

**AGENCY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN AMERICAN INDIAN
PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT: An American Indian philosophical tradition has stood against colonialism and genocide in the United States since at least the second half of the 19th century. This tradition, in contrast with particular tribal traditions, emerged at the border between Native and European America as a pan-Indian response to the coming of “settler society.” What had been a porous boundary earlier in American history where conflicts between whites and Indians occurred alongside significant moments of mutual influence was replaced by a new conception of difference defined by the transition from savagery and civilization. New theories of human development and the new economic and social conditions of the late 19th century set aside wars of displacement and led to new systematic practices of genocide that included the imposition of the reservation system, the establishment of Indian boarding schools, the implementation of the Allotment Act, and, finally, the passage, in 1924, of the American Indian Citizenship Act. Against these practices emerged a series of indigenous philosophers who offered a variety of responses, most of which shared philosophical commitments to a relational ontology, the importance of “power and place,” and to ontological, epistemic, and phenomenological pluralism. In order to introduce this tradition, I will consider several of its central figures and then focus on a conception of agency or personhood that is a product of these commitments. I will then consider three implications of the philosophical position developed by this pan-Indian tradition. The first two implications challenge central commitments of dominant western philosophy and the third adds a conception of sovereignty that resists the “progress” of settler society and can serve as a starting point for a politics of place.

Keywords: Indigenous Sovereignty, Native American/American Indian Philosophy, Settler Colonialism, Agency, Agent Ontology

An American Indian philosophical tradition has stood against American colonialism and genocide since at least the second half of the 19th century. This tradition, in contrast with particular tribal traditions, emerged at the border between Native and European America as a pan-Indian response to the coming of settler society¹. What had been a porous boundary earlier in American history

where conflicts between whites and Indians occurred alongside significant moments of mutual influence was replaced by a new conception of difference defined by the transition from savagery and civilization. New theories of human development and the new economic and social conditions of the late 19th century set aside wars of displacement and helped to establish systematic practices of genocide that included the imposition of the reservation system, the establishment of Indian boarding schools, the implementation of the Allotment Act, and, finally, the passage, in 1924, of the American Indian Citizenship Act. Against these practices emerged a series of indigenous philosophers who offered a variety of responses, most of which shared four philosophical commitments.

The first commitment was to the idea that things are relational—that is, things exist only in and through relations with other things that are also relational. Such relationality gave rise to the second commitment: the importance of place, that is, the particular relations that characterize individuals and their groups. Third, placed relations were not given or static but imbued with what is often called “power”; not power as “force” in the ordinary sense nor power as the product of systematic domination, but power as an individuating and connecting motive that seeks to fulfill purposes. And fourth, as a consequence of the resulting diversity of powers marked by different relational locations, this philosophical tradition was committed as well to ontological, epistemic, and phenomenological pluralism. In order to introduce this tradition, I will consider several of its central figures and then focus on a conception of agency or personhood as a product of these four commitments. I will then consider three implications of the philosophical position developed by this pan-Indian tradition. The first two implications challenge central commitments of the dominant western philosophy, in particular, the received conceptions of necessity and possibility and the standard principles of non-contradiction, excluded middle and identity. The third implication adds an alternative notion of sovereignty that can serve as a starting point for a politics of place.

¹ I use “settler society” to name what might be called the European-descended dominant society in North America, also called “white society.” This use follows Franz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* and, more recently, Taiaiake Alfred (2005).

