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The Concept of Monism in Navajo Thought

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THE CONCEPT OF MONISM IN NAVAJO THOUGHT

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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THE CONCEPT OF MONISM IN NAVAJO THOUGHT

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The concept of Wind as an underlying and unitary force in a Navajo conceptual scheme, as presented primarily in the work of James K. McNeley (Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy), is used as a means of exploring the possibility that the philosophical theory of monism may serve to explain basic Navajo cultural perspectives.

The study shows how philosophical method--analysis of conceptual notions and their implications--may enhance understanding of the many works on the Navajo presently offered through anthropological and ethnological research.

The idea that Native Americans share a view of the universe as "one thing" has been mentioned by many researchers. The fact that this view may be a monistic one has not heretofore been explored. The Navajo explanation of the Wind concept, as reported by McNeley, is compared to the monistic view proposed by Benedict de Spinoza in the seventeenth-century.

Aside from the analysis of McNeley's presentation this study relies on the views of non-Western peoples offered in the work of Benjamin Whorf and Ludwig Wittgenstein ("Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough").

The presentation of the Navajo world views as monistic is offered as an example for testing whether such a view might be present in other Native American peoples.

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I

INTRODUCTION

At the root of peoples acknowledged beliefs and practices are ideas and concepts that are of such ancient origin that they have become "presuppositions" about reality.[1] These now unstated presuppositions lie as the foundations behind acknowledged and present descriptions of the world we live in and color our expectations of human beings.

These presuppositions differ from group to group thereby producing different senses of what it is that constitutes the real. A set of related presuppositions, which I call a conceptual framework, is not easily accessible but the framework, because it provides us with a description of the real, becomes the lens through which we examine the world. We do not come to new phenomena with an "innocent eye."[2] When we confront that which seems alien to our own framework we tend to fit the alien into the familiar framework of our own presuppositions, or assumptions. We filter new phenomena and in the process distort what has been given.

The number of accounts concerning the alien human being that Europeans encountered in the "new" world is vast. The "Native American"--the indigenous people of the continent newly discovered--presented an anomaly to the European. The native not only looked different, but in

isolation from peoples on the other side of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, he had developed a lifestyle and ideas that were unlike anything ever encountered by the European. After initial contact the next reaction of the European (armed with a set of presuppositions drawn largely from Christianity: there was no mention of such a continent in the Bible) was to see the natives as merely "humanoid."[3] The cultures and practices of the natives were far too alien to be the products of a *true* human. Most of the written material produced by the cultures encountered in Mexico were destroyed; the rest were shipped to Europe. Only after the numbers of the indigenous population become small enough to pose a minimal or at least manageable threat did the accounts of alien cultures begin to be compiled.

At present there is a five hundred year accumulation of reference material concerning America's indigenous populations. Real insight, however, into the thought patterns of these people is only now becoming available. This insight is the result of the acknowledgment by contemporary researchers that different descriptions of the world may be made by peoples in isolation from others. The first attempts to compile the descriptions of the world and of man's relationship to that world consisted in gathering information concerning myths, legends, and rituals. The focus was on creation myths and explanations or descriptions of ritual practices. This early effort was

primarily the work of missionaries and ethnographers. The art of anthropology furnished supplementary information concerning the people themselves. Much of what was compiled was colored by the intentions of the early ethnographer: the intention of the missionary was to replace the beliefs of the native through conversion to Christianity; the intention of the non-missionary ethnographer (though perhaps not so explicit as that of the missionary) was to provide some insight into the native mind that would allow the assimilation of such peoples into the "mainstream."

Beginning with the work of Benjamin Whorf, a student of linguistics, a new focus on the Native American became available. Whorf's analysis of native languages brought greater insight into the fact that different peoples did indeed describe the world in different ways. Whorf's "presupposition" in his research was that there was an *external* reality, i.e., something that existed outside our own subjectivity. This external reality is multifaceted; it consists of many aspects. Out of this presentation of multiple phenomena, human beings *select* particular phenomena as their main focus. Whorf refers to this act as a "dissection" of nature.[4] "Each language," he says, "performs this artificial chopping up of the continuous spread and flow of existence in a different way."[5] He likens this act to the way that "different sciences chop segments . . . out of the world," so that we end with

"sciences" (emphasizing the plural) such as physics, chemistry, biology, botany, etc. Those indigenous languages which Whorf studied (and most specifically, the Hopi) appeared to Whorf to depict a universe consisting primarily of motion. Those phenomena which in the West are familiar to us as "things" and "objects" become "events" to the Hopi. The universe is an eternal flux continually manifesting itself as "events." Whorf describes this as follows:

> [Hopi metaphysics] . . . imposes upon the universe two grand cosmic forms, which as a first approximation in terminology we may call MANIFESTED and MANIFESTING (OR, UNMANIFEST) or, again, OBJECTIVE and SUBJECTIVE. The objective or manifested comprises all that is or has been accessible to the senses . . . . The subjective or manifesting comprises all that we call future. . . .[6]

That which is "manifested" becomes something which is "objective" in the sense that it is something that can be experienced. The universe, however, is dynamic (fluid and ever-changing), so that what is "objective" is not itself eternal--it is temporary duration, therefore, not so much a thing but a "happening"--an event in the eventuating flux.[7]

There has been criticism of Whorf's findings (most notably that of Max Black in his Models and Metaphors--a topic that is explored further in Chapter II of this work), nevertheless, subsequent researchers of Navajo thought do bear out the fact that the Navajo, as well as the Hopi, do have languages based on the concept of motion as a major characteristic of the universe. Gary Witherspoon, for

example, in his well-received Language and Art in the Navajo Universe, says that "the assumption" which underlies the Navajo world view is that "the world is in motion, that things are constantly undergoing processes of transformation, deformation, and restoration, and that the essence of life and being is movement."[8] It is from this concept of motion that Whorf derives his description of the Hopi universe as one of dynamic "manifestation."

