they are not exclusively or primarily so. Similarly, McGregor says that Indigenous knowledge is not just knowing *about* the relationships with the natural world; it *is* the relationships.[115] It is the process involved in being in these relationships that facilitates coming-to-know.[116] In that sense it

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[110] Ibid., 5.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Brian Yazzie Burkhart, "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology," in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 19,20. Burkhart uses the example that knowledge *equals* justified, true belief. It is propositional in that "something is so."
[113] Ibid., 21.
[114] Ibid.
[115] McGregor, "Coming Full Circle," 391.
[116] Ibid.

is a dynamic way of life rather than a snapshot of traditional information that can be categorized and documented.[117]

### 6.4 Ritual and Ceremony

Although daily life within a culture with such a relational ontology provides much of the participation and experience required in a lived Indigenous epistemology, it is through ritual and ceremony, as mentioned earlier, that transformation and renewal is sought and achieved. This renewal does not only pertain to the alliances formed with the spiritual nature of creation but also to the individual and the community. For most, these types of ceremonies provide opportunity for both personal and communal healing, renewal, and transformation, as well as interaction with the divine. Because knowledge is also derived from and through these alliances, ceremonies that focus on internal/spiritual connection, relation, and transformation, are also recognized as an opportunity to gain knowledge that is not accessible in other, more external, sensory, ways. Bastien says that "Ceremonies are a way to make present, teach, and demonstrate through origin stories the life of the ancestors, the natural laws of the universe and relationships, the moral and ethical conduct of the people, and the essence and respectful approach to the alliances of the bundles."[118] For Bastien, ceremonies create and renew relationships through which knowledge is accessed, both kinship relations with the natural world and with the divine. In Black Elk's description of the Sweat Lodge Ceremony, for instance, it is both a rite of purification (*Inipi*) and of renewal that benefits the individuals and the community. He states that when the rite is finished "those who have participated are as men born again, and have done much good not only for themselves, but for the whole nation."[119] All impurities are left behind in the *Inipi* lodge in order to renew their lives according to the

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[117] Ibid.: 402.
[118] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 12.
[119] Brown, ed. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, 43.

wishes of *Wakan-Tanka* and so that they "may know something of that real world of the Spirit, which is behind this one."[120] Not only does the sweat lodge provide physical purification, then, but also spiritual purification and a chance to gain guidance and knowledge of how to move forward in the world according to the aims of the divine. So too with the *Hanblecheyapi* (Crying for a Vision), sometimes known as a Vision Quest, which is often first done as a child reaches young adulthood but also continues throughout life for a variety of reasons such as in preparation for some ordeal, guidance, or in thanksgiving. The most important reason, according to Black Elk, is to help the participant "realize our oneness with all things, to know that all things are our relatives; and then on behalf of all things we pray to Wakan-Tanka that He may give to us knowledge of Him who is the source of all things, yet greater than all things."[121] The Vision Quest, then, can be viewed as a way to come to know the divine as it is expressed through the relationships with the natural world.

Cajete suggests that ceremonies actually evolved as techniques for accessing knowledge.[122] He cites the Sacred Pipe Ceremony as an example of a technique to breathe in, think and reflect. The blowing out of the smoke is a way of sending thoughts and prayers to places and beings.[123] The prayers and songs that often accompany the Sacred Pipe Ceremony serve to focus the intent and re-establish the relationship with the cosmos and the divine. It is therefore used, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, not only for personal reflection and communion, but also in conjunction with many Native American ceremonies, including the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux.

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 46. This patriarchal, personified, language is likely a result of translation and Euro-American Christian influence.
[122] Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 45.
[123] Ibid.

For many Indigenous people it is through active participation in ceremony that an avenue is provided for transformation. It is through the prayer, meditation, and songs that accompany ceremonies that a connection with the network of internal ontological relationships between oneself, the natural world, and the divine is reinforced and participated in. Because in a process relational worldview, such as an Indigenous ontology, the objective past and direction for the future are enfolded in every moment of becoming, an opportunity for such renewal and transformation is made possible.[124] From this perspective the non-temporal and non-spatial aspect of 'inner space' allows for accessibility to the vast network of relationships that have existed. In this way, an opportunity for relational change exists, both physically and conceptually. Although the past is set, objectively immortal as Whitehead says, one's relationship to what has happened in the past can change, resulting in new choices, directions, and possibilities for the future. Because the objective past is set, it does not matter where or when things occurred, each entity is still largely a product of their genetically inherited experiences. Renewal ceremonies are a way to re-connect and re-evaluate the relationship one has with the experiences and relationships of the past and proceed in the future in a novel way, cleansing oneself of the past relationships that may not be healthy and getting prepared to move into the future in a new way. In a theological sense, it is also a way to

[124] The term 'enfolded' can be thought of in the normal sense as 'to hold something within,' or 'include,' but is also thought of the way it was used by David Bohm. Bohm's use suggests that, as is the case in a hologram, every instance or region of reality contains the complete structure of the whole: "in some sense each region contains a total structure 'enfolded' within it." See: David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 149. Whitehead also suggests a parallel to the whole/part vision of reality a hologram exemplifies when he says "The more ultimate side of this scheme, perhaps that side which is metaphysically necessary, is at once evident by the consideration of the mutual implication of extensive whole and extensive part. If you abolish the whole, you abolish its parts; and if you abolish any part, then *that* whole is abolished" (PR 288). For a more detailed discussion on Bohm's vision of the whole being 'enfolded' within the parts, the hologram analogy, and how that relates to a vision of a multiple ultimate version of religious pluralism, see: Steven Kaplan, *Different Paths, Different Summits; a Model for Religious Pluralism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

connect with the divine in order to elicit guidance and support in that transformation. In the terms of process theology this would be to internally focus on and become more aware of the 'lure' toward maximizing value provided by God in the initial aim.[125] In addition, such transformation can not only be personal, but can also include the wider community. The communal aspect of many renewal ceremonies is helpful in supplying kinship support, both direct from the immediate human community, and 'kinship' ties to the network of relationships with non-human 'persons' in the wider natural world.

Both physical and mental/emotional/spiritual transformation and healing is possible through ceremony and ritual in this ontological outlook. If reality *is* relationships, changing one's relationship to the past, or how it informs one's life, could have a dramatic effect on the present and future, both physically and conceptually. In Whiteheadian process philosophy each actual entity is partially constituted by its own past actual world, which consists of the objective past relative to that entity. As Cobb has pointed out, "the past is in the present bringing the present into being."[126] The past is present *as* the past, and although it forces a level of conformity to itself, the distant past is not as active in any present or future decision making as is the more immediate past. How a becoming subject relates to the past, however, and what gets positively prehended and therefore brought forward into the present and future, is open for revision. Although the past actual world is prehended in its entirety, it is not all 'felt' in a positive manner. Those actual occasions that are not relevant are negatively prehended and therefore do not contribute positively to the final satisfaction of the concrescing subject. Through renewal ceremonies the past can be focused upon and how one relates to it can be transformed in the present, as can one's relationship to the rest of creation and the divine.

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[125] See Section 4.8 for more on the 'lure' towards maximizing value.
[126] John B. Cobb Jr., "Where Is the Past," in *Ask Dr. Cobb* (Claremont: Process & Faith, 2003).

What is relevant, and therefore more positively prehended, can change from one moment to the next.