1. Agency and America

In 1911, a Lakota man, called Charles Eastman in settler society, published a volume, *The Soul of the Indian*, whose title recalled W. E. B. Du Bois's book published a few years earlier, *Souls of Black Folk*. Ohiyesa was a Boston University-trained physician who had grown up with his Lakota grandparents on the northern plains after his mother died and his father fled to Canada in the aftermath of the "Great Sioux Uprising" in 1862. In 1873, his father returned and urged his son to become western educated. After attending Beloit, Knox and Dartmouth Colleges, Charles Eastman received his medical degree in 1890. *The Soul of the Indian* offers a philosophical framework used by indigenous people in their stand against empire. Central to this framework was the conviction that "every creature possesses a soul in some degree, though not necessarily a soul conscious of itself. The tree, the waterfall, the grizzly bear, each is an embodied Force, and as such an object of reverence."² In a world in which every creature, that is, every created thing, has a "soul," Eastman argued that people behave differently and with respect. Framing the resulting way of life as "religious," Eastman explained, "Every act of [an Indian's] life is, in a very real sense, a religious act. He recognizes the spirit in all creation, and believes that he draws from it spiritual power."³ Thanks are due to the creatures with whom one interacts and freely giving back to those creatures makes reciprocal relations also mutually constructive. This ontological view of relational beings also provided a critical perspective on settler society. "As a child," Eastman said, "I understood how to give; I have forgotten that grace since I became civilized. I lived the natural life, whereas I now live the artificial. Any pretty pebble was valuable to me then; every growing tree an object of reverence. Now I worship with the white man before a painted landscape whose value is estimated in dollars! Thus the Indian is reconstructed, as

the natural rocks are ground to powder, and made into artificial blocks which may be built into the walls of modern society."⁴ Even as he framed a conception of indigenous life, however, he also made room to acknowledge western religion and is able to harness both indigeneity and Christianity a critical tool. "There is no such thing as 'Christian civilization'," he concludes. "I believe that Christianity and modern civilization are opposed and irreconcilable, and that the spirit of Christianity and of our ancient religion is essentially the same."⁵

Eastman became part of the Pan-Indian movement that began in the late 19th century through the work of a number of American Indian intellectuals, many educated in boarding schools.⁶ The signal organization for the movement was the Society of American Indians, founded in 1911 two years after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Among the "associate" (non-Indian) founding members were co-founder of the NAACP W. E. B. Du Bois, social gospel movement leader Lyman Abbott, and Cornell University philosopher, Frank Thilly. The SAI's program was never clearly settled, but the work of several of its leaders adopted views that followed the path set by Eastman.

Arthur Parker, a Seneca Indian, who also served as the editor of the SAI journal, both affirmed the need for American Indians to "assimilate" to the dominant economy and at the same time made a case for sustaining aspects of Indian culture as a means of combating the evils of industrial capitalism. In his first address to the SAI on education, Parker concluded "The true aim of educational effort should not be to make the Indian a white man, but simply a man normal to his environment."⁷ Here, standing against empire—"commercial greed" and the "sordid ... conventional ideas of white civilization"—

⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶ Hertzberg, Hazel W., *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971.

⁷ Parker, Arthur C., *The Philosophy of Indian Education, Proceedings of the First Conference of the Society of American Indians*, Washington, D. C., 1912, p. 75.

² Eastman, Charles, *The Soul of the Indian*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911, p. 15.

³ Ibid., p. 15.

required the opposite movement. “[Indians] should cease to struggle against [the culture that engulfs them], that [they] should become a factor of it [so that they] should use [their] revitalized influence and more advantageous position in asserting and developing the great ideals of [their] race for the good of ... all [hu]mankind.”⁸

This view of indigenous activism, he argued in a 1916 paper published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, stood explicitly against aspects of the new system of genocide that developed in the late 19th century. “In the beginning, there was an endeavor to occupy the land forcibly and by various means to exterminate its barbaric owners. ... The idea of extermination persisted for a long time, ... but there was enough sentiment to bring about a new course—that of segregation.”⁹ For Parker, segregation was not a program designed to foster tribes but was rather a continuation of the system of genocide that began with the process of displacement and removal. “Segregation,” he concluded, “did more to exterminate the Indians than did bullets. Rigorously guarded reservations became a place of debasement.”¹⁰ The practices carried out, Parker charged, “[have] permitted the soul of a race ... to sink beneath the evils of civilization into misery, ignorance, disease, and despondency.”¹¹ The correct response, Parker argued, was to demand that settler society “return” certain stolen or destroyed aspects of indigenous life that could support the renewal of tribal cultures and the possibility of reciprocity with other cultures. These included indigenous intellectual and community life, and economic independence.¹²

Outside the SAI other native thinkers also challenged settler society. Luther Standing Bear, a member of the Oglala Lakota, was among the first students taken to the Carlisle Boarding School in Pennsylvania, where he was trained as a tinsmith.¹³ When he returned from