In the works of Whorf and others who more recently have probed the meanings inherent in Native American languages there is no doubt that such languages, and thereby the cultures in which those languages are spoken, depict a world view unlike that of the researcher who is most likely to be of European extraction.[9] Because of this research, it is just as plausible to speak of "the Hopi world" (as does Whorf) as it is to speak of the conceptual framework of the ancient Greek peoples as "the Greek world."

A conceptual framework consists not only of specific concepts but also of descriptions of the universe that have some initial observation of natural phenomena at their root. In the case of the Hopi and of the Navajo it is an observation that motion is a facet of the universe: there is change; there is movement; and there is temporary stability, or duration, which are called "objects" and "things."

The implications of this specific conception of the

world have only recently begun to be explored, especially by Witherspoon, James Kale McNeley (Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy), and John R. Farella (The Main Stalk: A Synthesis of Navajo Philosophy). One area of this research that is sadly missing, however, is the involvement of indigenous people themselves. Indigenous peoples serve as "informants" who are either credited by being assigned numbers or initials as "references." There has as yet been no equivalent to Alfonso Ortiz who analyzes the rituals of his own Tewa World. Part of the lack of indigenous analysts is certainly due to intentional community censorship of tribal lore but there is also a lack of native peoples trained in the methods which would allow them to speak for themselves in regard to their own philosophical concepts.

A conceptual framework, though it is implicit in language (both in structure and in content) and based on some real aspect of the universe, is difficult to expose to explanation when one has not lived within that framework. It is necessary, also, that in order to recognize that there is such a framework one must also be aware of the fact that there are other, and competing, frameworks. An example of how this process works could be drawn around the concept of the *soul*. We may read everything available about the concept, and we may even come to understand that the soul is something in which all of the "non-physical" characteristics of a very specific individual are

"embodied," but if one has no such concept it is almost impossible to consider what it would be like to live with such a concept as a *real* aspect of life. On the other hand, someone who actually believes (or "knows") that a soul does indeed exist will not react in the same manner as does the one who does not believe this concept to be a fact about human being.

A world view is like the concept of a soul. People do not merely *believe* that that view is the correct one--it is reality. As reality, it need not be taken into account. A world view is the lens through which we look at and interpret the world; it is the ultimate fact which grants meaning to our utterances, our practices, and our goals. This is how it can be said that a conceptual framework is *lived*. A Hopi or a Navajo who lives the universe as motion is best equipped to explain what it is to live that particular world view, especially in contrast to one that does not hold that view.

Another aspect of a world view, or conceptual framework, is that it can be transmitted even when the language that carries it has been eliminated. This is the case with many of America's indigenous peoples--they do not always speak their native tongues fluently yet they continue to share a world view with their group. If language were the necessary factor in learning this world view, then the world views of Native Americans would by now have been lost and this is not the case. Consider again

the example of the soul: this concept has survived through numerous European languages so that a speaker of a Latin language can talk about the soul with a speaker of another European language family. Not all Europeans today believe that there is such a thing as a soul, but all do know what is meant by the term in more than just an abstract sense. They can argue whether there is or is not a soul, whereas, for someone who does not have that concept as part of his or her sense of what is "real," the matter is simply not relevant. And when a matter is not relevant, we do not spend any time on it.

As more and more researchers come to have an intimate contact with the peoples that were formerly viewed as merely *subjects* to be studied the questions concerning world views become sharper and sharper. Indigenous peoples themselves, keenly aware that they are constantly exposed to two (or more) world views, give much thought to the differences between those views. Talk about such differences tends to revolve around the topics of values, beliefs, or religion, discussion is seldom about *world views*, and it is most certainly not about *conceptual frameworks*.

My own concern over the ideas which appeared to be only implicit in both cultures to which I was exposed revolved around belief. The clash of value systems was a matter of two groups holding <u>different</u> beliefs; a clash over what constituted the sacred was a matter of <u>religious</u>

belief. I became interested not in beliefs themselves but in where those beliefs originated and and what those beliefs implied about those who held them. My entrance into the discipline of philosophy was the result not of a love of philosophy but because it was the only discipline where questions concerning beliefs and assumptions could be raised. It was not a field which was very open to cross-cultural examination, however, there was a branch that dealt with the ideas of other non-European cultures: comparative philosophy. Explorations into the thought of non-literate or "primitive" peoples has barely been touched upon in the field of philosophy and is not a subject that is encouraged but there were enough non-Western philosophers on the campuses that I attended so that I received some encouragement in my pursuit. There were also the comparative philosophers themselves who did not see my pursuit as "merely" anthropology. They saw that what I was doing was in fact philosophy--an analysis of concepts, concept formation, and an attempt to identify and clarify those concepts. I was, in effect, dealing with a legitimate philosophical problem.

