

Indigenous Knowledge and the More-Than-Human World: Epistemic Injustice and Knowledge Transfer

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Abstract

Industrialised societies are failing to collaborate with Indigenous minorities on the task of finding a new, harmonious relationship with non-human nature in an era when we are no longer hunter-gatherers.

Indigenous contribution is first and foremost a matter of Indigenous dignity. In addition, it is also one of necessity.

This paper argues that Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach is able to secure Indigenous dignity once an eleventh capability, that of contribution, has been added to Nussbaum's existing ten. Realisation of this capability involves the following steps:

Firstly, deliberation is necessary to ensure minority contribution in a political system based on the aggregation of votes.

Secondly, successful deliberation is contingent on the elimination of epistemic injustice, both of Miranda Fricker's two types caused by discrimination, and of a third type caused by the impossibility of achieving a complete phenomenological reduction: understanding can remain elusive where there is insufficient familiarity with each other's vantage points.

Thirdly, therefore, and following Mary Midgley's advice to approach a new vantage point by initially starting from one's familiar one, this paper explores a collection of first-hand accounts of Indigenous philosophies, and attempts to understand these in light of some Western counterparts.

It is as a result of this exploration that it becomes clear that it is above all our Cartesian distancing from non-human nature that is preventing industrialised societies from rediscovering our relationship with it. Intellectual engagement with Indigenous philosophies quickly points us beyond its own boundaries, and in the direction of a complex view of humanity as embodied, emotional, and interrelated as well as rational beings. This Indigenous view shares significant similarities with the one proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his final years, and endorsed by Louise Westling's study of contemporary interdisciplinary work encompassing philosophy, ethology and biosemiotics: we share in the flesh of the world.

It is for this reason that the knowledge we stand to gain from our Indigenous fellow humans cannot be exclusively propositional.

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Introduction

In January 2020, bush fires of unprecedented magnitude devastated large parts of Australia. Amidst rescue missions and appeals for international aid, a local voice spoke out and largely remained unheard: Indigenous Australians knew how to prevent these bush fires, but instances of the dominant majority learning from them are few and far between.¹

To assess what can be done about this, this paper is going to examine the option of extending Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach² to the additional scenario of sharing space and time with Indigenous peoples. It is then going to present reasons why this approach, although superior to other options available, cannot be sufficient on its own, and suggest additional measures to complement it.

Firstly, it has been shown that we have an existential need for purpose: it is important to us to contribute to the society we find ourselves in, alongside being on the receiving end of its rights and benefits.³ This means that in order to meet Indigenous societies' needs as members of their encapsulating ones, an eleventh capability – that of contribution – is needed to complement Nussbaum's existing ten.⁴

Secondly, some situations are incapable of being resolved without collaboration, as illustrated by the Tragedy of the Commons.⁵ The current environmental crisis is one of these.⁶ In order to allow the above contribution in a system primarily reliant on the aggregation of votes, and to ensure that all voices are heard before votes are cast, Robert Garner's work on the use of deliberative elements of democracy⁷ will be explored.

¹ L. Allam, 'Right Fire For A Right Future: How Cultural Burning Can Protect Australia From Catastrophic Blazes', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/19/right-fire-for-right-future-how-cultural-burning-can-protect-australia-from-catastrophic-blazes?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

² M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³ V. Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp.106-117.

⁴ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, pp.76-78.

⁵ G. Hardin, 'The Tragedy Of The Commons', in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. by J. Benson (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.185-196.

⁶ R. Lozano, 'Collaboration As A Pathway For Sustainability', *Sustainable Development* 15, pp.370-381 (2007), DOI <10.1002/sd.322>, [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

⁷ R. Garner, 'Animals And Democratic Theory: Beyond An Anthropocentric Account', *Contemporary Political Theory*; Vol.16, Issue 4 (Nov 2017), pp. 459-477. DOI:10.1057/s41296-016-0072-0 [Accessed: 25 February 2020].

Thirdly, deliberation requires understanding. It follows from the impossibility of achieving a complete phenomenological reduction⁸ that in addition to Miranda Fricker's two types of epistemic injustice,⁹ there must be a third one, whereby gaps in understanding may remain through sheer unfamiliarity with each other's vantage points – and that this third type must persist even in a hypothetical situation where discrimination and prejudice have ceased to exist, and where Fricker's two types of epistemic injustice have been eliminated. Combining our necessarily divergent natural attitudes, and building mutual understanding, requires us first to attain a degree of familiarity.¹⁰

In order to explore ways of fostering the mutual understanding that is still bound to be elusive at least in part at this point, and in an attempt to find a remedy for the third type of epistemic injustice, I am going to follow Mary Midgley¹¹ in approaching an unfamiliar world view by initially working towards it from a familiar one's reference points. I am going to relate two aspects of Indigenous philosophies in relation to non-human nature to some Western counterparts.

The Indigenous philosophical perspectives are going to be first-hand, and they are mainly going to be provided by the eight Indigenous holders of PhDs in Western Philosophy in the United States at the time of publication of Anne Waters' *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*,¹² which is the collection of their work on the subject that was used. Indigenous scholars' support in relation to Indigenous philosophies outside the United States is going to be drawn from some interdisciplinary work that took place at Harvard, and was documented in John Grim's *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology*.¹³ The Indigenous scholars cited almost unanimously take a phenomenological approach, stressing a tendency

⁸ T.Toadvine, 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N.Zalta, (Spring 2019 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/merleau-ponty/>> [Accessed: 6 March 2020].

⁹ M.Fricker, 'Evolving Concepts Of Epistemic Injustice' in I.J.Kidd, J.Medina, G.Pohlhaus Jr. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook Of Epistemic Injustice* (Abingdon: Routledge 2017), pp.53-60. Fricker's two types of epistemic injustice (testimonial injustice, which means failure to take someone's testimony seriously on the grounds of irrelevant criteria, and hermeneutic injustice, which means withholding concepts from someone which they would need in order to be heard) both occur due to discrimination. Both are going to be explored in more detail below.

¹⁰ M.Midgley, *Beast And Man* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.335.

¹¹ M.Midgley, *Animals And Why They Matter* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p.127.

¹² A.Waters (ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004).

¹³ J.Grim (ed.), *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

in Indigenous philosophy to remain closer to the natural attitude than Western philosophy typically aims to.

It is through this third step, through the examination of Indigenous philosophies based on the natural attitude, that it is going to become clear that recovery of our ability to find our relationship with non-human nature is going to require emotional as well as propositional learning on the part of industrialised societies.

This will in no way imply any romanticising idealisation of the “noble savage”,¹⁴ or the removal of science from our own body of knowledge. It will, however, imply the acceptance of other forms of knowledge into the fold. The decline of our Western ability to relate well to non-human nature is a learnt incompetence,¹⁵ and its reclaim is going to involve us as entire intellectual, emotional and embodied beings, as opposed to exclusively challenging our intellects.¹⁶

Chapter 1. The case for a capabilities approach

The *UN Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples* makes chilling reading.¹⁷ If there is a need for a document that explicitly asserts the dignity of Indigenous individuals and peoples, then this can only mean that their dignity has not yet become lived reality. In order for it to become lived reality, it is necessary for it to be reflected in the political structures affecting Indigenous peoples.

Martha Nussbaum’s *Frontiers of Justice* places dignity at the centre of its approach. Nussbaum rejects a utilitarian approach on the grounds that its aggregative method carries a danger of disregarding individuals.¹⁸ She then argues that while social contract approaches

¹⁴ T.A.Gonzales and M.K.Nelson, ‘Contemporary Native American Responses To Environmental Threats In Indian Country’, in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.495-538.

¹⁵ W.Kymlicka and S.Donaldson, ‘Animals And The Frontiers Of Citizenship’, *Oxford Journal Of Legal Studies*, Vol.34, No.2 (2014), pp.201-219, DOI: 10.1093/ojls/gqu001 [Accessed: 29 February 2020].

¹⁶ K.Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards An Ecology Of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷ United Nations, *United Nations Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples*, 2007 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf> [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

¹⁸ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, p.224.

are able to avoid this danger, they may still fail in relation to those whose contribution may not be immediately obvious.¹⁹

Nussbaum suggests on these grounds that a capabilities approach is better suited than other approaches to ensuring just treatment – defined as dignified and compassionate treatment – of disabled people, of nations affected by global inequality, and of non-human animals.²⁰ The common ground shared by the three, according to Nussbaum, is that all three may be affected by the above potential shortcoming of a social contract approach: for all three, it may not be immediately obvious to the dominant majority in what way the concept of mutual advantage, and therefore the societal benefits of including them in a social contract approach, might apply to them. All three, in order to receive justice in the sense of dignified and compassionate treatment, at least at first glance appear to require society to grant more to them than it is going to receive in return.²¹

In the first part of this chapter, I am going to argue that Nussbaum's approach can be applied to a fourth group, to that of Indigenous minorities. Their situation is similar to that of the three groups discussed by Nussbaum: firstly, Indigenous minorities, too, are not yet being treated with the dignity they deserve. Secondly, discourse on Indigenous minorities' position in their encapsulating societies, too, can have a tendency to focus mainly on what the dominant majority should grant "them" in order for justice to prevail:²² their inclusion is discussed as a matter of human rights, and rightly so. Awareness of their potential contribution, however – as, for example, in the newspaper article on bush fires cited above – tends to be the exception rather than the rule, again in a similar way to Nussbaum's three groups of people with disabilities, nations affected by global inequality, and non-human animals.

I am going to argue that Nussbaum is right to require societies to be just (in the above sense of justice meaning dignity and compassion) in their treatment of all their members: I agree that this is no more than decent – regardless of any actual or perceived return on

¹⁹ Ibid., p.34.

²⁰ Ibid., p.14-22.

²¹ Ibid., p.3.

²² S.Song, 'Multiculturalism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. by E.N.Zalta (Spring 2017 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/multiculturalism/>> [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

investment, and simply on the grounds of fellowship²³ – and further, that a capabilities approach is an appropriate platform for achieving this, and that the approach can easily be applied to the situation of Indigenous minorities as a fourth group.

What I am equally interested in, however, is what happens next, and this is going to be the focus of the latter part of this chapter. Once members of a society are receiving the dignified and compassionate treatment that allows them to flourish, I believe, with Amartya Sen,²⁴ that in some (albeit perhaps unexpected) shape or form, they are not only going to *strive* to put something back, but they are also going to *succeed* in doing so.

Therefore, I am going to argue that the dominant majority's expectation of the absence of any return on investment, where it prevails, is mistaken: members of a society will go to great lengths to find ways to contribute if we allow them to. It was the knowledge of having a purpose to fulfil after release, and not the expectation of having interests to pursue, that was the most significant factor in preventing suicide in Nazi concentration camps.²⁵ I am going to return to this existential need to contribute, and its potential implications for the good of society, in the latter part of this chapter.

a) Application of Nussbaum's capabilities approach to Indigenous minorities

There are four particular reasons why the existing capabilities on Nussbaum's list chime with the requirements of the *Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples*.