Carlisle he worked for a time as a teacher and a shopkeeper at the Pine Ridge reservation. In 1905, he was elected chief of the Oglala and, after much controversy and conflict with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, left South Dakota in 1912 to become an actor, first with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show and then in Hollywood movies.¹⁴ Late in life he became an activist against the conditions imposed on the Lakota and wrote four books. In his last, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* published in 1933, Standing Bear diagnosed the failure of white society. “The White man,” he said, “does not understand the Indian for the same reason he does not understand America. He is far too removed from its formative processes. The roots of his tree of his life have not yet grasped the rock and soil.”¹⁵ In contrast, “in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested; it will be until other men are able to divine and meet its rhythm. Men must be born and reborn to belong. Their bodies must be formed of the dust of their forefathers’ bones.”¹⁶ Like Kicking Bear, Standing Bear was clear about the future of life in North America. “[It] is now time for the destructive order to be reversed... [In] denying the Indian his ancestral rights and heritages the white race is but robbing itself. But American can be revived, rejuvenated, by recognizing a nature school of thought. The Indian can save America.”¹⁷

II. Agent Ontology

By the 1960s, this tradition of American Indian philosophy that stood against empire found new voice in the work of Vine Deloria, Jr., whose grandfather had been a co-founder of the SAI and whose aunt, Ella Deloria, a Columbia-trained ethnographer, served as the secretary for the SAI’s successor organization, the National Council

⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

⁹ Parker, Arthur C., *The Social Elements of the Indian Problem*, *The Journal of American Sociology*, 22, 2, 1916, p. 252.

¹⁰ Ibid., 252.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 252-3.

¹² Ibid., pp. 258-9.

¹³ Standing Bear’s brother, Henry, was one of the founding

members of the SAI and was apparently a resident of Hull House in Chicago at some point.

¹⁴ Hale, Frederick, *Acceptance and Rejection of Assimilation in the Works of Luther Standing Bear*. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, 5, 4, 1993, pp. 25-41.

¹⁵ Standing Bear, Luther, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, (1933) 1978, p. 248.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 255.

of American Indians. Deloria, like his predecessors, offered both a critique of the dominant European-descended culture in North America and a vision of an alternative world framed by place and peopled by diverse agents—human and otherwise—understood as persons.

For Deloria, the central element of what he offers as American Indian philosophy is a particular conception of personhood, one that rejects the idea that the world is reducible to passive matter or to substances like matter and mind. Instead, he offers a view founded on what he calls a “simple equation”: “*power and place produce personality.*”¹⁸ Put another way, persons (or *agents* as I will call them) are both relational and purposive.¹⁹ As relational, as placed, persons or agents are like points in geometry formed by the intersection of lines. Without the lines, the point—the person—does not exist. However, the example of a point is an insufficient analogy since points are easily seen as passive constructions of someone else’s activity. Agents, things that can act with a purpose, are more than just relational beings; they are also modal, acting toward a possible future that is as yet unfulfilled. This aspect of personhood—power—involves both a determinate past and possible futures that are indeterminate. To say of a tree that it has power is to say that its past is one of tree activity. Its future will at once be constrained by its past. The product of relations with other agents and its own responses form a starting point. Depending on its activities and those of the agents it next encounters, it could become lumber, for example, or shade for someone on a hot day, or an inspiration or an adviser for someone who encounters it in need of their own sense of direction. Our tendency in the west is to attribute whatever possibility a thing like a tree has to the possibilities of the human beings (or at least the “higher” animals) it encounters. But this is to miss the

ontological point. Trees (as well as humans and higher animals and larger systems like rivers, waterfalls, and ecosystems) are relational—placed. A tree’s past and present is an intersection of activities where human purpose is only part of what has established the possibilities that exist for it in its next days or seasons. The ontology of individuals (and groups) is a matter of relations and power—that is, they are, to borrow a phrase from John Dewey, active doings and undergoings such that *what* they are is better taken as *who* they are. In sum, Deloria says, “every entity [has] a personality and [can] experience a measure of free will and choice”²⁰.