Aside from wanting to pursue an area of research that is not usual in the field of philosophy, I confronted another problem. Since little philosophical analysis had been done on Native American thought, there were minimal resources to which I could turn. I could not model my study on something that had already been done with the vast

material which dealt with the Native American; it was this very material which I found unsatisfactory or incomplete in regard to presenting a valid picture of Native American thought. I took as models, instead, the explorations into ancient Greek thought. The ancient Greeks were not a non-literate people, but they were far removed in time from the present so that they were in a way "inaccessible." The inaccessibility of the Native American groups consisted of the lack of written materials from within the cultures themselves.

Early in my research I discovered the work of F. M. Cornford, specifically his book, From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation.[10] Cornford set himself the task of discovering the underlying assumptions of the theories postulated by the post-Homeric thinkers in ancient Greece. Cornford's term for these assumptions is "collective representations," a term, he says, that he derived from the work of French sociologists. He quotes Levy-Bruhl on the definition of the term:

> Representations called collective can be recognized by the following marks: they are common to the members of a given social group, within which they are transmitted from generation to generation; they are imposed upon the individuals . . . . They do not depend for their existence upon the individual; not that they imply a collective subject distinct from the individuals composing the social group, but in that they present themselves with characters which cannot be accounted for merely by considering the individuals as such. It is thus that a language, although, properly speaking, it exists only in the minds of the individuals who speak it,

> is none the less indubitably a social thing, founded on a mass of collective representations. It imposes itself on each of the individuals; it exists before each of them and survives him.[11]

Cornford, in an attempt to make the "notion of a collective representation" a bit "more precise" warns that these representations are not "formulated creeds" or even "collections of final truths," nor are they "dogmas." He stresses that collective representations lie behind even these:

> . . . When we have eliminated all such formulas and creeds and put aside the supernatural, there remains embedded in the very substance of all our thoughts about the world and about ourselves an inalienable and ineradicable framework of conception, which is not of our own making, but given to us ready-made by society--a whole apparatus of concepts and categories, within which and by means of which all our individual thinking, however original and daring, is compelled to move.

Cornford is not arguing for some universal set of representations or "archetypes;" he goes on to say,

> This mass of collective representation is, of course, constantly undergoing gradual change, largely due to the critical efforts of individual thinkers, who from time to time succeed in introducing profound modifications. It is different for every age in history, for every well-marked group in the intellectual chart of mankind, and even within such groups, in a minor degree, for every nationality.[12]

Cornford's explanation of how he would direct his research gave me the impetus to pursue a similar methodology. I would seek out the underlying assumptions of my own Apache beliefs.

My discovery of Benjamin Whorf's research into American indigenous languages lent validity to the insight

that there was in fact a world view embedded in such languages and their cultures. This world view comprised what Cornford called "collective representations" and R. G. Collingwood speaks of as "presuppositions." Cornford, however, warns about the error of imputing our own concerns into the "worlds" of those unlike ourselves. The Greek philosophers of the sixth century, B.C., he says, were not confronted "with the same problems seen in the same light as the English professor of to-day." He credits the "immense difference" between the two as resulting from their "several inheritances of collective representation." He points out that this is a problem confronted by translators:

> He will soon discover that, when once we go beyond the names of objects like tables or trees and of simple actions such as running or eating, no Greek word has an exact equivalent in English, no important abstract conception covers the same area or carries with it the same atmosphere of association.[13]

Cornford, as does Whorf, directs us to the "abstract conceptions" that serve as the foundations which give meaning to what lies on the surface of our discourse and our actions.

Native American thought, unlike the thought of the early Greek philosophers, has too often been seen as a static thought pattern--a product of imagination (as in the formation of myth and legend) or as superstition (as in unfounded belief). Cornford finds his underlying suppositions about the world in religious belief; he traces

the abstract notions of the Greek philosophers to notions which were matters of "faith" for the Homeric Greeks (his example: *moira*). Whorf's view is that human communities derive their notions, or concepts, about the world through initial observations, or interpretations, of actual natural phenomena.

Another influence in my pursuit was from Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," he, as does Cornford, questions whether we can interpret the actions and beliefs of others through application of concepts which are our own collective representations.

The appearance of James K. McNeley's Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy provided, for the first time, a focal point on which I could pivot my research. McNeley had not only taken a Native American concept seriously, but he had also tried to explain how that concept fit into the structure of Navajo life. What I saw as equally important in McNeley's presentation was his inclusion of the transcripts from the original Navajo. These transcripts allow one to see the stress that the Navajo thinkers place on the importance of the Wind concept and on its proper definition. McNeley, in effect, provided a text which dealt with a topic that had very often been portrayed by the numerous researchers into Navajo culture but had not been related as important to other beliefs and practices which were more explicit and therefore accessible.

My selection of monism as the philosophical theory

which best exemplifies the "unitary" quality of the Navajo Wind concept is based on the fact that I have grown up with the notion that the world consists of only one thing that is manifested as the various things that we see and experience. Monism, especially that formulated by the philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza, best illustrates this sense of oneness.

Monism, according to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy article by Roland Hall, "is a name for a group of views in metaphysics that stress the oneness or unity of reality in some sense." Hall differentiates Spinoza's monism from other similar views: materialism, for example, is the view that everything that exists is material. Spinoza, however, according to Hall, stresses that "the apparent multiplicity of substances (as in matter) is really a manifestation of only a single substance in different states or from different points of view."