First and foremost, this is due to the spirit of fostering dignity and compassion that the capabilities were conceived in. Nussbaum is adamant that dignity does not depend on actual or perceived capacity, nor on actual or perceived usefulness,²⁶ but solely exists on the grounds of having been born human.²⁷ She reiterates that it is imperative for the system to be held together by fellowship rather than mutual advantage,²⁸ and in her final section (on non-human animals) concedes the entitlement of all creatures, non-human as well as human, to adequate opportunities for a flourishing life.²⁹

²³ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, pp.222-3.

²⁴ A.Sen, *Development As Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.270.

²⁵ Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, pp.106-117.

²⁶ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, p.17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.281.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.324.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.384.

Secondly, Nussbaum's list of proposed capabilities includes several that are known to play a particular role in Indigenous philosophy, such as (5) emotions, (7) affiliation, and (8) other species.³⁰

Thirdly, the capabilities on Nussbaum's list are phrased in sufficiently broad terms to accommodate their expression according to a variety of world views. For example, number 8 ("Other Species: being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature"³¹) is likely to be actualised in a range of diverse expressions, dependent on culture and on personality, and it is phrased in a way that will accommodate this. The author explicitly states that this is intentional, and that her aim is to support a variety of world views by providing a basis for an overlapping consensus.³²

Finally, Nussbaum's capabilities approach is outcome-oriented. This is not meant in a utilitarian sense of calculating aggregated outcomes of happiness: on the contrary, it is defined as the outcome for each and every citizen of having each and every capability on the list.³³ Its distinction lies in the fact that its work is not done as soon as particular procedures have been followed (which may or may not be successful), but only once the capabilities have been achieved for everyone. As a result, once Nussbaum's capabilities approach has been realised, it will have made obsolete any written declarations asserting dignity, because it will have made dignity a reality. Its outcome-orientation means that there is no room for dignity to fall through the cracks of insufficient understanding and indirect discrimination.

Where the approach needs adaptation before application to diverse groups (as opposed to diverse individuals), Nussbaum has already made provision to include a role for institutions.³⁴ The situation of diverse groups within *one* society (as opposed to internationally between many) is touched on, in relation to different species, in Nussbaum's discussion of her final scenario of non-human animals. Although the question of species' capabilities is largely treated as a question of a collection of individuals' capabilities,³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., p.76-7.

³¹ Ibid., p.77.

³² Ibid., p.297.

³³ Ibid., p.82.

³⁴ Ibid., p.306.

³⁵ Ibid., p.357.

acknowledgement is made of the parallel between the sovereignty of a nation in relation to other nations in an international context, and the sovereignty of, for example, a species, in a context that need not be international. Nussbaum is clear that also in the latter case, the sovereignty of a species to determine its own way of flourishing has moral weight.³⁶

It is due to this clarification of Nussbaum's that when the model is applied to the additional scenario of an Indigenous minority encapsulated in an ethnically diverse nation state, Will Kymlicka's work on group-differentiated citizenship can be drawn on to allow certain capabilities to function.³⁷ Capability number 10, regarding property rights, is an example of this:³⁸ once this capability has been adapted for the new situation of groups within groups to include Kymlicka's work on group-differentiated citizenship, and allows the option of, for example, collective land ownership, it becomes capable of accommodating Indigenous minorities. Since protection exists in Kymlicka's model for individuals and minorities within minorities,³⁹ and since it has been shown above that Nussbaum believes that a group's sovereignty to determine its own way of flourishing has moral weight, the inclusion of Kymlicka's group-differentiated citizenship for Indigenous minorities is compatible with Nussbaum's approach.

In summary, the approach, in a further application of its model for dignified and compassionate treatment of all members of society, is capable of accommodating the new, fourth scenario of Indigenous peoples within nation states.

b) The need to add contribution as an eleventh capability

Our existential need to contribute to something larger than ourselves,⁴⁰ on the other hand, is not yet catered for in Nussbaum's model. It is a need that appears to apply across

³⁶ Ibid., p.373.

³⁷ W.Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory Of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁸ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, p.77.

³⁹ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p.153.

⁴⁰ Robin Attfield, for example, discusses contribution as an aspect of the creative process of evolution: R.Attfield, 'Grammars Of Creativity', *The Heythrop Journal* LXI (2019), pp.381-392, p.389, DOI: 10.1111/heyj.13189 [Accessed: 10 May 2020]. Attfield's paper argues from a theistic point of view. Similar arguments can be made from other, not necessarily religious, vantage points that acknowledge the involvement of the individual in the being and in the becoming of a greater whole, as shown in Chapter 3 below.

cultures. Frankl's fellow inmates above were European; a report from Japan describes a similar dynamic.⁴¹ Reciprocity is also intrinsic to a variety of Indigenous philosophies across the globe.⁴² When Midgley speaks of natural traits on which culture only allows us a say with regards to *how* we are going to express them, but never with regards to the fact *that* we are going to express them,⁴³ there is a case to be made that reciprocity may be an example of this.

Either way – whether reciprocity is an innate feature, or whether it just happens to be an intrinsic part of a wide variety Wittgensteinian riverbeds⁴⁴ around the world – the fact remains that in any of the riverbeds that fall into this group, those who are excluded from making their contribution are going to be leading less than fully flourishing lives in this regard.

Miranda Fricker, from a consciously English perspective, speaks of the frustration experienced when one's offer of making someone a cup of tea is rejected,⁴⁵ before going on to frame reciprocity as an intrinsic, cross-cultural need. She then extends this to the situation of epistemic giving, stressing that it is interpretations, alongside information, that we are eager to share, and stating the importance of including epistemic contribution in any list of capabilities.

Havi Carel takes this further, giving examples from a healthcare setting to illustrate the difference between being treated as an informant, and being treated as a participant in interpretation.⁴⁶ According to Carel, epistemic contribution has only been achieved once the latter has been allowed to take place. From a phenomenological point of view (which is also Carel's preferred one), this is unquestionably the case: to do anything else would be to take the information provided by the informant out of context, and to invalidate their unique vantage point.

⁴¹ J.Knight, 'Feeding Mr. Monkey: Cross-Species Food 'Exchange' In Japanese Monkey Parks' in *Animals In Person: Cultural Perspectives On Animal-Human Intimacy*, ed. by J.Knight (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp.231-254.

⁴² A number of examples are included in Chapter 3 below.

⁴³ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.285.

⁴⁴ O.Hanfling, *Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* (New York: SUNY, 1989), p.162.

⁴⁵ M.Fricker, 'Epistemic Contribution As A Central Human Capability', in *The Equal Society*, ed. by G.Hull (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp.73-90.

⁴⁶ H.Carel, and I.J.Kidd, 'Epistemic Injustice In Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis', *Medicine, Healthcare And Philosophy* (2014:17), pp.529-540, DOI: 10.1007/s11019-014-9560-2 [Accessed: 25 February 2020].

Carel's work includes a proposed remedy for this, which I am going to return to in the chapter on deliberation below.

This invalidation of the informant's vantage point is exactly the mechanism that has been described with regards to Western treatment of the few aspects of Indigenous knowledge that have been incorporated into Western epistemologies. Western research in Indigenous settings has tended to involve asking Indigenous individuals to act as informants, before proceeding to reframe the information received on the basis of Western assumptions, and dismissing Indigenous interpretations and contexts altogether.⁴⁷ According to Carel's above definition, this constitutes prevention of an Indigenous contribution being made, and such situations have been reported to have left Indigenous participants feeling that they had been treated as less than human,⁴⁸ highlighting the centrality of contribution to a flourishing life.

Fricker proposes to add contribution as an eleventh capability to Nussbaum's list. In this context, she cites, and distances herself from, Wolff's and De Shalit's rather scathing assessment of Nussbaum's capabilities approach as portraying the person "as a receiver"⁴⁹.

I agree with Fricker: there is a difference between stating that any member of a society deserves justice in the form of dignity and compassion, regardless of return on investment, and then not discussing the matter any further, on the one hand (which is what Nussbaum does), and stating that any member of a society deserves justice in the form of dignity and compassion, regardless of return on investment, and then deciding that this is inevitably all that there can ever be to them, on the other (which Nussbaum does not do; she simply does not expand on the issue). – Either way, the need remains to include the ability to contribute as an additional capability in Nussbaum's list.

Fricker's reasons for stressing the importance of universal epistemic contribution are twofold: firstly, the evidence base for knowledge becomes corrupted if some are prevented from contributing and, secondly, universal contribution is a prerequisite of non-domination.

⁴⁷ L.T.Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies* (Croydon: Zed Books Ltd., 2012), p.10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.9.

⁴⁹ J.Wolff and A.De-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p.45.

The Australian bush fires in the newspaper article cited in the Introduction, as well as the continuing frustration of Indigenous peoples with their place in society mentioned in the chapter on deliberation below, suggest that Fricker's assessment is accurate on both counts.

Although Fricker advocates the inclusion of *epistemic* contribution as a capability, her reference to social reciprocity in other parts of her paper implies openness to a wider application – as does her example of a refused offer of a cup of tea, and her use of the metaphor of “the epistemic breaking of bread”.

Fricker is not alone in endorsing a capabilities approach while advocating the inclusion of the ability to contribute.

It is especially in view of Amartya Sen's observation that capabilities are supportive of each other that it becomes clear that the above statements of our need to contribute are not arguments against, but additional arguments in favour of a capabilities approach. If, in Sen's experience, capabilities are mutually supportive, and Sen (despite his reluctance to settle on a universal list of capabilities)⁵⁰ stresses the importance of the ability to contribute, then it is reasonable to expect that contribution as an eleventh capability will enhance Nussbaum's existing ten, and vice versa.

While Sen sees a clear role for the capability of contribution in benefiting society as a whole, this is not his first reason for advocating it: Sen's account of his experience in developing countries conceptualises development as “the expansion of human capability to lead more worthwhile and more free lives.”⁵¹ He points out that this requires us to see human beings not solely as means of production, but also as ends in themselves.⁵² This chimes with Nussbaum's earlier point regarding the irrelevance of any return on investment to anyone's eligibility for inclusion.

Sen's work contains several examples of our desire to contribute to, as well as to be supported by, society: from his account of the psychological harm caused by unemployment despite the availability of income support,⁵³ to observations on our disposition, through

⁵⁰ I. Robeyns, 'The Capability Approach', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N. Zalta (Winter 2016 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/capability-approach/>>. [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

⁵¹ Sen, *Development As Freedom*, pp.295-296.

⁵² Ibid., p.296.

⁵³ Ibid., p.94.

sympathy or commitment, to transcend self-interest willingly,⁵⁴ Sen is clear that development must transcend the provision of distributive justice, both on the grounds of economic sense and on the grounds of humanity.