Whitehead's metaphysics does not rule out the possibility of dramatic physical changes occurring during the course of such ceremonies. Griffin says that Whitehead's philosophy can decrease the 'anomalous nature' of some types of phenomena such as these.[127] For instance, because an enduring object is really a series of occasions, one perishing and being replaced by a new occasion, which for the most part repeats the same set of forms, it is not unthinkable for objects to actually materialize and dematerialize.[128] Human beings, with a psyche that has the capacity to imagine novel possibilities, also have the capacity to prehend them with 'strong appetition,' or appetite-to-be-a-certain-way.[129] Griffin says, "an especially powerful human psyche might, by evoking a sympathetic response to its appetition, be able to induce the incarnation of desired forms in a particular spatiotemporal region quite abruptly."[130] This could result in the materialization of some entity, but also, using the same principles, its dematerialization as it is stripped of the forms, or objective species of eternal objects, that give it spatiotemporal extension. Although this is helpful in understanding the possibility of dramatic healing, such as the dematerialization of cancerous tumours, on a less dramatic scale it also suggests how it may be possible for more gradual types of healing, both psychological and physical, that are associated with renewal ceremonies. By intensely focusing on one's relationship to past events and the greater world, what is deemed relevant and thus positively prehended, and what is negatively prehended due to a strong appetition toward transformation may alter what from the past actual world retains causal

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[127] Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," 268.
[128] Ibid.: 268-69.
[129] Ibid.: 270.Appetition as 'appetite-to-be-a-certain-way' is my own understanding of the term, not one provided by Griffin.
[130] Ibid.

efficacy in the new becoming subject. Because ontologically there is no difference between the objective eternal objects that characterize the determinate character of physical reality, and the subjective eternal objects that characterize emotions and other psychological states, transformations involving either would be equally possible.

Once again we see the intimate connection between ontology and epistemology in a relational worldview. If knowing oneself and the world is a 'coming-to-know' the dynamically changing relationships that make up reality, then one's own reality could change and be transformed by understanding oneself differently in each new moment. Coming-to-know and understand one's past and envisioning a change in the present becoming is not discontinuous with how reality is understood in each moment. Transformation and renewal is thus effected through the epistemological method itself.

### 6.5 Dreams and Visions

Dreams and visions are another related and equally important aspect of the epistemology of many Indigenous cultures as a method of establishing and participating in internal 'spiritual' relationships. Whether while asleep or through waking visions, dreaming is considered an important method of receiving knowledge through going into relationship with one's alliances in the natural world. According to Ermine dreams are the "voice of the inner space" that prescribe all ceremonies.[131] But it would be a mistake to assume an epistemic distinction between the world-as-dreamed and the world-as-lived, or dreaming and waking life, which is typical of the Western Euro-American, and according to Lee Irwin, largely a result of culturally reinforced rational theories of mind.[132] In the Native American context, says Irwin, there is no such separation.[133] Irwin

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[131] Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," 108.
[132] Lee Irwin, "Dreams, Theory, and Culture: The Plains Vision Quest Paradigm," *American Indian Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1994): 236.
[133] Ibid.

says that Indigenous people integrate "a diversity of altered states into its normative paradigms of consciousness" that constitutes a considerably different epistemé than that of most Euro-Americans.[134] These 'altered states,' typical of the dreaming or visionary experience, are simply different modes of gaining knowledge in a holistic continuum that is the lived world. In fact, Irwin says that among traditional Plains peoples, dreaming is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and given ontological priority.[135] Similarly, anthropologist Jean-Guy Goulet says that in many Indigenous societies, such as the Dene Tha of northwestern Alberta, the distinction between the everyday world and the internal world of dreams is simply not drawn.[136] In fact, in many societies there exist well-developed traditions for inducing visions and lucid dreaming as part of normal social development.

Kenneth Cohen calls visions in the Indigenous context a "mystical experience of seeing or knowing" that Native Americas consider a gift from 'Spirit,' which is a source of wisdom and guidance that goes beyond one's own resources.[137] Cohen says that visions, whether awake or while dreaming, can be a source of "healing songs and methods, spiritual dances, the design of medicine bundles, or the location and properties of herbs."[138] Traditionally visions can also supply the location of animals' migration routes, as in the case of the earlier example of the Inuit hunter, as well as the best places for fishing, foraging, or hunting,[139] as was the case in the experience of Rupert Ross. They also warn of danger, or supply guidance for present or future conduct. Stephen

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[134] Ibid. By epistemé he means "the underlying infrastructures or conceptual frames that organize shared, collective perceptions of the lived world and motivate actions and behaviours."
[135] Ibid.
[136] Jean-Guy Goulet, "Dreams and Visions in Indigenous Lifeworlds: An Experiential Approach," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 13, no. 2 (1993): 173.
[137] Kenneth Cohen, *Honoring the Medicine: The Essential Guide to Native American Healing* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2006), 98.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 103.

Buhner says that strong visionary experiences, which could be conveyed in images or understood as language or intuition, are often accompanied by ethical imperatives that are understood as deriving from direct contact with the divine, although interpreted through particular cultural experiences and values in order to make sense of them.[140]

According to Deloria Jr., there are two paths that led Native Elders to make sense of their world. One was the empirical observation of the natural world, as described by non-Native scholars, and the other was "the continuing but sporadic intrusion of higher powers in their lives, manifested in unusual events and dreams."[141] Although the observation of the natural world told them much, it was not enough. Through dreams they could receive guidance or urges toward particular paths of behaviour, or information that could in no way be attributed to empirical observation.[142] Deloria says that dreams and visions consist of communication with higher powers that appear with intent, often in the form of animals, to provide specific, situation contextualized knowledge and/or power.[143] He divides such communication into three types: one is "a vehicle for the sacred to manifest itself through the medium of other creatures;"[144] another is when the bird or animal appears in order to resolve a particular situation—providing information on such things as the location of game or the immanence of danger; the third is as a sort of commentator on human behaviour to provoke responses and changes.[145] These perceptual experiences can involve visionary images, perceived language, or merely be a form of intuitive knowing. He describes a particular experience of Black Elk's in which he was caught out in a storm while hunting. During the night he heard a coyote howl in the

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[140] Stephen Harrod Buhner, *Sacred Plant Medicine: The Wisdom in Native American Herbalism* (Rochester: Bear & Company, 2006), 8.
[141] Deloria Jr, *The World We Used to Live In*, xxiv.
[142] Ibid., xxv.
[143] Ibid., 107-08.
[144] Ibid., 108.
[145] Ibid.

distance and understood the howl as communication informing him of an old man and boy that were also caught in the storm, and the location of a bison that could serve as food while they were stranded.[146] Once the storm abated he was quickly able to find the man and boy as well as the bison that was trapped in the snow and easy to kill for food. Although Black Elk described it in a way that suggested he understood the coyote howl linguistically, Deloria says that the transmission of accurate information at that level of profound internal relatedness does not depend on language, but simply heightened awareness or alertness.[147] The information, therefore, might be perceived as visual images, language, or just an intuitive knowing, but it is the internal relationships one holds with the world that allows the transference.

But as Bastien also suggests, integration of such knowledge happens through active participation. All knowledge in such a context is 'lived knowledge' in that it is merely abstraction until experienced through participation in daily life. Irwin calls the rational interpretation of the visionary experience a "secondarily developed area of concern or interest."[148] He says:

> The reality of the dreaming experience lies in the pragmatic demonstration of new ability and in the dreamer's capacity to unfold the potential power and drama revealed through the vision experience. The explicit cultural order of religious symbols, icons, rituals, dances, and songs represent a testimony to some form of received, inherited, or purchased power, frequently transmitted through dream experience.[149]

It is the ability to use the knowledge gained in the experience in pragmatic ways that reinforces the visionary epistemé. In the Indigenous contexts described above, it is the Inuit's ability to know where, in unfamiliar territory, the migration of the caribou will

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[146] Ibid., 111.
[147] Ibid., 112.
[148] Irwin, "Dreams, Theory, and Culture: The Plains Vision Quest Paradigm," 240.
[149] Ibid.

be, where the best fishing spots will be in Ross' story, how to track someone from years before without once looking for physical evidence as in the case of the Aboriginal tracker, and how, in Black Elk's story, a coyote can inform a stranded person where to find food and others in need. Experience and participation on a daily basis confirms the efficacy of the knowledge gained though focus on the visionary, or internal, mode of awareness.