McNeley's presentation of the Navajo Wind concept strongly stresses the point that even if there is talk of wind(s), in the plural, there is only one wind.

I chose as the subject for this study the Navajo people primarily because there is more reference material on the Navajo than on the Apache. This access to materials would allow for cross-referencing the works and interpretations of various researchers. The Apache, however, does belong to the same stock and language group--Athabascan--as does the Navajo. (During my own childhood

we were "Apache" in contrast to the Navajo who was known to us as the "Apache Navajo.")

In closing comments made by James McNeley in his Holy Wind he makes note that there is a concept similar to that of the Wind among other Native American peoples and encourages research into this similarity. The purpose of my own work is not to explore those similarities but to focus on the Wind concept itself as portrayed by McNeley and his Navajo correspondents in order to examine its philosophical implications.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]The term 'presuppositions' comes from R. G. Collingwood's An Essay on Metaphysics. His explanation is as follows: "Whenever anybody states a thought there are more thoughts in mind than are expressed in his statement. Among these, some stand in a peculiar relation to the thought he has stated: they are its presuppositions." A presupposition, according to Collingwood, ". . . is not a 'dodge' and people who 'start' a new one do not start it because they 'like' to start it. People are not ordinarily aware of their presuppositions, and are not, therefore, aware of changes in them; such a change, therefore cannot be a matter of choice. Nor is there anything superficial or frivolous about it. It is the most radical change a man can undergo, and entails the abandonment of all his most firmly established habits and standards for thought and action." Source: Albury Castell, An Introduction to Modern Philosophy, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 249-251.

[2]E. H. Gombrich, "Truth and the Stereotype," in A Modern Book of Esthetics, 5th ed., ed. Melvin Rader, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).

[3]There is a famous debate held during the late 16th century in Spain between Bernardo de las Casas and the noted Aristotelian, Sepulveda, which hinged on just this issue. It was decided then that the "Indian" did indeed have a soul and was human and therefore deserved the protection of the church.

[4]Benjamin L. Whorf, "Language, Mind and Reality," in Language, Thought and Reality, ed. John B. Carroll, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956), 213.

[5]Ibid., 253.

[6]Ibid., "An American Indian Model of the Universe," 59.

[7]Gary Witherspoon, Language and Art in the Navajo Universe, (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1977), 48.

[8]Witherspoon and Paul Platero (Dine Bizaad Hazaalye, [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 198]), for example.

[9]F. M. Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation, (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

[10]Ibid., 43, 44.

[11]Ibid., 44, 45.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,"Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives, ed. C. G. Luckhardt, (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979).

II

METHODOLOGY: THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Issues having to do with the Native American are usually addressed in the fields of anthropology and ethnography. Both these disciplines, aside from compiling information about the cultural groups they study, also offer explanations (and/or interpretations) concerning the data they have compiled.

The philosophical perspective differs from both these fields in that the act of explaining itself is taken under consideration.

All explanation takes place in a <u>context</u>. Philosophy seeks to explore that context. In the case of cross-cultural explanation, it is necessary to explore not only the context in which the data which we seek to explain takes place, but also the context from which we undertake our explanations. The philosophical perspective requires that we be aware that different contexts may be involved in a cross-cultural study. It requires that we keep in mind Cornford's caution concerning those unlike ourselves:

> . . . The same problems may not be seen in the same light . . . .
>
> . . . Beyond the names of objects like tables and trees . . . no Greek word has an exact equivalent in English, no important abstract conception covers the same area or carries with it the same atmosphere of association.[1]

Ordinarily anthropologists and ethnographers are aware

that they are dealing with cultures that have different contexts but it is usually assumed that only the other, the alien, context must be subjected to scrutiny. (I am aware that the term 'other' carries specific philosophical import [for example, in the work by Tsevan Todorov on the conquest of America]; I use it here in the sense that it identifies those who do not share lifestyles, value systems, or world views with the researcher.) In a philosophical examination it is necessary to understand that examining and explaining are, themselves, contextual. In the case of cross-cultural examination, we may be dealing with contexts that may not be entirely commensurable. In other words, it may be that our framework for explaining is taking the conceptions of another culture and forcing them to "fit" into our own context of explanations.

Anthropology analyzes the way that people interact within a given culture and the way that those people interact with their surroundings. The ethnographer seeks to compile information about the oral "traditional" lore within a specific group. The context, however, in which both those endeavors are carried out is one that seeks out "alien" groups; i.e., there are few, if any, studies done on contemporary, e.g., "downtown Detroiters" in either field. Ethnographers do undertake studies of contemporary people from within their own group but the focus is on "lore" that is out of the mainstream. The emphasis is on the "folk" in the compiling of such information. Both

disciplines have an underlying assumption that guides their research: the groups that they study are not only different from the researcher but also in some fashion, perceived as either "primitive" or "regressive" forms of contemporary man and lifestyle.

The usual contextual approach of the researcher into Native America cultures is to view them as examples of a regressive life form which engages in a "less-developed" form of "modern" thought. This approach assumes that the thought of such peoples is embedded in myth and legend ('myth' and 'legend' in this sense being an example of uninformed thought, i.e., a product of imagination as opposed to speculation based on empirical observation). Native Americans are seen less as an example of the potential diversity of human thought than as an instance of the developmental course of modern man's own rise out of the realm of imaginative or superstitious speculation. We fail, through this approach, to see the other culture as a truly viable and alternative adaptation to life on this planet.