Raimond Gaita, too, frames the issue in terms of a conception of equality that transcends distributive justice: “We must be open to the distinctive voice of others, and that in turn means that we must encourage the conditions in which those voices can form and be heard.”⁵⁵

In other words, the better we are able to transcend our initial perceptions, and to see those who initially appear to be outside the mainstream as more than potential service users, but first and foremost as fellow citizens, the better we are going to be able to meet their needs as fellow citizens by allowing them all aspects of their dignity, which includes the ability to contribute. And once this ability has been exercised, what we are likely to find is that its benefit has extended not solely to those exercising it, but to everyone.

Having considered this dynamic, we can now see that it should not even surprise us if we did not see what the contribution of the previously marginalised was going to be until they were empowered to make it: of course we did not, as we needed them, in their diversity, to show us.

We are thus left with a two-stage process. In the first instance, contribution is an existential need which should, as a matter of dignity and compassion, be allowed to find expression. Nussbaum describes her approach as Aristotelian, by which she means supportive of enabling people to live lives that are fully human.⁵⁶ It has been shown above that in order to live a fully human life as a member of a social group where reciprocity plays a role, one must be allowed to contribute as well as to receive: it feels insulting to have one’s offer of a cup of tea turned down.⁵⁷

Then, in a second step, a society that has succeeded in allowing this contribution is going to reap the benefits. The 2020 bush fires are a negative example, illustrating what happens when this is not accomplished: the potential Indigenous contribution, although clearly

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.270.

⁵⁵ R.Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.104.

⁵⁶ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, p.278.

⁵⁷ Fricker, ‘Epistemic Contribution As A Central Human Capability’.

available, is not yet being utilised. The effect is not solely undignified treatment of the Indigenous minority who are prevented from contributing, although this alone would be reason enough to do better. The effect is also the loss of the minority's unique contribution to the whole that would be useful to everyone, and that the dominant majority, without Indigenous involvement, has been unable to make.

It is therefore on the dual grounds of dignity *and* of mutual benefit that I am taking up Nussbaum's invitation to add to her list of capabilities,⁵⁸ and proposing, with Fricker, the addition of an eleventh: that of making a contribution.

Chapter 2. The role of deliberation: why it is needed, and why it cannot be enough

The model proposed in the previous chapter is capable of safeguarding Indigenous communities' right, for example, to own their land collectively, and to treat it with respect, according to their own conception of what this implies, within the boundaries of what is deemed to be their collectively-owned land.

However, not all environmental problems respect such boundaries: the right to sovereignty over one's own piece of land quickly becomes meaningless in light of some of these problems' ability to spread. Pesticides, for example, have been shown to appear in locations where it is unrealistic to suppose that they could ever have been utilised.⁵⁹ Global warming, too, is *global* warming, and the Tragedy of the Commons⁶⁰ applies. The bush fires cited above, once established, continued to spread, irrespective of whose land it was that they were devastating.

This means that for at least some Indigenous rights, the only way of respecting them is through a collaborative approach to environmental problems. As shown by Fricker in the previous chapter, collaboration entails a need for universal epistemic contribution in order to attain a viable knowledge base, and in order to avoid domination.

⁵⁸ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, p.76.

⁵⁹ S.Corsolinia et al., 'Occurrence of organochlorine pesticides (OCPs) and their enantiomeric signatures, and concentrations of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in the Adélie penguin food web, Antarctica', *Environmental Pollution*, Vol.140(2), March 2006, pp.371-382, URL: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0269749105003805>> [Accessed: 14 April 2020].

⁶⁰ Hardin, 'The Tragedy Of The Commons'.

While members of Indigenous communities almost inevitably absorb Western knowledge and culture through their exposure to the dominant majority's education system,⁶¹ it is far less common for Indigenous knowledge to be utilised by the encapsulating society's mainstream. Exceptions do exist, but they tend to involve isolated pieces of information being taken out of context for profit.⁶²

The fact that a Western newspaper at least *knows* that there is Indigenous knowledge in relation to the prevention of bush fires arguably constitutes some success in this regard. However, this is unfortunately where it ends: to prevent the 2020 bush fires, collective preventative measures would have had to be taken, and they were not, nor are they likely to be. In a system that is almost exclusively based on the aggregation of votes, results exclusively based on mainstream knowledge cannot help but continue to be the most likely outcome, unless additional steps are taken to enable voters' access to all the knowledge available – in other words, to ensure universal epistemic contribution – before they cast their vote. If these additional steps continue not to be taken, then the eleventh capability – that of contribution – is going to continue not to be fully realised.

This is, on the one hand, a matter of decency, as shown by Nussbaum above, and it should be implemented on those grounds alone. However, since nobody wants bush fires, it is also a matter of the dominant majority then standing to benefit from the minority's empowerment when it manifests itself in an innovative contribution that the dominant majority could not have made without this newly added diversity.

Garner's research on the effect of deliberation in relation to animal rights demonstrates that introduction of deliberative elements into the democratic process can be helpful in this regard. Citing Jürgen Habermas, he introduces three functions of deliberation in democracy, all of which have the potential to result in a dominant majority learning from a minority group (in his case, from animal rights activists): firstly, the epistemic function of information and of detecting errors in reasoning; secondly, the intrinsic value of deliberation, also

⁶¹ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.5.

⁶² L.A. Whitt, 'Biocolonialism And The Commocification Of Knowledge', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A. Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.188-213.

fostering education and political equality; thirdly, the ability to build consensus, or at least understanding of the opposition's point of view.⁶³

Recent experience in Ireland supports Garner's point: participant comments after a recently held citizens' assembly stressed the method's success in preventing misrepresentation, and in supporting reasoned debate.⁶⁴

It is, however, less likely that deliberation on its own is going to be sufficient in the presence of genuine barriers to mutual understanding: such barriers will first need to be overcome before successful deliberation is able to take place.

The most obvious such barrier, with regards to relations between a dominant majority and an Indigenous minority, is the burden of history. Any discourse at the present time cannot help but take place against a historical background where – to stay with the example of Australia – Aborigines were not even recognised as citizens in the national census at the time that those currently old enough to be tribal elders were born.⁶⁵ Colonial practice around the world included the brutal exploitation of slave labour, and worse, in the name of a "civilising mission".⁶⁶ Looting of Indigenous graves for archaeological or anthropological purposes caused deep offence to Indigenous sensibilities, not solely due to the disrespect implied by the thefts alone, but also due to different conceptions of the meanings inherent in the loot.⁶⁷

Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out that, as a consequence, reparation must aim to restore spiritual, emotional and physical well-being alongside financial and material settlement.⁶⁸ A

⁶³ R.Garner, 'Deliberative Democracy In Action: A Case Study In Animal Protection', *Politics And Animals* Vol.4 (2018), pp.1-15, URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/64c6/e9f2b4bf57591c5a5295a4d5c2f8f23232b8.pdf> [Accessed: 25 February 2020].

⁶⁴ C.Bannock et al., 'Transparency and fairness: Irish readers on why the Citizens' Assembly worked', *The Guardian*, 22 Jan 2019, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/22/irish-readers-citizens-assembly-worked-brexid> [Accessed: 14 April 2020].

⁶⁵ D.Bell, 'Respecting The Land: Religion, Reconciliation, And Romance – An Australian Story', in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.465-484.

⁶⁶ M.Kohn and K.Reddy, 'Colonialism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N.Zalta (Fall 2017 edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/>>. [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

⁶⁷ A.Arkeketa, 'Repatriation: Religious Freedom, Equal Protection, And Institutional Racism', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.239-248.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.156.

cluster of contemporary, interdependent projects cited by Smith is underpinned by this approach.⁶⁹ Successful interventions have been reported where Indigenous processes such as healing circles have been applied.⁷⁰

A second obvious barrier to mutual understanding is the continued prevalence of Western domination in post-colonial societies. The continued exploitation described by Vandana Shiva⁷¹ not “only” constitutes financial exploitation, but is also an example of complete failure by the West to relate to the point of view being put forward by an unfamiliar society. India does not appear to be an exception in this regard, but rather the norm.⁷²

This experience chimes with Fricker’s conception of epistemic injustice, whereby unequal distribution of power can lead to the views of the powerless being discriminated against and dismissed (epistemic injustice type 1: testimonial injustice), or to the mainstream’s concepts being withheld from the powerless, preventing them from articulating legitimate concerns (epistemic injustice type 2: hermeneutical injustice).⁷³ In an Australian context, where Aboriginal attendance of Western-led educational institutions is the norm⁷⁴ (and thus the dissemination of Western concepts to Indigenous students), the encapsulating society’s failure to avail itself of Aboriginal wisdom with regards to the prevention of bush fires can therefore be interpreted as an example of Fricker’s epistemic injustice type 1.

Garner reports related criticisms being made of deliberative democracy, accusing it of reproducing existing inequalities by favouring one style of debate over another.⁷⁵ Such criticisms have also been made by Indigenous scholars,⁷⁶ some of whom now, in response, advocate refusal to engage in philosophical (as opposed to political) debate with the encapsulating society.⁷⁷ Smith, too, is wary of such engagement resulting in further loss of

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.144-162.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.156.

⁷¹ V.Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology And Survival In India* (London: Zed Books, 1988), ch.1, <URL: www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/stayingalive.pdf>, [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

⁷² Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.58.

⁷³ Fricker, ‘Evolving Concepts Of Epistemic Injustice’.

⁷⁴ Bell, ‘Respecting The Land’.

⁷⁵ Garner, ‘Animal Rights And The Deliberative Turn In Democratic Theory’, p.312.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.40.

⁷⁷ D.Turner, ‘Oral Traditions And The Politics Of (Mis)Recognition’, in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.229-238.

intellectual and cultural capacity, but is more hopeful than Dale Turner that this can be avoided if unequal power structures can be overcome.⁷⁸

Garner concedes that power is not simply going to be “bracketed by the soft tones of the seminar room,”⁷⁹ and that intervention is going to be required to counteract mainstream rigidity, for example by encouraging storytelling as an alternative form of deliberation.

Carel develops this point further, and her choice of proposed remedy promises to be highly relevant to our Indigenous minorities’ quest: when addressing a related scenario in general healthcare⁸⁰ and psychiatric care⁸¹ settings, Carel’s proposed interventions include a phenomenological toolkit.

Citing Fricker, Carel points out that both types of Fricker’s epistemic injustice may be encountered in healthcare and psychiatric settings. A patient’s testimony may be taken less seriously (epistemic injustice type 1), either on the grounds that they are not a health care professional or, particularly in a psychiatric setting, on the grounds that they are suffering from a mental health condition. In addition, as a result of not being a health care professional, a patient may lack some of the concepts whose articulation would trigger the appropriate response in the system, and thus be unable to elicit this response (epistemic injustice type 2). The patient’s position is therefore similar, in this regard, to that of an Indigenous minority experiencing existing power structures, despite attempts at deliberation being made, preventing Indigenous voices from being heard.