Goulet says that the Dene Tha often speak of the Elder's ability to travel long distances in their dreams, often with spirit animal helpers, in order to help others who have requested it.[150] As a Western ethnographer he does not necessarily accept the Dene Tha explanation that they actually do travel in this manner and that spirit helpers actually exist, but understands that this is an idiom they use to make such experiences meaningful and intelligible.[151] He argues that anthropologists that enter the 'lifeworlds' of Indigenous peoples in which the spiritual world is as real as the external physical world consistently have dream experiences similar to those of the people under study. He feels that these experiences, including one's own as an ethnographer, need to be included in any ethnography for a complete understanding of the culture. As the ethnographer's own dreams become consistent with those of the people under study they gain increased credibility and allow communication at a deeper level of understanding.[152] Goulet understands the imagery and content of such dreams as being a result of participating in the 'lifeworlds' of the society under study and so important to a full understanding of the culture. He relates his own dream experience, after having spent some time living within the Dene Tha lifeworld, of being visited and subsequently awakened by drumming Dene Tha Elders who had promised to help him in a journey he was undertaking to Ottawa.[153]

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[150] Goulet, "Dreams and Visions in Indigenous Lifeworlds: An Experiential Approach," 184.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.: 189.
[153] Ibid.: 183.

The alarm clock of his brother, whom he was staying with, had malfunctioned and without the Elder's visit he would have missed his flight. He is convinced that this dream would not have occurred if he had not been deeply immersed in their lifeworld, but would not necessarily interpret it as an actual visitation by the Elders rather than his consciousness using such imagery due to that immersion. However, to the Dene Tha Elders this was "a normal and recurring feature of nonverbal communication in their lives, particularly in the context of ritual activities."[154] To the Elders, then, this sort of 'influence at a distance,' as Griffin terms it, was a normal function of communication through the internal dream world, as opposed to Goulet's Euro-American explanation.

Anthropologist David Martinez acknowledges that it is necessary to analyze Indigenous dreaming practices according to locally generated values and beliefs, and also acknowledges that such dreams are controlled by the individual in order to obtain knowledge.[155] But although he acknowledges that the Dane-zaa (or Dene Tha) notion of dreaming is inexplicable within the Western theoretical tradition Martinez also continues to argue for an interpretation of Indigenous dreaming that stays within the Western, late modern, scientific paradigm. He wants to distance himself from interpretations of dreaming that stray into the 'mystic realm,' which would constitute the Indigenous understanding of dreams as what Ermine calls the 'voice of the inner space.' Ermine's perspective would suggest the ability to directly access information through internal relations rather than external sense perception. Rather, Martinez understands dreams, and specifically the vision quest of the Danez-zaa, starting from the practical assumption that "animals, hunting, and the vision quest are themselves derived from mythological precedents, which contain the body of knowledge that generations of ancestors

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[154] Ibid.: 184.
[155] David Martinez, "Other Than the Interpretation of Dreams: The Dane-Zaa Indians and the Vision Quest," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006): 117.

accumulated about the "right way" to live in their environment."[156] Therefore, like the Western definitions of TEK that understand Indigenous Knowledge as largely information passed on through generations of accumulated experience and observation, knowledge gained through dreams and visions is merely accumulated knowledge over generations that in some way is enfolded in the mythic representations encountered in such visions. It is not, however, that this accumulated knowledge is accessed directly and couched in particular mythic representations, but rather that the mythic elements of the visionary experience have encoded within them the learned information from ancestral experience and wisdom. Indigenous scholars would likely agree that the specific form in which dream information is manifest would be dependent on the mythic narratives of the particular culture and their particular relational alliances. It is also possible, if not probable as Martinez suggests, that there is indeed much traditional knowledge enfolded in the mythic structure of the dream and vision experiences. However, whereas Martinez's analysis uses the dominant society's metaphysical paradigm as the criteria for analysis, Indigenous and Process ontologies would expand the possibilities somewhat to include direct access to both the traditional knowledge of the past and the availability of current information that is not accessible through external sense perception. The encoded information is not just made available through the mythic imagery as if it was simply a story about how best to live, but because the past is ontologically enfolded into each becoming moment the information is directly cognitively accessible, yet couched in the particular mythic imagery that renders it intelligible for each culture. In much the same way, Whitehead insists that, when speaking of the past affecting the present and future, we have direct experience of the causality of the past (PR 169, 178).

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[156] Ibid.: 124.

Irwin also uses the 'enfolded' metaphor, largely derived from the work of physicist David Bohm, to better understand the epistemological significance of Indigenous dream experiences. To do so, according to Irwin, requires a shift from the Cartesian, determinative, causally conditioned, and mechanistic world order, to that of a 'postmodern' science of wholeness that postulates a "holistic, indeterminate, interactive, and non-local patterned world of interpersonal events."[157] These dynamically active and transformative patterns of relation imply greater possibility and potential order in any particular set of "discreet, observable phenomena."[158]

> Rather than seeking to understand a particular culture through a piece-by-piece analysis strictly determined by mechanistic or intellectual principles of hierarchical order and causal relations between parts, one begins by analyzing the processual dynamics of an undivided wholeness from which identifiable, stable, and recurrent patterns of only relative autonomy (rather than strict hierarchy) can be identified. These patterns, as explicit manifestations, represent subtotalities of meaning that can only be described in terms of their relative autonomy or relationship to other patterns of meaning. The fundamental concept is that rather than a fixed world being constructed out of a limited set of known, unchanging laws and relations in a static, deterministic manner, there is a world-process of ongoing, explicit manifestations of an implicit, emerging higher order dynamics that continues to unfold over the generations through a series of reorganized perceptions coupled with new interpretive perspectives.[159]

What Irwin describes as necessary for understanding Indigenous cultures, and in particular the dreams and visions that play a central role in their ontology and religion, is very similar to what Griffin refers to as Naturalism$_{ppp}$. In much the same way Griffin argues for a rejection of the primacy of external sense perception in favour of perception of non-contiguous causal patterns from the past actual world, Irwin speaks of "explicit manifestations" that are implicit in a "higher order dynamics" that unfold through time

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[157] Irwin, "Dreams, Theory, and Culture: The Plains Vision Quest Paradigm," 239.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

from previous generations. Irwin speaks of patterns of meaning in dynamic relationship with other patterns of meaning as the basis for an ontological wholeness. In rejecting atheism, Griffin also speaks of meaning and purpose as inherent in reality in the form of the immanence of God. Griffin also rejects, as does Irwin when trying to make sense of Indigenous ontologies, the mechanistic and materialistic modern worldview that fails to account for much of human experience, including, as far as Irwin is concerned, the "processual dynamics of an undivided wholeness." This dynamic undivided wholeness is explicit in both the Indigenous and Whiteheadian metaphysic. It is undivided in its interdependent relatedness, yet divisible and dynamic in regards to identifying instances of such ever-changing relations.

Irwin's interpretation of the Indigenous visionary experience and the paradigm-shift away from the modern Euro-American worldview that is needed to understand it also helps illuminate the epistemological links between Indigenous and Whiteheadian thought. What Irwin refers to as the 'enfolded order' is that realm of experience that is available and accessed in the visionary state. Both that which is already known (explicit) and the mysterious or unknown (implicit) are enfolded into the "physic potential of the visionary realm." To enter into this realm is to access the patterns of meaning that are not accessible strictly through rational analysis. Irwin says that dreams express complex "moments of encounter and manifestation that surpass the constraints of purely rational thought, because dreaming engages not only the rational aspects of the mind but also deeper and more subtle potentials."[160] He goes on to say:

> Through dreaming, the temporal immediacy of everyday consciousness is unbound from its immediate sensory and empirical conditioning and flows into an altered awareness in which past, present, and future can merge into meaningful atemporal continuities. And this past manifests

[160] Ibid.: 229.