Philosophy is uniquely qualified to surpass this particular approach to examining non-Western cultures. An example of how this can be done is Cornford's examination of the definitions of the world held by the ancient Greeks. The early cosmologists, according to Cornford,saw the world as similar to an organic life form: it was "hylozoist," i.e., alive; and it was viewed by the Greeks of that time

as self-changing and infinite. The analogy that was used to describe the process of this dynamic world is to physical growth. Cornford explains this focus:

> The chief object of speculation for [the Milesians] was not man or human society, but 'Nature' (*physis*).[2]

Cornford points out that understanding the concept of *physis* is difficult: "It is at once apparent that we have no satisfactory rendering for *physis*." He discards the substitution of the term 'primary substance' for *physis* because it is "charged with Aristotelian and scholastic associations." He rejects the term 'matter' on the basis that it "suggests something contrasted with mind or life, whereas the primary meaning of *physis* is 'growth,' and its first associations are of life and motion, not of stillness and death."[3] These are the basic definitions that the Greek cosmologists gave to their world and it was these definitions that provided the context upon which their speculations were based.

Cornford sees that this context had a "fundamental importance for all Greek cosmology" and that it did, as well, "pervade" all "political and ethical speculation."[4] The world view of the ancient Greek was the "stage" upon which all subsequent actions were performed.

If we examine early Greek speculation, the works, for example, of the early cosmologists such as Anaximander, Anaxagoras, or Heraclitus, we do not find a concern with the origin of the universe, as is so commonly found today.

A universe that is postulated as infinite, as was that of these early thinkers, precludes questions about beginnings. Their world was based instead on the assumption that "there is something" and their concerns then were focused on what that something might be. In order to understand ancient Greek thought it is necessary to accept that their definitions of the world were very different from those held by modern cosmologists. Once we accept that the Greek world was seen as infinite then we can understand that questions about origins do not make sense--as they do to those of us who are familiar with "the Big Bang" speculation. The ancient Greek speculated about whether the *something* of the universe was *water* (Thales), *fire* (Heraclitus), or some *undifferentiated* thing (Anaximander).

Our basic definitions of the world, in other words, serve to direct our questioning.

In the case of research into the thought of the various Native American groups, I know of few attempts by anthropologists or ethnographers to try to elicit any definitions of the world made by the groups themselves. The researcher clues the group into what sort of information he is soliciting: creation myths, for example, or specific rituals. Seldom is there an attempt to discuss concepts with the native groups or their intellectual leaders. McNeley's attempt stands almost alone in this respect.

The philosopher, Martin Heidegger, pointed out that it

was the task of the philosopher to get back to the *original questions*.[5] Those original questions that were asked by a specific group clarify the present *answers* which we come to take as the givens of a present world view. Philosophy is the only field that undertakes the task which Heidegger recommends.

If our research questions are not based on the context of the group we wish to study we cannot learn how it is that their subsequent ideas hold together. We see instead isolated strands of thought. We then try to fit those strands of thought into ready-made forms from within our own context. It is in this manner that we come to believe that all Native American thought is embedded in the literal language of myth and legend. We don not expect that there will be a logical consistency between ideas and definitions of the world because we already "know" that Native American thought is "prelogical," "instinctual," or "primitive." Because of this presupposition we fail to realize that Native Americans inhabit a "world" that is as different from contemporary American society as was that of the ancient Greek to "the English philosopher of to-day" of which Cornford speaks.

That this is the case is shown in studies done by Benjamin Whorf. Whorf is neither an anthropologist nor an ethnographer; he is a linguist. It is through the study of languages that he discovers that cultural linguistic groups do indeed inhabit different worlds. These different worlds

do not consist of "new" or "separate" realities to which Native Americans, alone, have access. Nor are they creations of the imagination. Whorf claims that human beings "make" their worlds by focusing their attention on very specific aspects of the universe. That focus then becomes indicative of the larger whole. Ludwig Wittgenstein, as will be shown later on in this work, appears to hold a view similar to that of Whorf on how *Weltanschauungen** are developed. (The term *'Weltanschauung'* is of German origin and "unpacked" is as follows: *Welt*/world; *-an*/directional; *schauung*/to view; meaning, to view in a particular direction, or manner. The term is cognate with the more familiar *world view*.)

Benjamin Whorf's major work was with the Hopi people of the Southwestern United States of whom he says that their language and culture is predicated on the existence of motion (movement, change, duration) in the universe. The Navajo, selected for my own study, also have been shown to have a language predicated on a definition of the universe as motion. This view of the universe is contrasted by Whorf to the world view of what he calls the "Standard Average European" or, SAE. The SAE, says Whorf, in contrast to the Hopi, inhabit a world that is "static."[6] He goes on to say that both views are, nonetheless, "equally valid":

> Just as it is possible to have any number of geometries other than the Euclidean which give an equally perfect account of space configurations, so it is possible to have descriptions of the

> universe, all equally valid, that do not contain our familiar contrasts of time and space. The relativity viewpoint of modern physics is one such view conceived in mathematical terms, and the Hopi *Weltanschauung* is another and quite different one, nonmathematical and linguistic.[7]

Different peoples, according to Whorf, "segment" the universe dependent on what part of a greater external reality they choose to emphasize. "Each language," says Whorf, "performs this artificial chopping up of the continuous spread and flow of existence in a different way."[8] Once, however, a decision is made to focus on a singular facet of the universe as *the* important facet, that focus comes to underlie all subsequent facts and beliefs about the world. The decision or choice lies so far back in our histories that we are no longer aware of the fact that what we now take for granted as *real* was once an item of conjecture.