Besides the more accustomed remedies of changes to healthcare professionals’ training, and awareness raising to eliminate prejudice in society as a whole, Carel proposes a phenomenological toolkit to enable a shift “from the disease entity to the way in which it is given.”⁸² The latter is proposed on the grounds that from a patient’s point of view, their illness experience comes before the scientific data (for example, the exact results of a blood test) that the health care system tends to focus on. In this regard, the patient’s position can be said to be similar to that of an Indigenous society advocating environmental change. For

⁷⁸ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.109.

⁷⁹ Garner, ‘Animal Rights And The Deliberative Turn In Democratic Theory’, p.313.

⁸⁰ Carel and Kidd, ‘Epistemic Injustice In Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis’.

⁸¹ P.Crichton, H.Carel, and I.J.Kidd, ‘Epistemic Injustice In Psychiatry’, *BJPsych Bulletin* 2017, 41(2), pp.65-70, DOI: 10.1192/pb.bp.115.050682 [Accessed: 25 February 2020].

⁸² Carel and Kidd, ‘Epistemic Injustice In Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis’, p.538.

all that a blood test – or its environmental equivalent – is a valid contributor to diagnosis and treatment, it is an illusion to assume that it can successfully act as the only one: lived experience is equally relevant, because scientific data (although usually precise) is necessarily reductive, while complex situations require us to consider them in their complexity.⁸³

Due to the similarities between the scenarios described by Carel in healthcare settings and those experienced by Indigenous minorities with regards to environmental issues, it is reasonable to expect that the use of an adapted cluster of interventions, based on Carel's, is able to contribute to eliminating epistemic injustices of Fricker's types 1 and 2 in deliberation between Western and Indigenous groups. The empathy fostered by the process itself, according to Garner above, will be supportive of the intention to refrain from domination, and Carel's tools will provide practical support in achieving this.

There is, however, equal reason to expect that this new intervention is still not going to be sufficient without further help.

Although this is not explicitly stated in Carel's paper, Carel's observations on general healthcare imply the existence of a third type of epistemic injustice: she describes situations where we genuinely *cannot understand*, in addition to those above where we simply will not listen or where we prevent someone from expressing themselves.

Carel, for healthcare settings, points out that some experiences of illness can be impossible to communicate in a direct, propositional manner, "and so are only shareable with persons with whom one shares a standpoint or a sense of solidarity."⁸⁴

In other words, on an abstract level independent of a healthcare setting, Carel is referring to a complex situation, which is not capable of being captured by scientific method alone (although, of course, scientific method can be helpful in capturing particular aspects of it). In this complex situation, she has found that it may be impossible for two people to fully understand each other unless their deliberation is underpinned by the availability of shared reference points.

⁸³ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.6.

⁸⁴ Carel and Kidd, 'Epistemic Injustice In Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis', p.530.

This is exactly the experience described by Indigenous societies when attempting to discuss environmental problems with their Western counterparts. Even where genuine attempts are made by Westerners to understand what is being said, what occurs is a failure in deliberation, which is experienced by the Indigenous side as “talking past each other”, and attributed to the absence of shared reference points due to lack of familiarity with each other’s world views.⁸⁵

We are going to have trouble understanding Wittgenstein’s lion, at least initially, even in a fictional scenario where we have stopped discriminating against lions. It is because we are insufficiently familiar with the lion’s own Wittgensteinian riverbed, and for lack of shared reference points, that we are, at least initially, going to be at a loss.⁸⁶

This means that the third type of epistemic injustice can occur irrespectively of any intention to dominate (although it can, as can any miscommunication, result in inadvertent domination after the event). In a healthcare setting, for example, it could easily occur in the final moments of palliative care, and I believe it is almost inevitable that it does. Since it is impossible for a person who is not dying to know what it is like to be dying, it becomes almost inevitable that – especially once a patient can no longer speak – at least some of the care given is, even with the best of intentions, going to miss what the patient would have chosen for themselves. This means that it is going to result in the carer’s ideas, and not the patient’s, being actualised. This eventual domination will, then, not have resulted from any intention to dominate, but from genuine inability to occupy the other person’s vantage point.

It is not by chance that, for those situations where our vantage points differ but where we are able to speak, Carel’s proposed remedy involves a phenomenological approach. The problem, even in a hypothetical, future scenario where communication is no longer impeded by political inequality, consists in genuine difficulties in piecing together the jigsaw of potentially complementary, but necessarily different views of the world obtained from different vantage points. This idea is supported by Indigenous reports of more successful

⁸⁵ A.Fienup-Riordan, ‘A Guest On The Table: Ecology From The Yup’ik Eskimo Point Of View’, in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.541-558.

⁸⁶ E.Meijer, *Animal Languages* (London: John Murray, 2019), p.149.

communication having taken place once some first shared reference points had been able to be established.⁸⁷

I stated above that the failure of mainstream society to incorporate Indigenous knowledge regarding the prevention of bush fires can be interpreted as an example of Fricker's epistemic injustice type 1, and I believe this to be the case: discrimination against Indigenous minorities is still rife, as outlined in the foreword to the second edition of Smith's work.⁸⁸

However, I do not believe this to be explanatory on its own. As well as discrimination, there is also genuine lack of understanding at play, or we would have availed ourselves of the Indigenous knowledge we wanted: industrialised societies, wanting seeds, have been more than happy to help themselves to Indigenous knowledge in the form of seeds.⁸⁹

Industrialised societies also want bush fire prevention but, despite also wanting bush fire prevention, have not helped themselves to Indigenous knowledge on bush fire prevention. There must be a reason for this discrepancy.

In light of Carel's above work on phenomenology in healthcare settings, I believe that the reason for this discrepancy is that we can understand seeds enough to utilise them without first approaching Indigenous vantage points, but that we cannot understand Indigenous ways of preventing bush fires without first approaching Indigenous vantage points. We are not exclusively dealing with epistemic injustice type 1 here, even though discrimination is still rife: we are also, simultaneously, dealing with the third type.

Deliberation has been shown to be helpful – by creating a platform for knowledge transfer, empathy, and increased political equality – in moving forward towards achieving the eleventh capability of Indigenous contribution, and thus enabling humanity as a whole, collaboratively, to find a new, harmonious relationship with non-human nature. However, it has also been shown not to be enough, and it follows from the impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction that on its own, it must be incapable of being enough: it is also

⁸⁷ H.A.Feit, 'Hunting, Nature, And Metaphor: Political And Discursive Strategies In James Bay Cree Resistance And Autonomy', in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.411-452.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, pp.ix-xiv.

⁸⁹ Whitt, 'Biocolonialism And The Commodification Of Knowledge', p.191.

necessary to attempt to approach each other's vantage points before we can begin to understand each other. One such attempt is going to be made in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Two aspects of Indigenous world views

It is impossible for us to occupy a neutral vantage point.⁹⁰ Our perception is limited by our circumstances, physical as well as cultural, and it is therefore inevitable that our perception must always be incomplete.⁹¹ We cannot fully understand Thomas Nagel's bat.⁹²

The Atlantic, for early Europeans, must have been a body of water where spectacular sunsets could be observed, whereas for those on the East coast of what is now the United States, it must have been a body of water with a different name, featuring spectacular sunrises. Before Columbus enabled the two sides to compare notes, it would have been impossible for them to know that they were looking at the same body of water, let alone to produce new knowledge based on this discovery, which eventually led to our understanding of the Gulf stream.

In light of such examples, Frege's morning star and evening star⁹³ take on additional significance: there may well have been metaphysics as well as linguistics involved. The fact that two distinct expressions, carrying two distinct senses for the referent Venus, exist in at least four different languages (English, French, German, and Russian) may well mean that early speakers shaping these languages – the majority of whom would have had little knowledge of astronomy – were unaware that they were talking about Venus at both ends of their day.

In a similar way to the Atlantic and to Venus, it is likely that when Indigenous scholars complain of "talking past each other" with their Western counterparts,⁹⁴ they are referring to phenomena that we in the West would be perfectly capable of recognising, and of learning to see a new side of, if only we could bear with each other until we have become

⁹⁰ Toadvine, 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty'.

⁹¹ L. Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p.6.

⁹² T. Nagel, 'What Is It Like To Be A Bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.83, No.4, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2183914> [Accessed: 25 February 2020].

⁹³ A. George and R. Heck, 'Frege, Gottlob', in *Routledge Encyclopedia Of Philosophy*, ed. by E. Craig, vol. 3 (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.765-778.

⁹⁴ Fienup-Riordan, 'A Guest On The Table: Ecology From The Yup'ik Eskimo Point Of View', p.545.

familiar enough to achieve understanding.⁹⁵ I am going to make a tentative start, following Midgley's advice initially to approach an unfamiliar world view from the existing reference points of a familiar one.⁹⁶

Midgley's thinking in this regard – although it, too, begins with Western reference points – is diametrically opposed to the mechanism of appropriation criticised by Smith above: appropriation takes information out of context, reinterprets it according to a framework where it no longer fits, and claims ownership of it. Midgley's approach, on the other hand, expects to learn by asking increasingly knowledgeable questions as it progresses on its journey towards familiarity with previously unfamiliar reference points. This is what I hope to achieve.

Indigenous philosophies are varied – as are Western ones – but some common themes emerge within each category, and with open-mindedness and curiosity, perhaps also between them.

a) "Orthopraxy, not orthodoxy": creating meaning through action

Indigenous traditions have a tendency to be oral ones;⁹⁷ Western traditions tend to rely on the written word. At first glance, we could not be further apart. In addition, especially with Western cultures tending to supply the dominant majority in post-colonial societies, literacy is vital – and even more so for minorities within minorities, for example women – as a prerequisite of enjoying several of the capabilities proposed by Nussbaum.⁹⁸ This, in turn, may contribute to an initial impression of oral traditions' irrelevance to contemporary life,

⁹⁵ Recent research demonstrates the practical implications of Westling's above claim that our perception is culturally as well as physically mediated: Elfenbein and Ambady show that we are less able to recognise Ekman's basic emotions in the absence of cultural similarity; Jasini et al. show that positive engagement with those who are initially unfamiliar leads to acculturation and emotional attunement: A.H.Elfein and N.Ambady, 'Cultural Similarity's Consequences: A Distance Perspective on Cross-Cultural Differences in Emotion Recognition', *Journal Of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 34 No. 1, (2003) pp. 92-110, <DOI: 10.1177/0022022102239157>, [Accessed: 20 February 2020]. A.Jasini et al., 'Tuning in emotionally: Associations of cultural exposure with distal and proximal fit in acculturating youth', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, (2018), <DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2516>, [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

⁹⁶ Midgley, *Animals And Why They Matter*, p.127.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.30.

⁹⁸ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, pp.76-78. An obvious example is that illiteracy is going to make it difficult to participate effectively in political choices in a modern state.

but the two are in fact separate issues. Listening to Indigenous voices, we may find that oral traditions are not only deeply relevant today, but also perhaps more accessible to Westerners than they appear at first glance. Literacy programmes, which benefit everyone, need not take away from this: possession of a skill does not have to entail its application to every situation.