> as the indefinite and powerful imagery of our shared spiritual and cultural history.[161]

Similar to the way Griffin suggests that conscious awareness of retroprehensive cognition, which could be considered a timeless realm of the objective past, the current becoming, and possible futures, are normally overpowered by the intensity of sensory perceptions, Irwin says that dreaming unbinds consciousness from such intense sensory input, which results in an 'altered awareness' and the cognitive merging of past, present and future. From the perspective described by Griffin this unlocking, in which sensory perceptions are no longer prominent, could help establish increased cognitive awareness of prehensions in the mode of causal efficacy, as well as other normally unavailable conceptual functioning. The result would be the increased possibility of being consciously aware of the prehensions and conceptual activity of other actual entities, including the divine. In Indigenous understanding, as described by the Native scholars above, this is merely a focus on the internal 'spiritual world' constituted by the network of relationships that comprises reality. It is another way to gain knowledge about and through the dynamic relationships that constitute reality. How these manifest is dependent on the particular relationship one has with one's total environment, which would not only include the natural world, but the social relationship one has with one's own family and community, and what Irwin calls the "mythic structures and contents of religious history"[162] that are part of any community. The epistemé, or what Goulet calls lifeworlds, of Indigenous peoples would certainly contribute to the imagery and interpretation of these dream experiences in order to make them intelligible, but from a Whiteheadian perspective like Griffin's, this is the symbolic reference inherent in any conscious interpretation of perceptual data, either sensory or non-sensory. These diverse

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

interpretations and symbolic references are what contribute to the diversity, beauty, and intensity of experience. The wide variance in imagery and symbolism does not in itself reflect on the truth or importance of the knowledge or the methodology.

The idea that information about both the immediate and distant past can be directly and internally accessed, along with direct experience of the divine, does raise questions about why such experiences are not universal, and whether or not they should be taken as veridical. If such a thing is possible, why does it not happen all the time with everyone, and what would be the criteria for determining whether such experiences could be considered 'true' perceptions of reality that provide knowledge? In "Decentering Whitehead" Donald Sherburne addresses an issue related to the first point by challenging whether it is possible for God to respond to events in the world by providing guidance and a 'lure,' via the subjective aim, towards making "the maximal contribution to the actual world from which it arises."[163] If that were so, according to Sherburne, our world would be much different than it is. For instance, people would routinely know things about the world that are not available from normal sense perception, because such knowledge could be provided by God via the initial aim. Sherburne's example is of a woman walking under the Empire State Building just as a piano toppled from the top. The question is whether God could, or would if it resulted in the best outcome for the concrescing subject and future entities, supply an initial aim that informed the woman and allow her to look up at the exact moment, or stop walking and step aside just before the piano struck.[164] Although the question specifically addresses whether God provides particular providence for individual actual entities, the central issue remains the same. If all entities were capable of intuiting distant events, in both time and space, through internal perceptions, why can we not all perceive each other's thoughts, or what is over a

[163] Sherburne, "Decentering Whitehead," 86.
[164] Ibid.

distant mountain, or where lost people or articles are located, or events that happened in the distant past? If such prehensive cognition is possible would not our experience of the world be very different than it is? Would we not be able to find out almost anything we wanted to know about the world, whether it was in the past or a potential future, simply by focusing our attention in a manner that would allow such cognition? If this were really possible, would there not be many more such experiences than there are?

Cobb's response to Sherburne about the providence of God also applies to this more general issue.[165] He says that, "Christians often report instances where they feel they have been guided to act or avoid action. In other words, they have felt an urge to do something that they have no ordinary basis for doing."[166] These impulses are often interpreted as divine guidance. He does acknowledge that many, but not all, of such experiences could be interpreted as "superfluous interpretations of events that can be readily understood in ordinary terms."[167] Many of the others, says Cobb, can be accounted for if 'parapsychological categories,' such as those investigated by Griffin, are allowed.[168] In other words there do appear to be common cases of extraordinary awareness that are not explainable by other means, even simple ones many people have, such as thinking of someone whom one has not been in contact with for some time just before receiving a phone call from that person. The fact that such awareness is not universal and all-encompassing does not mean it is non-existent. Such a conclusion would ignore Griffin's contention that retroprehensive cognition at a distance is commonly overshadowed by the intensity of information provided by our external senses and that special circumstances, abilities, and/or training, may be required to make such awareness consciously available. In fact, in Indigenous societies it is not uncommon that

[165] Cobb Jr., "Sherburne on Providence."
[166] Ibid.: 26.
[167] Ibid.: 27.
[168] Ibid.

specialists who have acquired 'sympathetic relationships' are the only ones who can routinely access such knowledge, with special situations, rituals, ceremonies, visions, etc., required for others. In fact, the commonality of reports of such experiences within Indigenous societies in itself gives credence to this reading and interpretation of Whitehead's process thought.[169] The fact that most of us are not consciously aware of the availability of such information, or have lost the ability to access it, does not mean that it is not available to others.

Whether or not such experiences can be considered 'true' or simply 'superfluous interpretations' was most often, I suggest, decided on pragmatic grounds. If over time the knowledge acquired through such means usually worked in the world, or was an accurate representation of lived experience, then there were sufficient grounds to have believed them to be true. As pointed out earlier, Deloria Jr. believed such visions and communications were considered true because the content was verified in daily life.[170] For Bastien it is through participation and experience that the knowledge is gained and integrated.[171] The 'truth' of the knowledge, therefore, became known through participation and experience. If one's communication with the Creator through a relationship with plants resulted in curare as a solution to your hunting problem, there was no reason not to believe the normative interpretation. If hunters more often than not were able to find game, or anticipate weather conditions, or track people years after the fact, there was justification for believing such experiences were truly veridical. William Alston, in regard to religious experience of God, suggests that such putative experiences are a source of justification for beliefs about God, in the same way that sense experience

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[169] Especially due to Whitehead's insistence that metaphysical speculation must begin from, and be grounded in experience of the world (PR 3). If it does not accommodate 'authentic' experience of the world, then such speculation is inadequate.
[170] Deloria Jr, *The World We Used to Live In*, xxv.
[171] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 3-5.

is a justification for beliefs about the physical environment.[172] If something perceived in this way seems to be the case, there is justification to believe it to be true unless there is evidence to the contrary.[173] He appeals to Richard Swinburne's 'Principle of Credulity'[174] to say:

> But though neither mystical experience nor sense experience is infallible, there are solid reasons for taking beliefs formed on the basis of either kind of experience to be, as we might say, *prima facie* rationally acceptable in the absence of sufficient reason to the contrary.[175]

If there is no evidence to the contrary, then, and over time such experiences tended to be veridical, and such judgements are supported within the presupposed relational ontology, there can be a presumption of truth. Of course, this would also result in epistemic circularity in which the experiences that support the worldview are also judged and interpreted with the presupposition of the same ontology. As Alston also pointed out, however, that is no different than the epistemic circularity involved in using knowledge gained from external sense perceptions to judge the truth of external sense perceptions, such as verifying the existence of something you have seen by looking at it again, or having someone else look at it.[176] If, on the other hand, such experiences did not yield knowledge that proved through time to be consistent with the person's or

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[172] William P. Alston, "Religious Experience Justifies Religious Belief," in *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West*, ed. Andrew Eshleman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

[173] In much the same way, William James says that when there is not sufficient evidence one way or the other there is justification to believe something based on our 'passionate nature.' There is also justification when belief is necessary for the existence of the fact, or when acting on a belief is necessary for getting at the evidence in support of its truth, as is the case in much scientific enquiry. William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York: Hafner Press, 1948).

[174] The Principle of Credulity allows initial credibility or a presumption of truth on the basis of experience, if there is no evidence to the contrary. Richard G. Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

[175] Alston, "Religious Experience Justifies Religious Belief," 185.

[176] Ibid.

community's experience of the world—and/or did not provide consistent beneficial results—the information gained by such would not likely be considered valid.

From a Whiteheadian perspective, dreams and visions are a credible way for human consciousness to focus on and gain knowledge from the internal relations that make up reality. Through retroprehensive cognition, as Griffin has envisioned it, it is not inconceivable to gain knowledge-from-a-distance about other entities, the actual world of those entities, one's own or another's past or probabilities for the future, or even direct cognition of the divine itself. Nor would it be unusual for such perception to be cloaked in familiar imagery and symbolism based on a particular culture's mythic images and narratives, and the various relationships and alliances that a people may have with their environment. 'Unbinding' the consciousness from the intense input of sensory data would allow the vague data of internal perception to become more cognitively prominent. Although this could happen spontaneously—given the right circumstances—ritual practices, ceremonies, sleep and drugged states, and special training could achieve the conditions that would facilitate the perceptual rebalancing that would be conducive to such visionary experiences. Although trained specialists may be able to produce such experiences at will, it is not inconceivable that prayer, singing, dancing, fasting, and special ceremonies like the aforementioned Sacred Pipe Ceremony, the Sun Dance, and the Sweat Lodge, would aid in generating and renewing the 'sympathetic' connections that Griffin feels would enhance the chance of success and consistency in such cognitive awareness.

