

NATIVE AMERICAN EVOLUTION AND CUTURAL WORLDVIEW

WORLDVIEWS IN COLLISION: THE EVOLUTION OF CIVILIZATION

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"I have read many histories written by the Spanish of things of this nation and all of them are very different from the original history...instead of saying one thing, they say another, some speaking about passion, others speaking about industry and others relating fabricated fables in the language of the moment of these and others...the Spanish do not understand well our language or what the elders are saying..."

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As we begin the new millennium we begin to question, as members of the world community, the underlying causes for the long series of patterns in Western society representative of violence (through conquest/invasion), exploitation (of the weak and poor), contamination/pollution (of Mother Earth), power abuse (contributing to greed, territorialness and individual selfishness), and social /economic inequities among man and woman. The result is a Darwinian survivalist system encased within a materialist society in which man/woman operates not as creative transcendental beings but rather as units in a primitive cultural state out of synchronization of the natural order. The problem stems from two sources: (a) the changing philosophy of the ancient civilizing order and its resultant changing patterns that make man/woman isolated individual selves and (b) the economic philosophy of materialistic gain and profit pitting man/woman in a never ending cycle of competition, social and economic inequity and economic dependency. Our challenge today is not so much with industrial or technological advances but with the culturally regressive humans (from a civilizing standpoint) that are in control of society at the institutional level via the existing power paradigms. This

problem is not new. It is one that has repeated itself in the history of Western culture, one of Conflict and Denial, Invasion, Imposition and Hegemony.

One of the problems of modern man is that he is still in the infancy of his mental development, and as such his science is likewise primitive especially when one considers the enormous complexity of a billion universes. The arguments with respect to existence of spirits, other intelligence outside our realm, the connection of the mind to the bio-plasmic body in a conceptual self organizing structure and the altering of space and molecular patterns are still gray areas in our infant scientific stage. There is too much that we cannot prove or disprove because we simply do not have the tools to measure and verify unknown phenomena. How we view the reality and the universe in the future will have much to do with how we must deal with ourselves, how we must govern. How we will think in the future is at the core of the new worldview; the question of humankind's harmony at all levels will constitute the core of the new worldview. Today it is obvious that the world is characterized by philosophies, ideologies and economic systems that do not provide harmony within humankind. The emphasis has been placed in the wrong places. The proof is in the current socio-economic, political and religious diaspora that projects a society of conflict and denial totally fragmented and out of harmony with the natural order of the universe.

Western Culture: Some Historical Perspectives

There are important moments in history that are responsible for the changing worldviews of what later is to become Western culture: The justification of slavery by Greco-Roman philosophers, the concept that one select class should rule a subservient class, the submission of women to an inferior status, leading to abuse and disregard of her dignity and rights, along with the creation of the view of Nature as part of the conflict or problem, both stemming from the Judeo-Christian interpretations of the biblical Adam and Eve story, the repression of Church theologians by Constantine and roman authorities with respect to the deletion and addition of religious concepts leading to materialism, power hierarchical structures and bureaucracy within Christianity. Most important early in the formation of the Christian Church, one can cite, moreover, early disputes by the Heads of the early Churches and the exclusion of women in the direction of services,¹ the infiltration and coercion by Roman officials on early Church Councils

(e.g. Constantinople) and the intentional discarding of the history and existence of the Essenes by early historians. (Josephus).

Culturally speaking, the Romans will leave their mark in Europe with the implantation of concepts of Conquest leading to the Medieval dictum of Might is Right, a ruling military aristocracy leading to abuse, social and economic inequities. It should be noted that the medieval church had been practicing a type of Roman theocracy that imposed its will on civil as well as religious institutions since the first council of Constantinople.² It is not, however, until the beginning of the Crusades that are called for by Pope Urban II that the Church will become a powerful institution dominating governments, controlling military regiments and establishing itself as a powerful economic empire.³ It is crusading that will provide the Church with a dominating political/economic base and the establishment of the *Santo Oficio* (Inquisition) with a tyrannical political/religious instrument to subvert nations with its obsessive mission to become the Universal Church. The popes, with their *plenitudo potestatis* decreed absolute power by declaring holy war, a practice defended by the law of *bellum justum* of St. Augustine.