Lee Hester, in his discussion of Western and Indigenous philosophy, and in the context of Indigenous philosophies often being oral traditions, points out that the Choctaw language has no state verb “to be”: things change and interact, so that “nothing is ever in a particular state”.⁹⁹ He describes Western philosophy as being about orthodoxy, whereas Indigenous philosophy is about orthopraxy – with belonging depending more on participation than it does on formal membership. One manifestation of this is a different approach to education: there are, for example, no formal schools of Native American philosophy, but people and experiential learning are central to developing understanding.

Hester is not alone: Jack D. Forbes’ native language has a verb, as opposed to a noun, for *culture*, describing it as *together-doing*, and because this is viewed from a multispecies perspective, no conflict with nature exists – a proposition that I am going to return to in the latter part of this chapter.¹⁰⁰

Hester’s and Forbes’ characterisation of Indigenous world views as practice-orientated ones is echoed by Simeon Namunu’s description of his traditional Melanesian world view, where there is one word, *tuwalali*, for both ritual and labour: it is through practice that meaning is created and experienced.¹⁰¹

The particular way in which this is expressed in Namunu’s paper – in terms of skills linking the spirit world to the material world through the medium of human activities – may, at least initially, be beyond many Western readers’ comfort zone. What is without question, however, is that Western traditions create meaning through activity, too. Wittgenstein’s

⁹⁹ L.Hester, ‘On Philosophical Discourse: Some Intercultural Musings’, in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.263-7.

¹⁰⁰ J.D.Forbes, ‘Nature And Culture: Problematic Concepts For Native Americans’, in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.103-124.

¹⁰¹ S.B.Namunu, ‘Melanesian Religion, Ecology, and Modernization in Papua New Guinea’, in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.249-208.

description of our cultural riverbeds is but one example¹⁰²; Cora Diamond¹⁰³ and Raimond Gaita¹⁰⁴ also provide ample evidence, with Gaita showing particular openness to the possibility of meaningful relationships with non-human animals.¹⁰⁵

In light of this parallel, it appears that it is Namunu's wording, more than the deeper message that it conveys, that Western world views have difficulty with: it is belief in spirits that we like to refer to as "mistaken",¹⁰⁶ whereas the connection between activity and meaning is one that we can relate to. We readily concede that, for example, aesthetic expression can be understood as a reflection of the artist's relationship with the world.¹⁰⁷ Westling's wording shares with Namunu's the connection that it makes between the material and the non-material; the difference lies in the fact that it does so in a way that is more easily relatable from a Western point of view. And once we have accepted this link in relation to aesthetic expression, we can readily see that the same conception of connectedness between the material and the non-material may be applied to any meaningful work, from sculpture to agriculture.

The practice-orientation of Indigenous world views is, therefore, more compatible with at least some branches of Western philosophy than it appears at first glance. It is with regards to the epistemological implications of this that we appear to be further apart – as demonstrated by the following example provided by Julio Valladolid and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin.¹⁰⁸

Valladolid, after leaving his academic career to return to agricultural work on the PRATEC project in the Andes, cites Kathryn Pyne Addelson, claiming that knowledge is based on collective action, and emerges from encounters, relationships and localities. The human and non-human Andean world, and our knowledge of this world, for Valladolid, is a world of shared knowledge to participate in, as well as to collectively create.

¹⁰² Hanfling, *Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*, p.162.

¹⁰³ C.Diamond, 'Eating Meat And Eating People', in *Philosophy*, Vol. 53, No. 206 (Oct. 1978), pp. 465-479.

¹⁰⁴ Gaita, *A Common Humanity*.

¹⁰⁵ R.Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2017).

¹⁰⁶ G.Harvey, *Animism: Respecting The Living World* (London: C.Hurst & Co., 2017), p.xiii.

¹⁰⁷ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, p.123.

¹⁰⁸ J.Valladolid and F.Apffel-Marglin, 'Andean Cosmovision And The Nurturing Of Biodiversity', in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.639-670.

Addelson is unusual in the West in her support of Valladolid's views, as are those who point out that quantum physics may provide examples of multiple truths.¹⁰⁹ What Western philosophy is more accustomed to is the law of non-contradiction, which finds expression in Quine's web of belief, and in its expectation that beliefs are going to be ejected from the web as soon as they appear inconsistent with more central ones.¹¹⁰

Indigenous traditions, on the other hand, in keeping with their largely oral character reflecting the location of knowledge in its spatial and temporal setting, tend to avoid binary outlooks, and to view new knowledge as complementary to, rather than in competition with, established knowledge.¹¹¹ Examples of syncretism are testimony to this.¹¹²

In a prime example of an outlook that expects to incorporate new knowledge without taking a binary approach, Hester sees difference, but not competition between the Western and Indigenous approaches to philosophy, and is confident that the two can complement each other. True also to his above statement regarding orthopraxy, he illustrates this with an analogy, citing a practice learnt from some Yuchi friends, who plant slender corn and beans next to each other. Neither crop would thrive on its own: the slender corn, on its own, would be blown over by the wind unless it was tied in, just as the beans, on their own, would fail to thrive without the support of beanstalks. Planted together, however, both are able to support each other and flourish. Equally, Western and Indigenous philosophy, for Hester, can be mutually supportive in their difference. While accepting of the fact that, not least due to numbers, Western philosophers are going to be gatekeepers for the time being, Hester expresses faith that wisdom will shine through both ways.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ G.Cajete, 'Philosophy Of Native Science', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.45-57.

¹¹⁰ P.Hylton and G.Kemp, 'Willard Van Orman Quine', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N. Zalta (Spring 2020 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/quine/>> [Accessed: 11 April 2020].

¹¹¹ A.Waters, 'Language Matters: Nondiscrete, Nonbinary Dualism', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.97-115.

¹¹² M.E.Smith, 'Crippling The Spirit, Wounding The Soul: Native American Spiritual And Religious Oppression', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A.Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.116-129.

¹¹³ Hester, 'On Philosophical Discourse', p.265.

b) The role of non-human beings

Western world-views, largely based on Cartesian dualism, can have a tendency to treat non-human nature as something to “measure rather than understand”.¹¹⁴ Western science has provided the world with the ability to produce satellite images proving beyond doubt that both sides of the Atlantic do indeed belong to the same ocean – at the same time as being said to have produced in us the very learnt incompetence when it comes to relating to non-human nature¹¹⁵ that may well be at the root of our environmental problems including the infamous bush fires. Descartes’ treatment of nature as a collection of automatons¹¹⁶ has resulted in industrialised societies denying its moral considerability, and approaching carbon reduction as if it could be addressed from a purely anthropocentric point of view.¹¹⁷

Gregory Cajete, on the other hand, defines culture as participation in nature;¹¹⁸ Victoria Tauli-Corpuz relates that the Philippine Igorot tradition, for similar reasons, has no word for *environment*.¹¹⁹ Indigenous societies are known to have developed languages where the word for *rock* can take on inflexions denoting animate status.¹²⁰ Indigenous philosophers unanimously stress the importance of human relationships with all parts of non-human nature.¹²¹ Reciprocity extends to all members of the ecosystem, as well as to the ecosystem itself.¹²²

In this section, I am going to consider Indigenous and Western philosophies in relation to non-human animals, as well as in relation to allegedly non-sentient parts of nature, to ecosystems, and to artefacts. Again following Midgley,¹²³ I am going to aim to gain a

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.44.

¹¹⁵ Kymlicka and Donaldson, ‘Animals And The Frontiers Of Citizenship’.

¹¹⁶ D.Garber, ‘Descartes, René’, in *Routledge Encyclopedia Of Philosophy*, ed. by E.Craig, vol. 3 (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.1-18.

¹¹⁷ R.Humphreys, ‘Suffering, Sentientism And Sustainability: An Analysis Of A Non-Anthropocentric Moral Framework For Climate Ethics’, in *Climate Change Ethics And The Non-Human World*, ed. by B.G.Henning and Z.Walsh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp.49-62.

¹¹⁸ Cajete, ‘Philosophy Of Native Science’, p.46.

¹¹⁹ V.Tauli-Corpuz, ‘Interface Between Traditional Religion And Ecology Among The Igorots’, *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.281-302.

¹²⁰ Harvey, *Animism: Respecting The Living World*, p.31.

¹²¹ Cajete, ‘Philosophy Of Native Science’, p.46.

¹²² Gonzales and Nelson, ‘Contemporary Native American Responses To Environmental Threats In Indian Country’.

¹²³ Midgley, *Animals And Why They Matter*, p.127.

tentative foothold of shared understanding by working towards Indigenous ideas beginning from my own, Western, reference points, to then point out where any remaining barriers to familiarity with each other's vantage points, and to successful collaboration, might be located.

1. *Non-human animals*

With regards to non-human animals, as briefly mentioned above, Kymlicka and Donaldson point out that our failure to communicate with them is a learnt incompetence: we are socialised not to, as opposed to being innately incapable of it.¹²⁴ Eva Meijer cites many examples of successful inter-species communication, and suggests that more will follow the more we allow ourselves to create space for them.¹²⁵ Louise Westling, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's thinking as well as on interdisciplinary work taking place after Merleau-Ponty's death, demonstrates that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of our natural connection with non-human nature, despite being published half a century before it, is a logical (albeit not chronological) consequence of recent research in the fields of ethology and biosemiotics.¹²⁶

Viewed against Merleau-Ponty's background of our sharing in the "flesh of the world",¹²⁷ it becomes understandable that Thomas Nagel's conception of our appropriate treatment of enemies in a just war, acknowledging their status as fellow beings even as we potentially kill them (which Nagel applies to a human-human context only),¹²⁸ shares similarities with Indigenous hunters' engagement with their prey: Fienup-Riordan's description of respectful Yup'ik treatment of hunted animals is but one example;¹²⁹ Piers Vitebsky's extensive study of the Even in Siberia is another;¹³⁰ Viola Cordova stresses the centrality of responsibility, and of thinking "we" as opposed to "I", in all relationships.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Kymlicka and Donaldson, 'Animals And The Frontiers Of Citizenship'.

¹²⁵ Meijer, *Animal Languages*, pp.231-2.

¹²⁶ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, p.27.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp.76-77.

¹²⁸ T.Nagel, 'War And Massacre', in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1972), pp. 123-144. <URL = <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264967>>, [Accessed: 11 April 2020].

¹²⁹ Fienup-Riordan, 'A Guest On The Table: Ecology From The Yup'ik Eskimo Point Of View'.

¹³⁰ P.Vitebsky, *Reindeer People* (London: Harper Collins, 2005), pp.262-270.

¹³¹ V.F.Cordova, 'Ethics: The We And The I', in Waters,A. (ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.173-181.