If ontology is the starting point, then the size and duration of agents are not given in advance but are characteristics of the place and power at hand. Individual human beings as individual agents live in relation to others—human and otherwise—and seek to fulfill their purposes as those around them do likewise. As Deloria observes, the planet itself is an agent and “nurtures smaller forms of life—people, plants, birds, animals, rivers, valleys, and continents”²¹. From the perspective of the “smaller forms of life” as members of larger ones, individuals are not independent but rather are parts of larger agents who also seek to fulfill purposes and who persist as agents even as their members die and new members become parts. Tribes and peoples are themselves agential wholes acting in a context of other such agents sustained by their parts but not reducible to them. Just who, then, count as agents? The answer may not be known in advance; since agency is relational it can make itself apparent only in the process of relating to others. The result, for Deloria, is that “In the moral universe all activities, events, and entities are related, and consequently it does not matter what kind of existence an entity enjoys, for the responsibility is always there for it to participate in the continuing creation of reality.”²²

If the world is composed of agents as Deloria sug-

¹⁸ Deloria, Jr., Vine and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, Golden, Co.: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001, p. 23.

¹⁹ Pratt, Scott L., *Persons in Place: The Agent Ontology of Vine Deloria, Jr.*, *APA Newsletter on American Indians in Philosophy*, 6, 1, 2006, pp. 4-9.

²⁰ Deloria, Jr., Vine, *Spirit and Reason: the Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader*, Golden, Co.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999, pp. 52-3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

gests, there are three further implications to be considered that relate to the character of the world. The first revises the western conceptions of necessity and possibility, while the second marks the recognition of boundaries, vagueness, and chance as “real.” The third implication points toward a conception of politics that begins with the recognition of collective agency or what may also be called sovereignty.

The first implication is that if there are agents of the sort proposed, then the universe is one in which real possibilities exist. When, for example, one faces a choice, there is, in at least some cases, no set of determining conditions that guarantee a particular choice; the judgment of an agent intervenes in the course of affairs established by the relations in which the agent exists. Agents order not just their own experience, as some might conclude, but order the world so that the purposes they chose and the choices they made are ontologically significant. At the same time, should agents become constrained by the relations that frame them, they can fail to recognize alternatives or come to believe that they do not have an ontologically significant role. Received conceptions of agency and received purposes can affect this narrowing so that even as agent ontology like DeLoria’s affirms the reality of alternative possibilities, it also can provide a critical framework for identifying the ways in which agency is narrowed or denied.

The second implication is that agent ontology and its notion of ordering also leads to the recognition of boundaries, vagueness, and chance. Between alternatives there stands an agent whose character or disposition to act is continuous with both alternatives. At the moment of choice, the person or agent in its relation is a contradiction whose logical character is formally indeterminate. Such formal indeterminacy applies not only to individuals but agents of greater complexity and size, collective agents, long persisting agents and so on. When a community faces alternatives for going forward, for example, to ally with another community or oppose it, the community itself stands in a “space” between, at a boundary continuous with both sides or alternatives. It is

at the same time part of one side, A, and part of the other side, B. But since, as an agent faced with real possibilities, the agent is also neither A nor B. Since the agent is A and B and not A and not B, by the usual logical rules regarding conjunctions, one can conclude that the agent is A and not A (not to mention, also B and not B). The agent then is logically indeterminate as to its direction based on the relations that form it. And yet as an agent, it can nevertheless go forward by making a choice by carefully deciding, rolling the dice, or acting on a guess.

Further, from the perspective of an agent who is an observer, when an object on the horizon is vague or unclear (in what it is or what it will do), it is not only vague for the observer, but ontologically vague in anticipation of the settlement of its determining relations. Again, making a determination is not simply seeing what is already determined, but is an ontologically significant act. To recognize agent ontology is to affirm that the experience of vagueness is not simply a “subjective” state, but is characteristic of the world. Boundaries, with their indeterminate character, and vagueness in the connection between things, open the world to the emergence of something new—by choice or chance—and for ongoing growth and change through the actions of agents.