Bastien best summarizes Indigenous epistemology in this sense when she says that knowledge is generated by and through the creation and renewal of the internal relationships that make up the cosmic universe.[177] This way of knowing is most effective

[177] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*, 3,4.

when alliances are formed and maintained in a respectful manner through protocols, ceremonies, and rituals. A person's knowledge and understanding of both themselves and the 'other' is constituted by coming to know one's place in that relational network of kinship, community, the natural world, and the divine. In this way, as Wilson and Ermine say, Indigenous epistemology *is* Indigenous ontology because in this context, how the world is understood to *be* entails in each moment coming-to-know oneself in relation to everything else. Because these relationships are internal and universal, with external spatiotemporal relationships and perceptions being important for integration but secondary nonetheless, the process of knowing is non-spatial, non-temporal, and sacred in that it connects with and enters into the 'spiritual' realm of the divine through entering into intimate relationship with a living cosmos.

Whiteheadian process philosophy gives us the tools to make sense of this ontology and epistemological method because of its acceptance of what Griffin refers to as $\text{Naturalism}_{\text{ppp}}$. Like Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world, Whiteheadian process thought allows for cognitive awareness and influence at a distance between entities that is not limited in time and space. With its emphasis on dynamic event-based processes in which the past and possible futures are enfolded in each moment of becoming, and how each occasion of experience is partially constituted by the entirety of its past actual world, Whiteheadian thought is capable of acting as an interpretive bridge for a better understanding of the Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the natural world, and each other. Also, Whitehead's insistence that God's universal immanence through the actualization of the conceptual forms and potentials that facilitate the creative advance of the world, reinforces the sacred nature of all knowledge and interconnectedness, and the ceremonies, rituals, and cultural practices that generate, maintain, and renew these epistemological and ontological relationships.

# Chapter Seven: **Conclusion**

The goal presented in the opening chapters of this thesis was to investigate the extent to which a Whiteheadian process metaphysic is capable of interpreting and accommodating Indigenous ontology as expressed through particular Native societies. In doing so it also takes up the challenge issued by Willie Ermine to provide a way to "reconcile a scientific based knowledge that defines much of the Western world with an epistemology based on participatory consciousness and personal experiences with human, natural, and supernatural relationships found in Indigenous learning traditions."[1] In the process, says Ermine, "It is important for Indigenous knowledge to be recognized as valid in its own right and not to be dismissed if it contradicts or is not explicable in Western academic terms."[2] The motive for such a comparative experiment was to provide a basis for making the Indigenous view of reality a 'live hypothesis,' as a precursor to further study and dialogue so that inter-cultural and inter-religious encounter may, in the future, be conducted in more equitable fashion. The context is that of John Cobb Jr.'s transformationist complementary theology that presupposes and relies to a large extent on a Whiteheadian process philosophy. I propose that compared to other forms of comparative theology and theologies of religions, Cobb's transformationist complementary approach avoids many of the critiques that have been leveled at comparative theology, theologies of religions in general, and religious pluralism in particular. These critiques include imperialist hegemony in a one way appropriation of value, not being *completely* open to possible transformative truths presented by the religious 'other,' and in the case of religious pluralist theologies, not taking the alterity of

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[1] Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery, "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," 46. Although these relationships are termed 'supernatural' by Ermine, that is largely due, I suggest, to how they are viewed from a Euro-American worldview. From both a Whiteheadian and Indigenous perspective these would be considered natural occurrences.

[2] Ibid.

the religious 'other' into sufficient account. Cobb's avoidance of these critiques, I maintain, is largely due to his Whiteheadian presuppositions. The experiment in comparative ontology presented in this thesis is an example of how process thought is capable of accommodating a foreign worldview in such a complementary style. As far as Whitehead is concerned, the onus is on the proposed metaphysic to accommodate *all* human experience. Process philosophy, as we have seen, inherently resists imperialism and hegemony, even while interpreting and translating a worldview into foreign terms and concepts. As implied earlier, there is no *a priori* rejection of ontological understanding, only *a posteriori* judgement of interpretation of experience, thus allowing for an equal partnership in authentic dialogue and encounter, with the hope of mutual transformation, based on the premise that each has possible universal truths that the other lacks.[3]

Whitehead's metaphysic, I argue, is successful at meeting Willie Ermine's challenge for reconciliation of a Western based philosophy that accounts for the insights of Western science, with a relational epistemology characteristic of the Indigenous worldview. Although Whitehead's philosophy is not considered mainstream, or widely accepted or understood in Western society, it is believed by process philosophers, and has been shown by a variety of physicists, to better accommodate not only what Griffin calls 'hard-core common sense notions,' but also many new advances in scientific knowledge. It adequately, if not quite completely in its current form or conception, interprets many fundamental aspects of the Indigenous experience. It also does not dismiss outright conflicting claims that appear irreconcilable from a Western academic perspective, but strives to accommodate them in a complementary manner, exemplified by Cobb's

[3] Once again I need to make clear my position that, in light of the historical record of encounter, a goal of 'mutual' transformation may be premature in some spheres of encounter. The emphasis may be better placed on ways in which such encounters can at least be mutually beneficial.

complementary pluralist understanding. When the Indigenous experience does not seem to be completely consistent with Whitehead's philosophy, process thought still provides the tools to help us more fully understand their own interpretations of that experience. In this way it once again is successful at rendering the worldview of the foreign 'other' a 'live hypothesis.'

It was pointed out earlier in this thesis that new insights into physics seem to have a particular affinity to Whiteheadian process thought in that these insights reject substance-based mechanistic views of the nature of reality. However, Western Euro-American society still tends to live in a substance-based conception of the world. Based primarily on experiencing through our limited physical senses, we perceive things as objects in space and time, and we understand ourselves as one of those objects. We also tend to function as if physical sense perception is the *only* way to perceive and understand the world. A relational view of the world is not readily available to us and is not generally incorporated into how we understand the world, and how we construct our social reality. The Indigenous experience is one of living and being aware of fundamental relationality 'from the bottom up.' Not only is reality relational, the web of relationships *is* reality itself. As stated earlier, from both an Indigenous and a Whiteheadian perspective, it is not just that we are *in* relationship with all others, we *are* the relationships we hold. This is not merely how self-identity should be understood, but how we are ontologically constituted. Indigenous scholars tell us that this fundamental awareness of the basic relationality of existence permeates all aspects of Indigenous existence, as exemplified by First Nations people that hold to traditional ways. It is present in language and language structure, familial and other social structures, spirituality, epistemology, cultural practices, and an understanding of one's place in society and the world. There does not seem to be any aspect of existence that does not reflect a fundamentally relational perspective.

## 7.1 Comparative Summary

The preceding comparative exercise discussed a number of common Indigenous perspectives that have been shown to be fundamental to the Indigenous ontology—and ultimately to the intimate connection between that ontology and Indigenous epistemology—which have significant parallels in Whiteheadian process thought. These could be summarized in the following manner:[4]

*Reality is a Process*

> Reality is an event-based, dynamic process of ever-changing relationships, which is reflected in language, cultural practices, and epistemology. Reality is not substantive and mechanistic, and therefore no-*thing,* whether physical, 'spiritual,' or conceptual, can be considered permanent or changeless.

*Universal Relationality*

> Reality is constituted by a vast web of reciprocal relationships that includes the divine. Things in reality do not *have* relationships as much as they *are* the relationships they hold. In a very real sense 'We are all related' and 'everything is sacred.'