Western echoes of this extension of Nagel's sentiment to relationships with non-human animals can be found not only in Gaita's¹³² and Diamond's¹³³ explorations of our relationships with domesticated animals, but also in Gaita's thoughts on his inability to shoot wild rabbits in the same spirit again after appreciating their intrinsic value and beauty,¹³⁴ as well as in Midgley's account of Iris Murdoch's encounter with a kestrel.¹³⁵

It is intriguing, in this context, that Westling cites two ancient *Western* myths to illustrate the complex relationship between human and non-human animals, encompassing both the potential for shared meanings and the ever-present, accompanying reality of potentially causing each other's death.¹³⁶ Westling's choice demonstrates that this complex relationship has been part of our shared philosophical heritage for millennia – perhaps to the point of being part of our shared nature, and only ever (as indicated by Kymlicka and Donaldson above) partially concealed, but never fully erased by the recent dominance of positivism in the West.

2. *Allegedly non-sentient parts of nature*

Indigenous relationships of reciprocity with allegedly non-sentient parts of nature appear, at first glance, to be less accessible from a Western point of view. Contemporary research cited by Westling, however, sees significant overlap between the genetic makeup of plants and animals, and ample reason to acknowledge the possibility of there being such a thing as plant behaviour (here defined as interaction with meaning factors and meaning carriers).¹³⁷ Since the publication of Westling's work, more recent research has compellingly pointed in a similar direction: plants are capable of forming symbiotic,¹³⁸ as well as mutually beneficial, non-symbiotic relationships with other beings.¹³⁹ It has also become at least conceivable that plants may be self-aware: plants' additional growth where one side is shaded by

¹³² Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog*.

¹³³ Diamond, 'Eating Meat And Eating People'.

¹³⁴ Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog*, p.170.

¹³⁵ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.346.

¹³⁶ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, pp.49-60.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹³⁸ R.Wilson and M.Barker, 'Biological Individuals', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.Zalta (Fall 2019 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/biology-individual/>> [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

¹³⁹ S.Mancuso, *The Incredible Journey Of Plants* (New York: Other Press, 2020), p.146.

another plant, at the same time as showing no additional growth to escape their own crown's shade, suggests that they recognise the difference.¹⁴⁰

It is once we free ourselves from the constraints of the Argument from Analogy, as put forward, for example, by Peter Singer¹⁴¹ - once we acknowledge that other forms of life will have different ways of interacting with the world,¹⁴² and once we appreciate that this difference in no way implies inferiority¹⁴³ - that we are able to recognise that a tree does not have to pass the mirror test before it can recognise the boundaries between it and the rest of the world.

Cajete, being familiar with both Indigenous and Western philosophy, takes a phenomenological approach to linking the two, and supports the idea that it is again learnt incompetence as opposed to innate incapability that prevents us from relating to allegedly non-sentient parts of nature.¹⁴⁴ He sees a layer of unity in diversity underneath our biologically and culturally mediated perceptions, explanatory of what he refers to as an interdependent, "natural democracy" that includes "plants, animals, stones, water, clouds, and everything else".¹⁴⁵ Citing Merleau-Ponty, he argues that because our perception is based on participation with our surroundings, animism is a basic human trait – a conception that now, especially in view of Westling's work on Merleau-Ponty considered above, appears accessible from a Western point of view despite its difference. Harvey, too, calls the conventual conception of animism as "mistaken belief about spirits" outdated, and instead defines animism as the fostering of "respectful relationships with other inhabitants of the more-than-human world".¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ A.Fleming, 'The Secret Life Of Plants: How They Memorise, Communicate, Problem Solve, And Socialise', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/05/smarty-plants-are-our-vegetable-cousins-more-intelligent-than-we-realise> [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

¹⁴¹ P.Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.59.

¹⁴² Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, p119.

¹⁴³ M.Midgley, 'The Concept Of Beastliness: Philosophy, Ethics and Animal Behaviour', *Philosophy*, Vol.48, No.184 (1973), pp.111-135, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3749836> [Accessed: 2 March 2020].

¹⁴⁴ Cajete, 'Philosophy Of Native Science', p.50.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.46.

¹⁴⁶ Harvey, *Animism: Respecting The Living World*, pp.xiii-xiv.

3. Ecosystems

The above, Western reluctance to contemplate the possibility of there being such a thing as plant behaviour, or any corresponding need to ascribe intrinsic value to allegedly non-sentient parts of nature, is mirrored in our similar difficulty with ecosystems. While Western examples of ecocentrism exist,¹⁴⁷ these are not the norm: mainstream world views in the West have a tendency to find it difficult to consider ecosystems to be intrinsically valuable. This finds expression, for example, in the Western conception of terra nullius, and in our Western cultural practice of issuing a written statement conveying ownership of a piece of land.

These Western conceptions initially appear as absurd to Indigenous thinkers as do individual intellectual property rights: just as knowledge is understood to be gained through participation (and is thus conceived to be communal, as stated by Valladolid above), so groups of human and non-human beings belong to the land as much as the land belongs to them, and are creatively involved in allowing the universe to unfold.¹⁴⁸ Individual property rights are perceived to be diametrically opposed to this.¹⁴⁹

None of this by any means implies denial of the individual's role: individuals are perceived to be autonomous from an earlier age than in the West.¹⁵⁰ The "we" that Cordova refers to originates not from communitarianism, but from the responsibility that is central to all relationships in the web of human and non-human interaction.¹⁵¹ It is Cordova, too, who offers a potential starting point for shared understanding here: after pointing out that Indigenous philosophers are ideally placed to build bridges due to their familiarity with both Western and Indigenous philosophy,¹⁵² she states that Western environmental ethics can have a tendency to view the world as "a ship with a captain who is in charge,"¹⁵³ while her own preferred analogy, echoing Cajete's earlier reference to Western chaos theory,¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ A. Leopold, 'The Land Ethic', in *Environmental Philosophy*, ed. by M. Zimmerman et al. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1998), pp.87-100.

¹⁴⁸ Cajete, 'Philosophy Of Native Science', p.47.

¹⁴⁹ Bell, 'Respecting The Land'.

¹⁵⁰ Hester, 'On Philosophical Discourse', p.265.

¹⁵¹ Cordova, 'Ethics: The We And The I', p.173.

¹⁵² V.F. Cordova, 'Approaches To Native American Philosophy', in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by A. Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.27-33.

¹⁵³ Cordova, 'Ethics: The We And The I', p.181.

¹⁵⁴ Cajete, 'Philosophy Of Native Science', pp.48-49.

stresses the concept of no pebble being dropped into a pond “without its ripples encountering other ripples, and those ripples having other consequences through their encounters.”¹⁵⁵

It is these ripples of relationships of giving and of being given, then, that matter,¹⁵⁶ and these relationships are only able to remain healthy if both the whole *and* its constituting individuals are treated with consideration and respect. Considered from this new vantage point offered by Cordova, ecocentrism and biocentrism are able to come together and unite in a relational view of the world.

Westling, in the same vein, connects Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh of the world” to the contemporary understanding that individual humans are constituted, amongst other things, of colonies of bacteria, and that we ultimately produce as well as consume, contributing to the world and changing it, alongside being changed by it.¹⁵⁷ In light of Cordova’s work, this idea now not only takes on a new form of significance, but also a new dimension of shared meaning: shared between Western and Indigenous philosophy, as well as shared between individuals and ecosystems.

Midgley allows us a Western glimpse of this new dimension: on one level, Iris Murdoch’s sighting of the kestrel was simply an encounter between a human and a non-human animal. Ultimately, however, it was the kestrel’s embeddedness in the world that made an impression on Murdoch, and that Midgley was interested in. In Midgley’s Western example, too, it is the fact of our embeddedness in a larger whole,¹⁵⁸ and the absence of the omnipotence that our traditional Cartesian world-view would have assumed,¹⁵⁹ that are ultimately capable of being our salvation,¹⁶⁰ and it is at this point that we can begin to find shared understanding with Indigenous philosophies.

¹⁵⁵ Cordova, ‘Ethics: The We And The I’, p.181.

¹⁵⁶ Whitt, ‘Biocolonialism And The Commodification Of Knowledge’.

¹⁵⁷ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, p.83.

¹⁵⁸ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.346.

¹⁵⁹ M.Midgley, ‘On Not Needing To Be Omnipotent’, *Humans And Nature*, 24 May 2012, Available at: <https://www.humansandnature.org/to-be-human-mary-midgley>, [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

¹⁶⁰ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.350.

4. Artefacts

A fourth potential incompatibility between Indigenous and Western philosophies' views of the non-human world is their respective treatment of artefacts. While artefacts can have symbolic value in the West, artefacts are not usually deemed to be alive in the West.¹⁶¹

Indigenous philosophy, on the other hand, has no hesitation in committing to the latter.¹⁶²

No mention is made of the saddle in Westling's example of a talented rider and their horse being both cause and effect of each other's movements,¹⁶³ although Westling's thoughts on the role of *aesthetic* expression as a way of "singing the world", cited above from another section of her work, provides a clue.¹⁶⁴

Other authors are more forthcoming: Vikram Seth gives a sensitive fictional account of a musician's relationship with his violin;¹⁶⁵ similar relationships have been documented between crews of rowers and their boats.¹⁶⁶

Significantly, both authors invoke the creators of the artefacts in question: Seth has Michael Holme going to great lengths to create an opportunity to play his violin in Venice, where it was built by Tononi during Vivaldi's time (whose support of disadvantaged young musicians resonates with Holme's own background). In Brown's non-fictional novel, extensive reference is made to the interplay between George Pocock's way of relating to the world and the boat he creates for his crew, and it does not appear coincidental that the crew are able to relate to Pocock's world view while bringing out the best in his boat.

Linking these ideas with Westling's thinking on Merleau-Ponty, then, it becomes natural, even from a Western point of view, to transcend our conception of our tools as mere extensions of our bodies into the world: the tools may indeed be revealed through

¹⁶¹ For example, an MP's removal of the mace caused a stir in Parliament not because the mace is required for any practical purpose, but because it symbolises Royal authority. However, no one suggested that the mace might be alive. J.Elgot, 'MP Causes Uproar In Parliament By Grabbing Mace In Brexit Protest', *The Guardian*, 10 December 2018, Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/10/day-of-brexit-drama-ends-with-mp-grabbing-the-ceremonial-mace [Accessed: 11 April 2020].

¹⁶² M.Henare, 'Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau, Wairua: A Maori Philosophy Of Vitalism And Cosmos', in *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*, ed. by J.Grim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp.197-221.

¹⁶³ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, p.140.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.123.

¹⁶⁵ V.Seth, *An Equal Music* (London: Phoenix House, 1999).

¹⁶⁶ D.J.Brown, *The Boys In The Boat* (Basingstoke/Oxford: Macmillan, 2013).

competent use.¹⁶⁷ According to Westling's above comments, aesthetic expression sits alongside linguistic expression as a way of "singing the world", and it follows from this that the art of building a musical instrument, or a boat, can be its creator's way of embodying their relationship with the world. As a consequence of this, it then becomes perfectly conceivable that their artefact may resonate again with a new musician or crew, to be brought back to life – in a way that is accessible also from the vantage point of a Western philosophical outlook – to sing the world again, as new hands finding the instrument join across time and space with those of a maker potentially long deceased.