The ontological standing of boundaries and vagueness also lead to the rejection of a particular set of ordering principles that are at the heart of Enlightenment philosophy and central to how one understands relations between things, that is, the idea of borders. These common ordering principles are the principles of non-contradiction, excluded middle, and identity and are recognized as logical (or formal) as well as ontological and epistemic principles. In much of western culture, these serve as unspoken assumptions about what it is to be and to know.

In simplest terms, non-contradiction as a logical principle holds that a proposition cannot be both true and false. As an ontological principle, it holds that a thing cannot both be and not be what it is. The principle of

excluded middle formally holds that a proposition must be either true or false (and not something in between) and ontologically it requires that a thing either be something (a stone, a human, a Lakota) or not, thus rejecting the idea of something ontologically in between. The principle of identity in logic holds that a term is identical with itself, while ontologically identity means that a thing (or a person or a category) is identical with itself, that is, it remains the thing it is.

Agent ontology violates all three principles in each of their versions. Since things are relational and so subject to change as relations change, the principle of identity cannot hold. Since the universe of agents is one in which there are indeterminate borders, vagueness and chance, the principle of excluded middle is rejected. Since incompatible possibilities are “real” and manifested in the character of agents and boundaries, real or true contradictions are possible. According to the principles of agent ontology, the middle is not excluded; things change as a result of changing relations, and contradiction only marks practical conflict and not logical impossibility. The commitments that mark the development of a positive philosophy about what to expect also point to a critical philosophy aimed at challenging the underlying ordering principles of settler society. While agent ontology rejects the ordering principles of Enlightenment logic and ontology as first principles, it can nevertheless recognize them as describing a limited form of agency.

From the perspective of agent ontology, the “agency” of Enlightenment minds (rational individuals) is one that recognizes only certain forms of action as legitimate agency and categorizes other forms of agency as inferior or even as non-agential. The ordering principles of Enlightenment philosophy—non-contradiction, excluded middle and identity—should be seen as practical rules that govern not ontology or knowledge in the abstract, but serve as normative principles for action; that is, they mark a particular kind of agency. Such agency—settler agency—expects borders to be sharp divisions so that one can rightly say that everything must be on one side or the other of any given dividing line and that things

remain ontologically unchanging. From this perspective, there can be only one kind of legitimate agent—the sort that adopts non-contradiction, excluded middle, and identity as guiding principles. Agents who do not are problematic, limited and even irrational.

And so settler agency turns out to be only one way to be an agent, albeit a narrow and sometimes dangerous one. Other kinds of agency can operate by affirming betweenness both formally and ontologically and lead to the expectation of both a less clear-cut logical landscape and a more complex world of experience. Indigenous conceptions of agency that emerged historically in contact with European settlers utilize the wider notion and so are able to recognize the narrower form of settler agency as agency nonetheless. While settler agency and western ethics and epistemology sought legitimate agents in a world composed of non-agents—of passive rocks, mountains, trees, and animals operating by instinct—the alternate notion of agency recognized diverse agents and interests and a consequent need for respect and cooperation.

III Indigenous Sovereignty

The third implication of agent ontology is a politics grounded on the recognition of collective agents—tribes, clans, and other sorts of communities—that also have the ability to act with a purpose. This capacity can be called “sovereignty” and can replace or redefine the notion of sovereignty received from dominant western philosophy. In the context of colonial displacement and the imposition of reservations, American Indian tribes as agents became bound up within the systems established by the U.S. government and predicated on a wholly different starting point. For the United States, American Indians were legally and systematically framed as dependent, first as nations and then, in the late 19th century, as dependent individuals. With Allotment in 1887, native lands were to conform to a vision of individualism where people were only full-fledged human agents when they operated outside the shared commitments of a

group using a particular practice of rationality. From an established commitment to recognition of native peoples as members of nations, boarding schools sought to transform rationality, and citizenship sought to transform membership from tribal membership to membership in the United States and in humanity as a homogeneous whole. By the 1950s, the program of transformation entered what was to be its final stage with the passage of the first termination act by the U. S. Congress in 1953. Now, individual tribes would be legally dissolved leaving native people as proper individual agents unsustained by formative relations except the most abstract and without the sustaining powers of being, for example, Klamath or Chippewa.