*Nature is Alive*

> Everything is 'alive' in some sense, or at least is capable of experience. Because everything in the natural world is constituted by relationships and has divine immanence, 'life' and 'personhood,' as understood in the Indigenous context, is extended far beyond human beings and biological life to include most, if not all, aspects of the natural world. Acknowledging and experiencing these relationships

[4] I state these comparisons here rather than earlier in the thesis because to do so would have raised more questions than answers and disrupted the flow of the comparative exercise. The preceding text has now made these comparisons clear.

is a fundamental way of being in the world that permeates all aspects of individual and social life.

*Non-Sensual Perceptions are Primary*

Although external sense derived perceptions and relations are important, and tell us much about our immediate surroundings, internal ontological relations and perceptions, both conscious and unconscious, are most fundamental and therefore primary modes of perception and acquiring knowledge.

*Influence at a Distance*

Because of the non-temporal, non-spatial character of the web of internal ontological relations, or 'inner space,' both receptive and expressive influence at a distance is possible. The entirety of the past is 'enfolded' into each moment of the present, which also encapsulates the vector for the future. Reciprocal participation in these relationships allows action, both physical and conceptual, without limitations regarding time or space. Past events, and possibilities for the future, both for oneself and all other aspects of the world, are cognitively available to provide knowledge and guidance. Although the past cannot be changed, nor the future decisively known, one's relationship to events from the past may change, providing opportunity for personal and communal healing, renewal, and transformation.

*Ontology Equals Epistemology*

On the bases of the above observations, Indigenous epistemology involves a processive *coming-to-know* about and through the relationships that make up reality. In the Indigenous experience, coming-to-know involves participating in these relationships, both internal and external, in a reciprocal and respectful manner in everyday life and through ceremonies, rituals, narratives, and other cultural practices. By establishing and participating in such relationships one

> comes to know more about the external spatiotemporal world, as well as one's own identity and place within the vast network of relationships involving oneself, the family, the community, the world, and the divine. Therefore, coming-to-know *is* the process of construction of self in that the self is constituted *by* these relations. In addition, by focusing on and connecting to the divine relationship—whether directly or mediated by relations with the natural world—guidance toward harmony and balance can also be received. Such an epistemology has significant parallels in a Whiteheadian process epistemology and metaphysic.

These commonalities illustrate that process thought is capable of accommodating, and translating, much of the Indigenous view of reality, experience, and epistemology. However, the comparative experiment also made clear that not everything can be so readily accommodated. Process concepts of panexperientialism and divine imminence, along with Birch and Cobb's understanding of 'Life,' help us to understand how the natural world can be considered alive in the Indigenous context. However, how inanimate natural objects ('aggregates'), and elemental forces such as fire, wind, and water could be thought of as having enough life to have the capability of going into social relationship as a 'person,' is not easily accommodated by Whiteheadian process thought. Although it was shown that process philosophy may give us the tools to better understand this manner of relating to nature, a typical interpretation of Whitehead's metaphysical system does not allow for a mountain (Grandmother /Grandfather mountain), a campfire (Grandfather Fire), or meteorological phenomena (Thunder Beings) to have independent life and existence as persons that are capable of having intentional social relationships with human beings. It does, however, help us understand how information and knowledge can be acquired through cognitive awareness of such ontological relationships, with these 'beings,' perhaps, as anthropomorphized representations of the epistemological relationship. Further study, including, I suggest, direct dialogue, would be required to

establish whether this discrepancy is irreconcilable, whether it is a misunderstanding of the Indigenous experience, or whether a re-thinking of Whitehead's metaphysic is called for in order to better understand and accommodate this fundamental Indigenous experience.

Along those lines, however, what did become clear in the study is the inadequacy of the English terms 'life' and 'person' to accurately translate the Indigenous understanding of what is meant when such words are used. These are but two examples of terms that have been forcibly imposed on Indigenous understanding by the dominant society. It is likely that with further study and dialogue, many more such discrepancies would become evident. Although it appears that a process, rather than substantist, metaphysic is better able to conceptually translate how terms such as these are understood by Indigenous people, we are still stuck using a substance based language structure that has limited ability to translate process-relational concepts on a word-to-word basis. That does not imply that such Indigenous concepts are inherently untranslatable, but rather that it may take more than simple word-to-word correspondence to facilitate sufficient conceptual translation.[5]

### 7.2 The World as an 'Ultimate'

It was mentioned in the Introduction that one objective of this thesis was to determine the accuracy of Cobb's suggestion that Indigenous traditions prioritize 'The World' as an ultimate focus of discernment. In Whiteheadian process thought 'The World' represents the multiplicity of finite entities that make up the cosmic epoch. To reiterate using Western philosophical terms as formulated by Griffin and Cobb: Creativity can be thought of as equating with 'Being itself;' the World is the multiplicity

[5] Once again it is worth noting Paul Ricoeur's position that all translations are inherently imperfect and that all that is ultimately required is an equivalence of overall meaning. Ricoeur, *On Translation*, 22.

of the finite things; and God is the supreme instance of Being.[6] Discernment of the ultimate principle of Creativity is prioritized by 'acosmic' religious traditions such as Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism, like Advaita Vedanta; discernment of a personal God is prioritized by theistic traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as some theistic forms of Hinduism; and discernment of the natural world is prioritized by 'cosmic' traditions who focus on the multiplicity of finite entities that make up the cosmos, such as Daoism, and Indigenous traditions.[7] Cobb insists, however, that these types are not to be thought of as mutually exclusive.[8] Any one tradition can focus on more than one such Ultimate, as can individual adherents. According to Cobb, mystics, for instance, often identify both acosmic and theistic elements in their religious vision.[9]

Cobb, then, acknowledges relationship to the Earth/World as the focus of the Indigenous cosmic vision of reality.[10] What he does not emphasize, and this comparative experiment clearly shows, is that the relationship to the Earth is also a method of being in relationship with the divine. In fact, it is through divine immanence that such relationships, and the knowledge that is gained from them, are even possible. In the Indigenous context, relationship to the divine is achieved *through* relationship to the natural world. It would be problematic to say that the Indigenous *cosmic* relationship takes priority over the *acosmic* relationship of encountering the divine. I am suggesting an acosmic understanding of the divine simply because, as the Indigenous scholars

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[6] Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," 47, 49.

[7] Cobb borrows Jack Hutchison's ordering of religious traditions into acosmic, cosmic, and theistic, because he finds it helpful to distinguish between the various types of experiences, although ultimately he knows such categories may prove misleading. See Cobb Jr., "Order out of Chaos," 120. Hutchison offers this particular ordering in his book: John A. Hutchison, *Paths of Faith*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969).

[8] Cobb Jr., "Order out of Chaos," 121.

[9] Ibid. David Ray Griffin points out that Gene Reeves also favours a view that in Whitehead's metaphysic the world of finite occasions could be considered an Ultimate and that all three Ultimates should be emphasized. Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," 51 n44.

[10] Cobb Jr., "Christian Universality Revisited," 138.

sourced in this thesis have pointed out, many of the traditional terms used by Native North Americans seem to translate better as 'The Great Mysterious,' as in the Lakota *Wakan Tanka*, or the Algonquin *Manitou* that permeates and allows for all existence, suggesting a more impersonal 'ground of being' understanding of the divine. It is not clear that the more personal translation of 'Creator' is not a product of post-contact influence from Christianity. In fact, for those who hold to traditional ways of life in the modern context, all three 'Ultimates' may have roughly equal emphasis. Although there is certainly a focus on relationship with the natural world, this relationship is considered sacred in that it is a connection with the Great Mystery that pervades the cosmos in an impersonal, or acosmic, manner. However, a personal connection and relationship with 'Creator' can also be realized through various cultural practices, ceremonies, and rituals.

Although I realize that the preceding interpretation and analysis is generalized and speculative, it nonetheless serves to illustrate that it is restrictive and misleading to consider Indigenous traditions as simply prioritizing the natural world as their ultimate concern and focus of discernment. To be conclusive, each particular tradition would require individual study and analysis to determine how each culture uniquely understands and relates to divine reality.