Chapter 4. Implications for recovering our relationship with non-human nature

It has been shown that in order to realise the eleventh capability of contribution for Indigenous minorities, deliberation is necessary in order to foster universal epistemic contribution in a system that relies on the aggregation of votes. It was then shown that a degree of mutual understanding of each other's vantage points is necessary for successful deliberation: in its absence, even in a future scenario after the elimination of discrimination, and simply due to the impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction, a third type of epistemic injustice may prevail, resulting in genuine failure to understand, even in the absence of any unwillingness to listen.

This now begs the following question: if it is already possible now (and it is, as I have just demonstrated in the previous chapter) to find credible shared ground between Western and Indigenous philosophies in relation to all aspects of non-human nature, then what additional barrier can there be that must still be overcome before collaboration on a renewed relationship with non-human nature can take place?

There clearly is one, as demonstrated by the devastating bush fires this year, which occurred despite the availability of Aboriginal knowledge on how to prevent them. But if our requirement had merely been to become sufficiently familiar with each other's vantage points to compare notes on our respective sides of the metaphorical Atlantic of non-human nature, and to understand the metaphorical Gulf stream of environmental problems before

¹⁶⁷ J.Howarth, 'Neither Use Nor Ornament: A Consumers' Guide To Care', in *Environmental Philosophy* ed. by J.Benson (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.161-170.

collaborating successfully to relieve them, then why did we find ourselves unable to achieve this even this year, even though the works I have referenced have been with us for a number of years? – We know from the above chapter on deliberation that the explanation cannot exclusively lie in the presence of discrimination and epistemic injustice type 1: discrimination and epistemic injustice type 1 did not stop us from helping ourselves to Indigenous knowledge in the form of seeds when we wanted it.

I am going to examine three possible explanations for our continued failure to collaborate successfully with Indigenous minorities on restoring a harmonious relationship with non-human nature, despite the above shared reference points having been available for a number of years. Having done this, I am going to argue that there is, in fact, a way out.

Firstly, part of the answer may lie in the fact that some differences do remain. It is one thing to claim – as I did above, building on Westling – that an artefact can be a reflection of its creator’s relationship with the world, and to allow that the knowledge and emotion that went into creating the artefact might resonate, and be brought back to life, with a new pair of hands at a later date. This is nothing new; it is simply what happens every time a sensitive practitioner, anywhere, tries out a musical instrument, or indeed a boat, in order to find out whether it suits them. To claim, on the other hand, that the artefact is alive in and of itself is a different proposition,¹⁶⁸ and it is a proposition that I am too Western to claim to understand. This is an example of a gap between Western and Indigenous philosophy that would need to be bridged before mutual understanding could be fully achieved.

I have argued, however, that it follows from Merleau-Ponty’s statement of the impossibility of achieving a 100% phenomenological attitude¹⁶⁹ that mutual understanding is never going to be fully achieved anyway: since there is no option of occupying a genuinely neutral vantage point, what we are left to make do with are our many biologically, culturally, and individually biased ones. We can learn about each other’s, and approximate them, but we can never exactly occupy them.

This is less depressing than it appears at first glance: it not only means that we are never going to fully understand each other, but it also means that, in order to cooperate

¹⁶⁸ For example, Henare, ‘Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau, Wairua: A Maori Philosophy Of Vitalism And Cosmos’.

¹⁶⁹ Toadvine, ‘Maurice Merleau-Ponty’.

successfully, we do not need to. Despite the impossibility of complete mutual understanding, there have been many instances of successful cooperation being achieved. This means that once basic shared reference points have been established, any remaining barriers to our cooperation on the project of restoring our relationship with non-human nature are likely to be located in a different place.

Secondly, part of the explanation may lie in the fact that the relationship with non-human nature that we are looking for is a new one. It is not a replica of a romanticising idealisation of a “noble savage’s” way of life, as Indigenous scholars will be the first to point out.¹⁷⁰ The relationship we are looking for belongs to a new vantage point – spatially, temporally, and epistemologically – and this implies a need for innovation as we find our way forward.

I would argue, however, that the need for innovation is unlikely to be the barrier that is holding us back here: innovation is also what it took to invent the machinery that produced global warming, and this machinery is there to behold, testament to our capacity to innovate.

Thirdly, it is the practice-orientated, Indigenous vantage point discussed in section 3.a) that may point us in a more promising direction: the determinedly cerebral vantage point of our Cartesian heritage would not have hampered us in our utilisation of a novel seed, but to allow a relationship with non-human nature that accommodates Indigenous knowledge on the prevention of bush fires requires deeper involvement than that.

What I am proposing is that it is going to be necessary for us to let go of our conception of propositional knowledge as the only permissible kind, and to allow ourselves to accept the fact that as well as being rational beings, we are also emotional and embodied ones. Carel has already suggested as much in her above phenomenological toolkit proposed for another setting.

In other words, there is a case to be made that the Indigenous contribution capable of making a decisive difference to our shared, future relationship with non-human

¹⁷⁰ Gonzales and Nelson, ‘Contemporary Native American Responses To Environmental Threats In Indian Country’, p.498.

nature is experiential more than it is propositional, and this is in keeping with the Indigenous scholars' focus on experiential acquisition of knowledge above.

Kymlicka and Donaldson claim that our inability to communicate with non-human animals is a learnt incompetence, and Milton claims that a similar process of un-learning applies to our relationship with other parts of non-human nature too.¹⁷¹ Our failure, as we mature, to continue to relate to non-human nature is a failure in respect and compassion, which develops as a consequence of our socialisation into ever-increasing distance from the non-human world. The lion's share of the pebbles in our Western, Wittgensteinian riverbeds is Cartesian: it is the norm, in Western cultures, to the point of it not being explicitly articulated, to regard the natural world as the "other", which is not included in our capacity for respect and compassion.¹⁷² Considered from this vantage point, our failure in respect and compassion for nature now mirrors the failure in respect and compassion for other sections of humanity that was criticised by the 1980s campaign for nuclear disarmament, and that was at the root of similar failures in human-to-human relationships presented in Jonathan Glover's account of the 20th century.¹⁷³

Focusing on nuclear arms, and making exclusive reference to the human aspects of the potential devastation, Roger Fisher, by this time already heavily involved in the Harvard Negotiation Project, argued that it was distancing that allowed us to contemplate pressing a button that would cause millions to be killed, and that it was only through the reversal of distancing that this would reliably be prevented.¹⁷⁴

What is taking place between human and non-human nature, too, can be framed in terms of Fisher's distancing and reversal of distancing. As we acquire the learnt incompetence cited by Kymlicka and Donaldson, and by Milton above, we allow ourselves to turn into the carbon-emitting equivalent of the President of the United States wielding power over the nuclear button, shielded in the Oval Office of our urban spaces from the flesh of the reality of what we are perpetrating outside, and therefore failing to grasp its meaning.

¹⁷¹ Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards An Ecology Of Emotion*, pp.70-109.

¹⁷² Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*, pp.328-330.

¹⁷³ J.Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History Of The Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁴ R.Fisher, 'Preventing Nuclear War', *Bulletin Of The Atomic Scientists*, March 1981, available at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ygoAAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA16&ots=oVkrzABnMr&pg=PA11&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false, [Accessed: 7 April 2020].

Fisher's proposed remedy was both drastic and demonstrably effective: reversal of distancing would prevent the threatened destruction, and his suggested way of achieving this was to implant the nuclear codes in a capsule next to a volunteer's heart. The volunteer would carry a butcher's knife and accompany the President at all times, so that in order to gain access to the process that would kill millions remotely, the President would be forced to kill one innocent person with his own hands first. Objections from the Pentagon that the method should not be adopted because it would make it impossible for the President to press the button, unintentionally proved Fisher's point.¹⁷⁵

Our failure in industrialised societies to act compassionately towards non-human nature is unlikely to be caused by a gap in our propositional knowledge about the planet, or in our propositional knowledge regarding Indigenous world views. The President of the United States in Fisher's example did not lack propositional knowledge regarding the number of people about to be killed. Reversal of distancing is not achieved through the provision of additional propositional knowledge, but through experiential removal of distance. Meaning is embodied; it resides in the connections we make through the material world.

Kymlicka and Donaldson's, as well as Milton's, above observations with regards to our learnt incompetence suggest that Westling's and Merleau-Ponty's ideas regarding our natural, physical and emotional sharing in the "flesh of the world" are realistic. The learning from Indigenous societies that will enable us to allow the return of meaning is indeed experiential, and we know from Cajete's work that Indigenous philosophers know this too.¹⁷⁶

Cajete's point is not unfamiliar to Western philosophers: Naess, when advocating his *frisluftsliv*, makes a similar one.¹⁷⁷ In a wider sense, Naess is far from alone: where Western philosophy has transcended Cartesian ideas, it has shown itself more than capable of recognising the role of engagement in generating compassion. Variation – and difference from Indigenous philosophy in this regard – is mostly in the extent to which this makes reference to non-human nature. As Nussbaum illustrates, the perception of others as

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Cajete, 'Philosophy Of Native Science', p.45.

¹⁷⁷ A.Naess, 'Identification, Oneness, Wholeness And Self-Realisation', in Benson, J. (ed.), *Environmental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.243-252.

“other” can act as a significant barrier to compassion.¹⁷⁸ Glover, in the same vein, mentions the removal of dignity from the “other” as a facilitator of cruel behaviour.¹⁷⁹ Murdoch shows that our moral choices are at least as much influenced by the attitudes we cultivate in the time between them as they are by our thoughts at the time of our actual choice.¹⁸⁰ In his exploration of our creative involvement with the world, Attfield mentions a variety of ways of immersing ourselves in it first.¹⁸¹ Milton, drawing on ethological research, makes a convincing case for the role of experience and emotion in learning and in the shaping of our attitudes.¹⁸² Wittgenstein’s riverbed analogy is a non-biological illustration of the same process.¹⁸³ Several millennia previously, Aristotle, in addition to stressing the role of experiential learning, already argued that virtue is only complete once it encompasses both our intellect and our emotions.¹⁸⁴

It has been shown that our history has made us set in our propositional ways. However, it has also been shown that there is a way out: our history has also prepared us to learn from new experiences as they become available.¹⁸⁵ Both Hegel’s (Western) dialectic¹⁸⁶ and the (Eastern) Catuskoti¹⁸⁷ may be understood to have the potential to supersede the (Western) law of non-contradiction – at the same time as reminding us of the Indigenous point of view that they may complement rather than supersede it, and herein lies our hope.

The impossibility of achieving a complete phenomenological reduction, thought through, implies that a Western, scientific point of view, for all its attempted neutrality, must be culturally mediated too, and must stand to benefit from being complemented by others.