Thus, the Crusades mark the beginnings of European religious colonialism with the underlying motives of expansionism (imperialism), the imposition of Roman Catholic Christian rule and dogma, and the papal idea of creating their Roman Christian church as the Universal Church of the world.⁴ From crusading stem the ideas of invasion, plunder and booty with materialism and avarice as motivating forces. The idea of Might is Right practiced in the European Middle Ages brings about the concept of power as a fundamental right developing as a consequence, imperialistic and despotic tendencies. Moreover, the leading and ruling families of all of medieval Europe derived from a warrior tradition, a Nordic warrior spirit that was extended to all of the nobility in Europe as well as Spain.⁵

It is with Western culture via European nations impacting the Americas that will continue the cultural /political paradigm begun by the Romans notably that of Conquest i.e. usurpation and profiteering.

With the arrival of Western culture came, (1) the medieval concept of Might is Right leading to imperialistic Conquest and a *bellum justum* shielded by religious fanaticism.

(2) *Machismo* and the female as an underclass citizen, (stripping her of her rights and dignity) (3) the introduction of color and race prejudice (toward Native Americans, Blacks, Asians Jews and foreigners that did not fit the mainstream mold), (4) the introduction of religions based on fear and damnation (self righteous and condemning of other cultures and religions), (5) religious intolerance (as witnessed in the American colonies as well as Spanish-Speaking America), (6) a patriarchal system of social and economic inequities to the underclass, and (7) avarice and materialism (creating economic and social inequities along with race and religion).

While there is religious hatred between Anglo-Saxon and Spanish cultures, there remains religious fanaticism and intolerance of Native spiritual beliefs on both Protestant and Catholic sectors of society. From this myopic stance springs cultural and racial prejudice against Moors, Gypsies, Africans, Jews and Native Americans. The Middle Ages further contributed to the concept of might is right which facilitates the idea of invasion/conquest leading to imperialism and expansionism. The Middle Ages gave rise to crusading, conquests and booty, an ideal of possession and materialism as the reward; the Aristotelian ideal of the elect dominating the underclasses, additionally gives rise to the ideal of enslavement and the separation of classes. Within this Judeo/Christian Western model the woman remains a domestic and secondary entity in a society of privileged classes, which constitute a religious/civil plutocracy. It is precisely the arrogant/righteous attitude of the governing classes together with a recalcitrant individualism that is directly responsible for cultural genocide against people of color and different cultures.⁶

Western Culture vs. Native-American Culture: Two Worldviews in Collision

As one looks ahead to the twenty-first century, the question arises regarding change and the new vision for the future. Currently, the Western worldview has been negatively characterized as mechanistic, rationalist and linear by such notable figures as Alfred North Whitehead, James Jean, and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz. Essentially, human kind has dealt with two distinct worldviews. One is intrinsic in which there is an essential unity on the Universe and any dynamic and cyclic interplay of opposites as part of that unity. The basic unity of the universe also contains an awareness of a mutual interaction of all things. This worldview is intrinsically dynamic and contains time and

change as essential features. The Cosmos, therefore, is one inseparable reality, forever in motion, alive, organic, spiritual and material at the same time.

The second worldview is extrinsic in which there is mechanistic, fragmented view of the world. There is a division of nature into separate objects. Here the forces causing motion are outside the object. In this model, there is separation of spirit and matter. Rather than the unity of the universe, there is an intelligent and personal God who stands above the world and directs it.

The first worldview (intrinsic) belongs to the ancient civilizations best represented by pre-Columbian Native American society. While there is very little information on pre-history in Academe as it relates to advanced pre-Columbian civilizations prior to 10,000 B. C., there appears to be present a continuing profound understanding of Nature and reality as astronomy and other sciences provided a basis for this intrinsic worldview. This view surprisingly is futuristic and in accord with the New Physics, which parallels a non-Western view of reality.