Whorf's claim that language carries a metaphysics is demonstrated by him in his essay, "An American Indian Model of the Universe." He begins his essay with a rather bold statement:

> I find it gratuitous to assume that a Hopi who knows only the Hopi language and the cultural ideas of his own society has the same notions, often supposed to be intuitions, of time and space that we have, and that are generally assumed to be universal.[9]

Whorf then goes on to say that the Hopi does not share the SAE view of time as "a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at an equal rate" or, that there is "an observer . . .[who] is being carried in

the stream of duration continuously away from a past and into a future." The SAE view, according to Whorf, is "kinematic"--i.e., "a continuous translation in space and time." The Hopi view the world of motion as "an exhibition of dynamic effort in a certain process." Whorf explains what is meant here by explaining the metaphysics of the two peoples:

> The metaphysics underlying our own language, thinking, and modern culture (I speak not of the recent and quite different relativity metaphysics of modern science) imposes upon the universe two grand COSMIC FORMS, space and time; static three-dimensional infinite space, and kinetic one-dimensional uniformly and perpetually flowing time--two utterly separate and unconnected aspects of reality . . . .
>
> The Hopi metaphysics also has its cosmic forms comparable to these in scale and scope . . . it imposes upon the universe two grand cosmic forms, which . . . we may call MANIFESTED and MANIFESTING (or UNMANIFEST) or . . . OBJECTIVE and SUBJECTIVE. The objective or manifested comprises all that is or has been accessible to the senses, the historical physical universe . . . with no attempt to distinguish between present and past but excluding everything that we call the future. The subjective or manifesting comprises all that we call future . . . also all mentality, intellection, and emotion . . . it is in a dynamic state . . . not advancing toward us out of a future, but ALREADY WITH US in a vital and mental form . . . .[10]

These two world views which are offered by Whorf as two distinct ways of describing the universe are the reason that he can say that to ascribe some universal acceptance of the Western views of space and time as "intuitive" to all people is "gratuitous." Each of the two ways of describing the universe begin as observations of some aspect of the world which is then interpreted and taken as

indicative of the whole. The views then become embedded in what Whorf terms "linguistic habit."[11] This is how a world view is perpetuated in a group. He goes on to say that, "Newtonian space, time, and matter are no intuitions." They are "recepts" from a very specific culture and language. "That," says Whorf, "is where Newton got them."[12]

Whorf's theory about language and world views has been subjected to strong criticism. One of the most notable examples from a philosopher is that of Max Black in his essay, "Linguistic Relativity: The Views of Benjamin Lee Whorf."[13] Black's reaction to Whorf's claim that, ". . . it is possible to have descriptions of the universe, all equally valid, that do not contain our familiar contrast of time and space," is not a reaction that is unfamiliar to any non-Westerner that attempts to point out to Westerners that there are different ways of describing the universe. Black calls Whorf's view one of "amateurish crudity."[14] He castigates Whorf's theory as suffering from the following errors: "variant formulations of the main points are often inconsistent, there is much exaggeration, and a vaporous mysticism blurs perspectives already sufficiently elusive."[15] He charges Whorf of imputing to the Hopi his own views which are rife with elements of "Bergonsonianism" and William James' "stream of thought:"

> . . . Whorf commits the *linguist's fallacy* of imputing his own sophisticated attitudes to the speakers he is studying.[16]

Aside from the derogatory comments, Black does refer to the points that he says Whorf makes. He lists ten points and proceeds to refute them (actually he refers directly to only six of the ten points).[17]

> (1) Languages embody "integrated fashions of speaking" or "background linguistic systems," consisting of prescribed modes of expressing thought and experience.

Black grants that there might be some similarity here to "semantical types" or Wittgenstein's "depth grammar" which are legitimate topics to address. Black, however, balks when it appears that Whorf credits the Hopi of being aware of this "submerged, subtle, and elusive meaning" (Whorf's terms as quoted by Black). "The heuristic value of a notion of a cryptotype is manifested in its capacity to induce verifiable predictions," says Black, "the rest is mythical psychology."

> (2) A native speaker has a distinctive "conceptual system" for "organizing experience," and (3) a distinctive "world view" concerning the universe and his relations to it.

Black's objection here is that Whorf's claim that different groups "segment" nature really makes no difference in how one views the world. "Navajo splits our *black* into two colors," says Black, "and they lump blue and green together." Nevertheless, says Black "the Navajo are just as good at discriminating colors as we are!" Whorf, according to Black, has succumbed to the muddled notion that the function of speech is to "reinstate reality." Black sees this as being "a far cry to the assumption that

to speak grammatically is to mold 'reality' into a structure isomorphic with the grammar." The third point (distinctive "world view") that Black criticizes begins with his statement that this implies, "every man is his own metaphysician." He states here a common flaw in the argument against any claim of relativism, i.e., that relativism breaks down to the singular individual.[18] He outlines the Hopi "metaphysics" of the *manifesting* and the *manifested* in all of the subtle points that Whorf points out and asks, "How much of all this would the average Hopi recognize?" He then goes on to object to Whorf's reference to the "Standard Average European." "The idea," says Black, "that a given language commits its users to a distinctive philosophy has captured the imaginations of such as Cassirer and Wittgenstein," and, "must have something to be said for it." Nevertheless, Black opts to dismiss the idea on the basis that "languages that Hume and Hegel could use with equal fluency can hardly embody a unique philosophy." "And, what about Descartes?," he asks, here is another "Standard Average European" with a "radically different" metaphysical system.