### 7.3 Mutual Transformation

The general context for this comparative study is John Cobb Jr.'s transformationist theology. The goal is that making the ontological worldview of the Indigenous 'other' a live hypothesis would help facilitate a more equal partnership in any further inter-religious, or inter-cultural, dialogue and encounter. The hope, from a transformationist perspective, is that future dialogue could provide an opportunity for both partners in the encounter to acquire knowledge that would be beneficial and lead to transformation of each tradition, or at least be mutually beneficial rather than simply a

one-way appropriation of value. Cobb does, however, acknowledge that both traditions in such an encounter may not feel the 'other' has anything to offer, or is willing to be transformed.[11] Nor, does it mean, as noted earlier, that in light of the historical record, 'mutual' transformation is appropriate in all spheres of encounter. It may take some transformation of the dominant society on its own before it is in a position to contribute positively to the Indigenous religious understanding. As Cobb has noted "Some traditions may understand their primary task to be maintaining the separateness of their people from others, or keeping their inherited wisdom intact and unaffected. For them the ability to be enriched and transformed is not a norm at all."[12] For most Indigenous cultures, the primary focus may rightly be survival of their own cultural and traditions, rather than transformation as such. That should not, however, deter the attempt to move toward authentic, mutually beneficial dialogue.

The question, specifically in light of the information brought forward in this thesis, is: "In what way does having Indigenous ontology translated into a contemporary Western philosophical metaphysic benefit and offer the opportunity for possible transformation to both Indigenous peoples and Western society?" Also: "If the Indigenous worldview is successfully rendered 'live' in that it appears to be able to coexist in a complementary fashion with a Western perspective, and therefore result in a more equal partnership in dialogue, how does that change the conversation?"

Although, as Cobb suggests, it would not be appropriate to pre-determine the outcome, or even the direction the dialogue will take, it is possible to make conjectures as to some benefits a more equal dialogue would facilitate. Having a better understanding and acceptance of what it means to live a relational ontology, such as the Indigenous worldview, could contribute to future dialogue in a number of ways, both theological and

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[11] Cobb Jr., "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic World," 750.
[12] Cobb Jr., "Beyond Pluralism," 92.

secular. From a non-Indigenous theological perspective, a deeper understanding of relating to the divine through nature could transform the Euro-American attitude toward environmental issues and the human-nature-divine relationship. Understanding the divine as immanent in *all* nature changes one's perspective on how to relate to the natural world and to God. I would also suggest that if, as was alluded to earlier and in spite of my stated reservations, the divine understood as a personal 'Creator' is the result of post-contact Christian influence in many Indigenous cultures, perhaps the Indigenous recognition of what Christianity has to offer in the context of mutual transformation has already begun. Emphasizing all three Ultimates equally—Creativity(acosmic)/God(theos)/World (cosmic)— may be a transformation that the Indigenous tradition has embraced due in part, albeit perhaps involuntarily in some instances, because of its contact with Western religious traditions.

From a less theological perspective, one of the most pressing issues in North America to which a process understanding may contribute involves the effects of colonialism and what can be done in the future to correct or alleviate the ongoing damage to Indigenous cultures. For instance, a process-informed understanding of how Indigenous identity is created and constituted through relationship, not only between familial kin, but through relationship with the wider community, the natural world, and the divine, changes how the long-term effects of forced relocation are perceived. Whether discussing relocation of communities that forcibly remove people from the land that informs their beliefs, practices, and social identity, or the forced removal of children that are subsequently placed in residential schools far from their home and family, the devastation to self-identity and the crisis that results would be understood differently from the perspective of a relational ontology than a modern substantist/materialist worldview. With that new understanding would come a transformed sensitivity to the personal and social issues that have inflicted Indigenous people as a consequence of such

violence and oppression from the dominant society. Such an altered sensitivity would also transform any dialogue with Indigenous people that discussed ways to deal with the resultant ongoing issues, perhaps bringing novel and potentially enlightened strategies to the table. This is but one example of ways in which transformation of understanding by the dominant society would be the initial goal before any discussion of 'mutual' transformation would be appropriate.

Understanding from within a relational ontology how Indigenous epistemology is inherently connected to acquiring, renewing, and maintaining relationships, would likely also transform the conversation on Indigenous education and pedagogy. Although Indigenous scholars, such as Betty Bastien, have worked toward, and written extensively about, the need for a reformed methodology in Native education,[13] a modern substantist worldview does not have the epistemic tools to fully understand or appreciate the benefits or requirements of such an alternative approach. A more equal dialogue, in which a process-based perspective facilitates a better understanding and acceptance of the Indigenous epistemological method, could not help but result in a transformed outcome that would be beneficial to both Indigenous communities and the wider society.

A process-informed understanding of Indigenous connection to particular geographies through internal relatedness could facilitate a much different dialogue involving land claims and sacred sites. An enhanced sensitivity to what it means, from a relational ontological perspective, to be connected to a particular land base, and the identity construction and religious significance that is inherent in that relatedness, could significantly alter any dialogue on the subject. In particular, any discussion on sacred sites, which would involve a more extensive and detailed comparative analysis than what this thesis provides, would take on new significance.

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[13] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*. Native education and pedagogy is a major theme in her book.

In both a Whiteheadian and an Indigenous context all space could be considered 'sacred' to some degree due to universal divine immanence. However, it is certainly the case that particular locations, landscapes, or landmarks are considered especially sacred from the Indigenous perspective. If sacred space could be understood, as Mircea Eliade suggests, as a place where the sacred manifests, then in this sense all space is sacred, but some locations may be more or less sacred than others.[14] If ceremony, prayer, and ritual can be thought of as not only creating sacred space, but also maintaining its sacredness by renewing and maintaining the relationships with the divine, process theology may be in a unique position to interpret and understand this experience. It could well be that the focused intention that is central to these religious practices is capable of increasing potential for creative transformation both in the participants and the surrounding area. By repeatedly positively prehending the transformative energies of the divine, or 'Christ' in Cobb's process-informed Christology, in a particular location, it may serve to maintain a closer relationship between the natural world and the divine in that area. Perhaps, then, particular spaces are felt as closer to, or more positively connected to, the divine.

It could also be that particular places may be the site of meaningful historic or mythic events. Ceremonies and rituals at such a site could simply be a method of bringing into the present, and hence more intensely into the participants, the meaningfulness and teachings from such events. Positively prehending past events, whether historic or mythic, that have special meaning and value would give the narratives more transformative power in the present. In his book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso discusses how 'place-making,' in the Navajo context, consists of , "an adventitious fleshing out of historical material that culminates in a posited state of affairs, a particular universe of objects and events—in short, a *place-world*—wherein portions of the past are

[14] Mircea Eliade's perspective is most comprehensively discussed in Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987).

brought into being."[15] For Basso, place-making combines both remembering and imagining that "inform each other in complex ways."[16] He goes on to say that remembering often provides a basis for imagining how things *could* be, thereby creating "possibilities of a new and original sort."[17] Such a perspective on space and place is suggestive of the creative transformation that is so prominent and important in process theology. Active participation in a 'sympathetic' relationship with particular places may involve not only positively feeling mythic events of the past, but re-conceptualizing them in new ways in order to facilitate novel originality in the future in a creatively transformative way.

Without further study, both into the meaning of 'sacred space' from an Indigenous relational perspective as well as how that could be understood in a Whiteheadian metaphysic, the above is speculative at best but, I suggest, deserves investigation. At the very least, increased understanding and acceptance of how Indigenous people are intimately connected to the nature world through more than merely an old Newtonian framework of external spatiotemporal relations, would transform the conversation and potentially yield significantly different results.

I would argue that one of the most important, and universally beneficial, contributions a process informed-Indigenous dialogue could produce would be toward ecological and environmental awareness and value. Because process thought conceives of all actual entities as subjects of experience having divine immanence, each has some degree of intrinsic value. Each actual occasion 'enjoys' its own immediacy as a subject

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[15] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 6.
[16] Ibid., 5.
[17] Ibid.

and "attains some measure of "harmony," "intensity," "truth," and "beauty."[18] This places some degree of intrinsic value on everything in the natural world. In fact, because of the continuity between all levels of existence, Birch and Cobb state that, "if there is intrinsic value anywhere, there is intrinsic value everywhere."[19] However, typically the degree of intrinsic value is directly correlated to capacity for intensity of experience.[20] The intrinsic value of 'aggregates,' such as rocks, and 'democracies,' such as plants, is limited to the intrinsic value of the molecules or cells of which they are composed. But although their intrinsic value may not be entirely negligible, the primary value of plant cells, according to Birch and Cobb, is instrumental.[21] Therefore, there is justification for treating plants and inorganic objects primarily as instrumental 'means' rather than 'ends,' even though the 'means' may be extremely important.[22] Animals, especially those with a central nervous system, have a much higher capacity for intensity and richness of experience and therefore much greater intrinsic value, with conscious beings, such as humans, on the top of the intrinsic value scale.