In the 1960s, in response to termination and this history of systematic attempts to undermine and displace indigenous ontologies, knowledges, and culture, Deloria, and other activists stood against empire and called for the restoration of American Indian sovereignty. From the perspective of agency, the call for sovereignty became the effort to reestablish or reassert the agency of tribes, reestablishing their distinctiveness and making possible relations between tribes and settler society. But the call for sovereignty was not without risk. In *We Talk You Listen*, Deloria identifies the difficulties bound up with sovereignty. Oppression and persecution of minority groups carried out by the dominant society, of course, must be recognized to be stopped. "In order to validate the persecution of a group," however, "the persecutors must in effect recognize the right of the group to be different." At the same time, "if any group is different in a lasting sense, then it can be kept as a scapegoat for the majority."²³ In the latter case, recognition of sovereignty becomes an instrument of, rather than a challenge to, oppression.

Taiaiake Alfred proposes an alternative. Consistent with the concept of agency as a product of power and place, he argues that in rejecting the "classic notion of

sovereignty"²⁴ it is possible to "recognize our mutual dependency, to realize that indigenous and non-indigenous communities are permanent features of our political and social landscape, to embrace the notion of respectful co-operation on equal terms, and to apply the peacemaking principles on which were based both the many great pre-contact North American confederacies and the later alliances that allowed European societies to establish themselves and flourish on this continent."²⁵ Sandy Grande, in her book, *Red Pedagogy*, concludes that on Alfred's account "'sovereignty' becomes a project organized to defend and sustain the basic right of indigenous peoples to exist in 'wholeness' and to thrive in their relations with other peoples. Local (tribal) and global aims come together in solidarity around the shared goal of decolonization."²⁶ In the context of the recognition of agency, "indigenous perspectives," Alfred says, "offer alternatives, beginning with the restoration of a regime of respect."²⁷

In the end, Deloria and Alfred argue for a similar approach to standing against empire. In each case, they are interested first in re-figuring the world in terms of its living agency. If sovereignty is taken as "the agency of a collective" then the alternative model emerges. In *We Talk You Listen*, Deloria concludes, echoing Eastman, that "America needs a new religion." Describing the activism of the late 1960s, he continues, "Nearly every event and movement today shows signs of fulfilling this role, but none has the centered approach that would permit it to dig its roots in and survive."²⁸ This "religion" is one that leads to "rigorous adherence to the values of racial and other groups." "If my conclusion is correct ... [f]urther generalization about how we are all alike—all people—are useless today. Definite points of view, new logic, and

²³ Deloria, Jr., Vine, *We Talk You Listen*, New York: Macmillan, 1970, p. 117.

²⁴ Alfred, Taiaiake, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, second edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Grande, Sandy, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, p. 171.

²⁷ Alfred, Taiaiake, *Sovereignty, A Companion to American Indian History*, edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, p. 471.

²⁸ Deloria, *We Talk, You Listen*, p.17.

different goals define us. All we can do is try to communicate what we see our group means to itself and how we relate to other groups. Understanding each other as distinct peoples is the most important thing.”²⁹ Sovereignty then becomes a politics of agency that stands against displacement and colonization and supports the coexistence of diverse logics and purposes.

This is the key. American Indian philosophy as it has emerged at the border—rather than being contained by colonial society has the perspective to see how colonial society is in fact a narrowing of the conception and logic of agency. Agency still exists in western philosophy but is has been narrowed so sharply that it has the potential to destroy not just indigenous cultures but European cultures as well. By starving agency in general, western people are less and less able to be, as Parker said, “normal to the environment”—to fit, to acknowledge and

foster growth and change. Narrowness limits responsibility, respect, vision and growth—and so overrides the concerns of those who do not count as legitimate agents in the dominant society. In contrast, Alfred observes, “Indigenous conceptions, and the politics that flow from them, maintain in a real way the distinction between various political communities and contain an imperative of respect that precludes the need for homogenization. Most indigenous people respect others to the degree that they demonstrate respect. ... And that is the key difference: both philosophical systems can achieve peace; but for peace the European demands assimilation to a belief or a country, while the indigenous demands nothing except respect.”³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Alfred, *Sovereignty*, p. 472.