Black's fourth and fifth points which he would argue against Whorf are the claims that,

> (4) The background linguistic system partially determines the associated conceptual system, and (5) partially determines the associated world view.

Whorf, says Black, identifies "conceptual systems" and

"world view" with the language in which they are expressed, while also confusedly thinking of them as distinct.

Black's last point of contention is with Whorf's claim (as understood by Black) that "reality consists of a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions." Black dismisses this sixth claim with the statement that "insistence upon the continuity and flow of experience is unexceptionable but empty." He ends his criticism of Whorf's view by addressing the issue of relativism: Whorf claims that "no individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality." This statement, according to Black, would negate anything that Whorf would have to say about another view; i.e., he would not be able to get out of his own in order to see the other. Black ends his criticism on a conciliatory note:

> Often enough in the history of thought the unsoundest views have proved the most suggestive. Whorf's mistakes are more interesting than the carefully hedged commonplaces of more cautious writers.

The questions that Black raises about Whorf's claims are legitimate ones but they are also capable of being answered with Whorf's own approach to his study. Whorf makes the statement that, "a change in language can transform our appreciation of the Cosmos."[19] An example of this would be to note how our world changes when our basic definitions of the world change. Black's charge that if we were truly locked into a conceptual system, then we could not get out is recognized by Whorf. Whorf recommends that we become

familiar with as many "widely different linguistic systems" as possible. It is through Whorf's acquaintance with Hopi that he becomes aware of the distinctions between the Western way of "segmenting" the universe and that of the Hopi. "The SAE," says Whorf, "has analyzed reality largely in terms of what [he] calls 'things' (bodies and quasibodies)." The SAE tends also to "spatialize" or *objectify* nonspatial existents and to speak of them as being "charged with implications of form and continuum." Time is one of those nonspatial existents that is spoken of in spatial terms: *it flows*, we *move through it*. The Hopi, on the other hand, analyzes reality in terms of *events* which are then viewed objectively--as that which is in existence; and subjectively--what has not come into being but is about to.[20]

Black wants to deny that such views affect the way we react to the world. He wants to deny that there is any difference between how cultural linguistic groups view the world. He wants, however, to maintain that his own cultural linguistic group is too diverse to be spoken of in general terms (Hume, Hegel, Descartes and their respective views are his examples of European diversity).

Black especially objects to the fact that if linguistic relativity does portray different world views that they are all "equally valid" and he especially resents the implication that the Hopi world view, as portrayed by Whorf, "may be a better vehicle for physics" because it

seems to be describing a world similar to that of the modern physical discoveries.[21] The context of Black's objections lies in the fact that he sees Whorf claiming that there are many external realities. Black, on the other hand, sees that there is only one and therefore only one correct way to describe it. Whorf makes no claim to there being many realities. His argument is based on the assumption that there is one external reality that is dynamic and multifaceted. Different peoples emphasize different facets of this reality--this is the "chopping up" and "segmenting" of which Whorf speaks. The analogy Whorf makes to illustrate this point is to the existence of many sciences, such as physics, chemistry, or biology. Each of these look at one segment of a larger whole. Each science is not the only correct one but they each supplement knowledge of a greater whole. Whorf's greatest "sin" in Black's eyes is an unstated one, i.e., that Whorf has equated a "primitive" people with a more highly developed people. Whorf does not see that one has a more "advanced" view than the other. He, unlike so many other researchers, does not see the Hopi as a regressive life form but as an *equally valid* form.

Whorf speaks of a *Weltanschauung*, a *metaphysics*, and a *world view*, the fact that he does so seems to imply that he is aware that language is part of a larger context. It would be a mistake to think that meaning lay only in language; language is only a part of a larger context and

it is in that context that meaning is embodied and reinforced.

A good example of how it is the context which carries meaning is the discredited geocentric view of the universe. The context of that view was Christianity. Early Christians "knew" that the earth was the center of the universe--God had made it that way. The heliocentric view of the world introduced by Copernicus called into question not only the position of the planet and the language used to depict it, but all of the views that had depended on that description. The entire context of a society was called into question and subsequently the views of that society were changed in order to correspond with the new perception of the world.

Examining the changes that occur when a context of meaning is changed is easier when a culture has a written language. Cross-cultural studies pose a problem but as Whorf has shown the problem is not insurmountable. His work and that of others, such as Wittgenstein's critical examination of the work of James George Frazer's Golden Bough, and McNeley's focus on a critical concept in Navajo thought offer a means to "get at" the nonwritten discourse of a people.