The second worldview properly belongs to what is known as the Western worldview. It begins appropriately with the Greek civilization circa 600 B. C. with Eleatic School of Thought. Here, the split of the unity of the universe caused man to be separated from his Creator and now has to see a Divine Principle above all Gods and man. This idea was promoted and developed further by Parmenides of Elea. From the split in unity emerged a Personal God that commands and punishes. As a consequence of this classical Greek model, there was a strong philosophical hold by the Christian Church supporting those doctrines interpreting nature and reality that lasted throughout the Middle Ages.⁷

From the ancient Greeks there has been a bifurcation in reality, which has been carried on through approaches to nature and approaches to the “divine”. According to D. Coole, its foundations can be found in Greek origin myths. Coole not only sees their preference for the rational but also a preferential chauvinistic attitude. Zeus impregnates the goddess of wisdom then swallows her and give birth to his daughter, Athena, from his head, suggesting now, according to Coole, “that the male vision is of a superior kind, rooted in reason rather than in the dark recesses of the flesh”⁸. This superiority of the rational over the physical is carried on through Western philosophy. Plato sees the world

as a world of imperfect shadows, reflecting the perfect forms. He also views the body as unholy and the world devoid of meaning.⁹ His student Aristotle although an empiricist creates a hierarchy of being, with the rational at the summit. St. Paul successfully grafts the Greek superiority of the soul over the body on to Christianity. Augustine merges Platonism with Christianity, as Aquinas later merges Aristotelianism with Christianity. This Western tradition emphasizes either transcending the body, the physical or splitting from it. The Spiritual becomes remote from the day to day. This allows humans to see the physical as inferior to the rational, nature as inferior to humans. It ultimately sets the stage for people to see the world as “dead” and humanity as the ultimate beneficiary and arbiter of Nature.¹⁰ This de-spiritualization can result in a faltering experience where people can become insensitive to those experiences that do not fit the rational model. When the Middle Ages ended with the demise of scholasticism, Descartes further fragmented Western’s view of Nature on a fundamental division of two separate and independent realms; that of mind and that of matter. The Cartesian division allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and completely separate from themselves and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assimilated to an enormous machine. This mechanistic worldview was held by Isaac Newton, which dominated all scientific thought to the beginning of the XX Century. The XX Century with the rise of the industrial and technological revolution has further added to the materialistic and fragmentary view of reality.

Thus when we state that the Native American worldview is non-Western it is because it understood the natural unity of all things in the universe, the interconnectedness of all living things. It transcends the notion of an isolated individual self and sees rather the necessity to identify with ultimate reality (Manitou, Téotl/Zentéotl, Hunab Ku, etc). In this manner, Native Americans in both continents did not separate themselves from the Creator but rather established an interconnection to all living things; moreover, the need for self actualization and the search for a deeper meaning which is within each person since he is connected to the Creator.¹¹

In contrast, Western civilization took another path to perceiving reality. Its principle concepts of separation from ultimate reality, its division of Nature and the separation of spirit and matter, and an extrinsic fragmentation of the material world set

the stage for the rationalization and objectivity and further division of reality. Cartesianism led Western man to equate his identity with his primitive notion of mind (still to be defined adequately) rather than his whole organism, creating isolated egos existing “inside” their bodies. Each individual was, moreover split into a large number of separate compartments, according to his or her activities, talents, feelings, beliefs, etc; all of which are engaged in endless conflicts generating continuous metaphysical confusion and frustration. In addition to Octavio Paz who called for an end to our linear perception as well as to the idea of history as progress, other influential writers have come around to understanding the intrinsic Native American perception. Jorge Luis Borges, one the more influential literary giants of the XX Century underscores the idea of the indivisible divinity operating within us, the idea of dreaming the world and thus creating it, mysterious yet visible. Borges further consented that our visible reality is comprised of ethereal intervals of non-logic in its architecture, that we might know it as false.¹² Similarly, astronomer Sir James Jeans addresses a non-Western perception of reality, a type of omnijective nature of reality. How omnijective nature of reality will change Western civilization remains to be seen, but certainly it will be transformative.

The Americas: Imposition and Hegemony in the United States

Religious fanaticism by the Spanish in the Middle Ages is well documented via the *Sanctum Officium* or

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