This gradation of intrinsic and instrumental value, which places humans at the top and inorganic objects at the bottom, seems consistent with Euro-American, and particularly Christian, ideals. Although a process informed environmental awareness may give more intrinsic value to the natural world than is typical in Euro-American society, placing intrinsic value solely in the realm of complexity and capacity for intense, rich

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[18] Cobb Jr. and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, 83. Whitehead identifies and discusses these categories of value in *Adventure of Ideas.* This type of Whiteheadian language, and the aesthetic component that it describes, may well be equally as fruitful a comparative study with the artistic and aesthetic aspects of Indigenous traditions as the more technical perspective of this thesis. However, I suggest that such a study, although likely comprehensive and important enough to be a thesis in itself, would presuppose the relational ontology discussed in this work, making it derivative rather than fundamental, and too large a topic for more than a fleeting reference here.

[19] Birch and Cobb Jr., *Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community*, 152.

[20] Ibid., 152ff.

[21] Ibid., 153.

[22] Ibid.

experience, thereby allowing for the majority of the natural world to be instrumentally used as a means to an end, I would argue, has contributed to the environmental problems we are experiencing today and is inconsistent with the Indigenous experience.

I doubt that Indigenous people would disallow that the natural world has strong instrumental value—after all it has provided food and shelter for millennia—but I would also suggest that intrinsic value is understood more on the 'spiritual' level of internal ontological relations than on the level of richness of experience. For instance, for Whitehead inorganic objects are "vehicles for receiving, for storing in a napkin, and for restoring without loss or gain" and "merely what the causal past allows them to be" (PR 177). This is primarily because of the lack of originality in their own becoming, which is overwhelmingly constituted by faithfully reproducing their own previous serial lineage. Although this position would need to be verified through further dialogue with Indigenous peoples, I would suggest that from the Indigenous perspective this is precisely *why* inorganic objects *have* high intrinsic value. Mountains, for example, are perhaps the largest and oldest representation of such inorganic aggregates. Although it has a high instrumental value from the Euro-American perspective, with the life it harbours, the water it holds and supplies, the weather patterns it influences, and the minerals it can supply when it is demolished, from the typical process perspective it has no more intrinsic value than the molecules that constitute it. From the perspective of ontological relationship, however, it is a storehouse of ancient ancestral knowledge and teachings. If, as Griffin has suggested, through prehensive cognition one can become aware of an inorganic entity and its prehensions of the actual world as it has unfolded in the history of its own inherited past, it has intrinsic value precisely *because* such vast and ancient information is stored and is accessible without undo novelty or originality. Mythically speaking, Grandmother/Grandfather Mountain becomes *the* most wise and knowledgeable holder and provider of ancient ancestral teachings. Therefore, I would

argue, it seems arbitrary to have conceptual originality and intensity of experience normative for intrinsic value.

Because of its relational ontology of inter-connectedness, its acceptance of panexperientialism, and its concept of universal divine immanence, process thought tends toward a 'deep' environmental awareness and sensitivity. Based on Whitehead's concepts of 'prehension' and 'mutual immanence,' what negatively affects the natural environment, also negatively affects the whole of humankind and, in fact, God. I submit, however, that process-informed inter-cultural and/or inter-religious dialogue with Indigenous peoples could provide valuable insight into further depths of environmental concern and value. Although the details of such insight would be forthcoming in the process of dialogue and study itself, a higher degree of universal intrinsic value, along with a deeper lived awareness of the interconnectedness of the natural world and divine, may only be the beginning of what could be shared.

### 7.4 Concluding Remarks

The comparative experiment in this thesis began with simply illustrating how the Indigenous ontology is fundamentally relational, how that is reflected in cultural practices, beliefs, and language, and in what way it parallels Whitehead's metaphysic. It finished with a discussion on epistemology and how a relational ontology *is* a practical epistemology. Understanding the nature of reality is coming to know the relationships inherent in it. Although this particular study was limited to these themes, in many ways the exercise is just the beginning. By establishing parallels between Whitehead's metaphysic and the lived Indigenous experience, as well as developing a Whiteheadian understanding of Indigenous epistemology, it suggests a wealth of available topics and avenues of research, study, and dialogue which are beyond the scope of this work.

Any of the points of comparison discussed in this thesis could be a study in themselves if analyzed individually with a diversity of Indigenous cultures. Conversely, the ontology of particular Indigenous cultures could be studied in detail with the variety of themes introduced in this more general comparative exercise. Regardless, this thesis was limited to particular themes and generalized over a variety of Indigenous communities in order to establish the efficacy of Whitehead's metaphysic in accommodating an Indigenous ontology as expressed in particular Native North American societies.

It was not my expectation that Whitehead's metaphysic would fully explain all expressions and interpretations of the Indigenous experience, no more that it can accommodate all interpretations and claims made by other traditional ways. My expectation, which I submit was realized, was that there would be sufficient parallels to render the Indigenous ontology a 'live hypothesis' in the Jamesian sense to those who accept a relational/process metaphysic. From a process-informed perspective, I argue that there are enough points of positive comparison that the Indigenous view of reality, as presented in this thesis, appeals to our understanding as a real possibility.[23] In fact, I would submit that the insights that Indigenous scholars have provided that are reinforced by a process relational metaphysic, not only make such a worldview a 'live hypothesis' but should be viewed as a 'genuine option.'

For William James, a 'live hypothesis' is only one of three criteria needed to be a 'genuine option.' The choice must also be both forced and momentous. It must be forced in that there is no choice but to choose one or the other. You cannot decline choosing. The choice must also be momentous in that it is of critical importance. Choices with trivial consequences do not qualify. The choice before us is whether to continue on our

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[23] James, *Essays in Pragmatism*, 89.

present course, living in a materialistic, substantive, model of the universe, or embrace a worldview that is more consistent with the diversity of lived human experiences, as well as the findings of modern science. In this case, although there is a myriad of variations possible, the ontological viewpoints that are presented to us in the modern world seem to be either process-relational or substantive-materialistic, represented by Griffin's $Naturalism_{ppp}$ or $Naturalism_{sam}$.[24] The choice before us if true, therefore, is forced. By rejecting some form of $Naturalism_{ppp}$ one affirms some form of $Naturalism_{sam}$. To reject an ontology that understands reality as material substance that endure through time and space, an ontology becoming increasingly implausible with advances in contemporary physics, one affirms some type of process-based relational ontology, whether or not it is Whiteheadian.

This choice is also momentous because of its consequences. We are at a point as a species that to continue to reject a relational worldview that affirms the interconnectedness of the natural world, including ourselves, will only lead to further environmental destruction. A relational worldview, exemplified by Indigenous ontology, may be critical for continued survival of the human race and the planet. Therefore, I submit, the choice is momentous and therefore a 'genuine option.' At the very least, the choice is sufficiently plausible within a process perspective to allow the meeting with Indigenous peoples at the 'ethical space' in equal dialogical partnership, without the imperialism of *a priori* hegemonic presumptions. If both partners were accepted with epistemic equality, given the valuable, and potentially critical, theological and secular insights Indigenous peoples could provide, such a meeting could not only help benefit those engaged in the dialogue, but also the wider society. Such a meeting could also benefit First Nations people in their struggles to co-exist in a multicultural and multi-

[24] I realize it is possible there may be alternative ontological views, but these two do seem to broadly represent the choices before us with our current knowledge of the physical sciences.

religious country like Canada. In other words, such a meeting could be mutually transformative.

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