¹⁷⁸ M.C.Nussbaum, ‘Compassion: Human And Animal’, in *Ethics And Humanity: Themes From The Philosophy Of Jonathan Glover*, ed. by N.A.Davis, R.Keshen, and J.McMahan (Oxford Scholarship Online: 2010), DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195325195.001.0001 [Accessed: 2 March 2020].

¹⁷⁹ Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History Of The Twentieth Century*, p.24.

¹⁸⁰ I.Murdoch, *The Sovereignty Of Good* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1970), p.17.

¹⁸¹ R.Attfield, ‘Grammars Of Creativity’.

¹⁸² Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards An Ecology Of Emotion*, p.149.

¹⁸³ Hanfling, *Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy*, p.162.

¹⁸⁴ R.Kraut, ‘Aristotle’s Ethics’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E.N.Zalta (Summer 2018 Edition), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aristotle-ethics/>>. [Accessed: 25 March 2020].

¹⁸⁵ Midgley, ‘On Not Needing To Be Omnipotent’.

¹⁸⁶ R.Horstmann, ‘Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich’, in *Routledge Encyclopedia Of Philosophy*, ed. by E.Craig, vol. 4 (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.259-280.

¹⁸⁷ G.Priest, ‘The Logic Of The Catuskoti’, in *Comparative Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2010), pp. 24-54. Available at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/comparativephilosophy/vol1/iss2/6/> [Accessed: 20 February 2020].

The third type of epistemic injustice, where it still prevails, cannot be eliminated from our accustomed vantage point of propositional knowledge alone:

The intellectual shared ground between Western and Indigenous philosophy that I have attempted to stake out above, drawing on the work of those who have been exposed to both sides, has pointed us beyond its own boundaries and shown us that the key to salvaging our relationship with non-human nature does not lie in our intellect alone, but instead lies in our recovery of our species' capacity to engage with the world as entire beings. It has shown us that it is not the undoubted gains in propositional knowledge brought about by increased familiarity with Indigenous peoples that are going to help us grow into our place in the world, but that it is going to be the rediscovery, through shared experiential learning, of our innate ability to create meaning through interaction with it.

In doing so, it has also reminded us of what, for Midgley, was biological and philosophical reality all along: that man can neither be understood nor saved alone.¹⁸⁸ The way to learn from the Indigenous scholars cited is to immerse ourselves into our shared world.

Conclusion

Bush fires of the magnitude experienced in January 2020 do not have to be a matter of course, any more than our relationships with Indigenous minorities and with non-human nature have to remain static. Change is not only an inescapable fact of life, but it is also ours to bring forth: we have the capacity to be creative.¹⁸⁹

The bush fires highlighted the failure of industrialised societies to collaborate with Indigenous minorities on the task of finding a new, harmonious relationship with non-human nature in an era when we are no longer hunter-gatherers. Examples demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge is in fact capable of preventing bush fires, but it is the exception rather than the rule for this knowledge to be accepted into the mainstream.¹⁹⁰

The existence of a UN *Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples* demonstrates that the dignity of Indigenous minorities has not yet been realised. It has been shown that

¹⁸⁸ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.350.

¹⁸⁹ Attfield, 'Grammars Of Creativity'.

¹⁹⁰ Allam, 'Right Fire For A Right Future'.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach outlined in *Frontiers of Justice*¹⁹¹ can be extended to include the new, fourth scenario of our relationship with Indigenous minorities, and that it is capable of securing this dignity once an eleventh capability, that of contribution, has been added to Nussbaum's existing ten.

In order to allow minority contribution in a political system reliant on the aggregation of votes, it is necessary in some situations to introduce deliberative elements of democracy, as outlined by Garner.¹⁹² This is of particular importance where collaboration is required to achieve common aims (for example, the prevention of bush fires): an additional mechanism is needed, besides voting, to ensure that all voices are heard, by everyone, before votes are cast.

While Garner makes a convincing case for the use of deliberation, it is also the case that successful deliberation, and therefore contribution, is only possible if barriers to mutual understanding are removed. In the case of relations between Indigenous minorities and dominant majorities, several such barriers exist. Firstly, there are past injustices to be addressed. Smith gives examples of successful interventions in this regard.¹⁹³ Secondly, continuing discrimination in postcolonial societies entails continuing occurrence of Fricker's two types of epistemic injustice.¹⁹⁴ The outcome-orientation of Nussbaum's capabilities approach means that success is defined by the *actual*, not the *theoretical*, removal of indignities, and such discrimination must be eliminated, for example by a cluster of interventions patterned on Carel's approach in a healthcare setting.¹⁹⁵

Thirdly, the impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction implies the existence of a third type of epistemic injustice, in addition to Fricker's two, which is already implicit in the fact that some of Carel's examples involve a failure in communication in the absence of mutually intelligible vantage points. There are times when, even in a hypothetical, future scenario after the elimination of discrimination, we *cannot understand*, as opposed to being unwilling to listen. In order to understand, we must first attempt to approach each other's vantage points, and Midgley suggests that this will, by necessity, begin from our

¹⁹¹ Nussbaum, *Frontiers Of Justice*.

¹⁹² Garner, 'Animal Rights And The Deliberative Turn In Democratic Theory'.

¹⁹³ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*, p.156.

¹⁹⁴ Fricker, 'Evolving Concepts Of Epistemic Injustice'.

¹⁹⁵ Carel and Kidd, 'Epistemic Injustice In Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis'.

own, which is permissible as long as we begin with an attitude of expectation to have them expanded.¹⁹⁶

It was in the context of overcoming the third type of epistemic injustice that this paper considered the work of eight Indigenous scholars collected in Waters' *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (who were, at the time of publication, the only Indigenous holders of PhDs in Western philosophy in the United States).¹⁹⁷ Additional Indigenous scholars' input on Indigenous philosophies outside the United States was drawn from some interdisciplinary work at Harvard, documented in Grim's *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology: The Interbeing Of Cosmology And Community*,¹⁹⁸ so that it was possible to obtain a first-hand Indigenous philosophical perspective throughout.

This attempt to approach Indigenous vantage points, and to find fundamental similarities and differences between Indigenous and Western environmental philosophies in relation to epistemology and to four aspects of non-human nature, then, demonstrated that it is those branches of Western philosophy that acknowledge the role of embodiment and of emotion that are best able to relate to Indigenous thought.

Indigenous philosophies' tendency to regard ritual and labour as one chimed with those Western views that acknowledged the creation of meaning through action. Wittgenstein's riverbed analogy was but one example; Diamond's and Gaita's work contain more. The parallels drawn by Westling between Merleau-Ponty's work and contemporary scientific research make a strong case for abandoning our accustomed reliance on Cartesian ideas.¹⁹⁹ Indigenous philosophies conceive of knowledge as emerging from encounters, relationships and localities, and therefore as non-binary: new knowledge adds to, rather than replaces elements of, the existing body.²⁰⁰ Such views are still the exception rather than the norm in the West, but Westling's work on both philosophical and biological connections between material and meaning suggests that this is in need of revision.

¹⁹⁶ Midgley, *Animals And Why They Matter*, p.127.

¹⁹⁷ Waters (ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*.

¹⁹⁸ Grim (ed.), *Indigenous Traditions And Ecology*.

¹⁹⁹ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*.

²⁰⁰ Valladolid and Apffel-Marglin, 'Andean Cosmovision And The Nurturing Of Biodiversity', p.648.

In particular, with regards to our relationships with non-human animals, allegedly non-sentient parts of nature, ecosystems, and artefacts, Indigenous philosophies consistently point us in the direction of respectful interaction and reciprocity. For example, parallels between Nagel's principles for relating to enemy soldiers and Indigenous hunters' engagement with their prey become understandable against the background of Westling's research regarding two ancient Western myths:²⁰¹ the tension between our shared meanings and our potential for causing each other's deaths has been inherent in our relationships with humans and non-humans alike. It is once we allow ourselves to be open to the wonder of this that we realise, with Cordova²⁰² and with Gaita,²⁰³ that although it is not in our gift to stop causing harm altogether, we will never shoot wild rabbits in the same spirit again. When describing Murdoch's encounter with the kestrel, it is the fact of our embeddedness in nature that captures Midgley's interest.²⁰⁴

Western minds – for example, Merleau-Ponty's and Westling's – are able to relate to Indigenous philosophies, and it is what they tell us when they do that provides the foothold of understanding we have been looking for: our role, as humans, is not one of mastery of a collection of automatons which are "other", but one of participation in the flesh of the world.

It is at this point that it becomes clear where our challenge lies, and with it also our hope. Participation implies reversal of the distancing that has enabled nuclear wars and other atrocities against the human "other" in our recent past,²⁰⁵ and the same distancing is also at the root of our learnt incompetence in our relations with the non-human world. Non-human nature is not innately "other" to us, but becomes so as we socialise into our Cartesian-based, Western Wittgensteinian riverbeds.²⁰⁶ It is this mistaken, acquired perception of non-human nature as "other" that is continuing to enable our distancing from it and, as a consequence, our inconsiderate treatment of it.

²⁰¹ Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*, pp.49-60.

²⁰² Cordova, 'Ethics: The We And The I', p.173.

²⁰³ Gaita,, *The Philosopher's Dog*, p.170.

²⁰⁴ Midgley, *Beast And Man*, p.346.

²⁰⁵ Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History Of The Twentieth Century*, and Fisher, 'Preventing Nuclear War'.

²⁰⁶ Kymlicka and Donaldson, 'Animals And The Frontiers Of Citizenship', and Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards An Ecology Of Emotion*.

Propositional knowledge of the number of innocent lives to be extinguished by proposed acts of war was available for every act of war discussed in Glover's work, and it did not succeed in preventing the acts. The Pentagon's response to Fisher's proposed experiential remedy, on the other hand, demonstrates that reversal of distancing *would* prevent such acts. Fisher's findings thus confirm Merleau-Ponty's and Midgley's conception of human beings as complex ones: rational, emotional, embodied, and naturally related to and immersed in the world. It is when we reverse our distancing that we are able to let go of our destructive ways, and this reversal of distancing involves us in all our complexity.

The learning we can hope to gain from a collaborative relationship with Indigenous peoples is therefore propositional only in part: its very essence is that we are going to be required to allow other forms of knowing into the fold.

This is not a matter of removing science from our own body of knowledge. As shown by Hester in his corn and bean analogy, it is a matter of adding views from other vantage points to it, of allowing ourselves to see that there are sunrises as well as sunsets over the metaphorical Atlantic we share. In order to do this, in collaboration with our Indigenous fellow humans, we are going to have to find new ways of immersing ourselves into non-human nature at a time when we are not hunter-gatherers, and of overcoming the distancing that is fuelling our disrespect. Following Midgley in admitting that man can neither be understood nor saved alone is going to be a matter of allowing the eleventh capability, that of Indigenous contribution, to change us.

It was inevitable that we could only see this contribution after first allowing it the dignity of attempting to approach its vantage point.

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