The philosopher's contribution to such a study is in examining the ramifications of the concepts, implicit or explicit, in such discourse. Ludwig Wittgenstein offers an insight into how one might go about inquiring into the

context of a people who do not share our own culture or language. Wittgenstein does this primarily through his criticism of Frazer in his essay, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough."[22]

Frazer's work, The Golden Bough, is a compilation of myths, beliefs, and practices of the early Greeks and Romans and "savage" peoples.[23] Accompanying these tales are Frazer's own explanations of the *meaning* of this material. The book was highly acclaimed when it first appeared in the twenties and is still looked upon by many as one of the classics in the field of ethnography.

Wittgenstein's opinion of Frazer was not in accord with the views commonly held by others. He says,

> Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views look like *errors* (R., 61).
>
> (The 'R.' is in reference to the "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," followed by a page number.)
>
> All that Frazer does is to make them plausible to people who think as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity (R., 61).
>
> What a narrow spiritual life on Frazer's part! As a result: how impossible it was for him to conceive of a life different from that of the England of his time!
> Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically a present-day English parson with the same stupidity and dullness (R., 65).

Wittgenstein chides Frazer for an inability to see that "men . . . perform actions which bear a characteristic peculiar to themselves . . . ." (R., 67). That is, Wittgenstein recognizes that there are underlying

rationales for the "strange" behaviour of those people who are so unlike ourselves. But it is difficult to get out of our own frame of reference in order to see the stranger as an equally viable human being. Most likely we are not even aware that we have a frame of reference that serves as our model of interpretation.

Wittgenstein insists that underlying our obvious actions and intentions is a "mythology" that is not accessible to us.[24] It is this mythology which infiltrates our attempt to understand other peoples. Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer's interpretations is based on the fact that Frazer is not so much telling us about the beliefs of his "savages" as he is remaking those beliefs so that they can be equated to something that his readers already know:

> Identifying one's own gods with the gods of other peoples. One convinces oneself that the names have the same meaning (R., 69).
>
> Indeed, if Frazer's explanations did not in the final analysis appeal to a tendency in ourselves, they would not really be explanations (R., 66).

Frazer's method of analysis, which, according to Wittgenstein, is based on his own "form of representation" (R., 69), intrudes on any real understanding of the practices of others.

Wittgenstein stresses that in order to understand the other we must first understand that a specific "community" of peoples develops a *Weltanschauung* ("the way we see things" [R., 69]) that is unique to those people. He illustrates this point:

> . . . There can have been no *reason*, that prompted certain races of mankind to venerate the oak tree, but only the fact that they and the oak were united in a community of life, and therefore it was not by choice that they arose together, but rather like the flea and the dog. (If fleas developed a rite, it would be based on the dog.) (R., 72-73.)

Meanings attendant to rituals, cultural practices, and even ideas exist in a context--what Wittgenstein refers to as a "community of life." It is to this context of meanings that we should turn in an attempt to understand what is alien to us. The context of meaning is perhaps a cultural adaptation to peculiar circumstances and these adaptations are not, according to Wittgenstein, acts of "stupidity" nor even imagination:

> The nonsense here is that Frazer represents these people as if they had a completely false (even insane) idea of the course of nature, whereas they only possess a peculiar interpretation of the phenomena. That is, if they were to write it down, their knowledge of nature would not differ *fundamentally* from ours (R., 74-75).[25]

With this observation, Wittgenstein, as does Whorf, seems to be pointing to the fact that people take into account their circumstances on the planet and their specific locale in the development of their peculiar *Weltanschauung*. These world views differ among peoples because each is based on what Wittgenstein says is their "peculiar interpretation of phenomena." All of a cultural group's actions and ideas have meaning which is based on these interpretations, and these interpretations, because they are specific to the group, are going to vary.

The cultural context which surrounds an individual

human being has a tremendous effect on how an individual acts and see things. It provides "the background of a way of seeing" (R., 77). Furthermore, our common understanding within the group is based on a "background" that may, itself, be inaccessible. Wittgenstein makes several comments concerning this issue in his On Certainty (the numbers following the quotations from On Certainty do not indicate page numbers but passages):[26]

> It may be for example that *all enquiry on our part* is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route traveled by enquiry (88).
>
> . . . I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false (94).
>
> Now it gives our way of looking at things and our researches their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts (211).
>
> The propositions describing this world picture might be a part of a kind of mythology (95).

In the "Remarks," Wittgenstein says more emphatically, "An entire mythology is stored within our language" (R., 70).

It is not merely the complexity of a culture's practices (and language) that sets up barriers to our understanding another culture. According to Wittgenstein, we come to that complexity with a barrier of our own: our unexamined "mythology." Wittgenstein illustrates just what a barrier this can be when he criticizes Frazer's interpretations:

> Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages, for they are not as far removed from the understanding of a spiritual matter as a twentieth-century Englishman. *His* explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves (R., 69).

For example, Wittgenstein demonstrates that Frazer's presentations of "savage" practices may not be so stupid or unreal as Frazer would like:

> I read, among many similar examples, of a Rain-King in Africa to whom the people pray for rain *when the rainy period comes*. But surely that means that they do not believe that he can make it rain, otherwise they would make it rain in the dry periods of the year in which the land is "a parched and arid desert." For if one assumes that the people formerly instituted this office of Rain-King out of stupidity, it is nevertheless certainly clear that they had previously experienced that the rains begin in March, and they would have had the Rain-King function for the other part of the year. Or again: toward morning, when the sun is about to rise, rites of daybreak are celebrated by the people, but not during the night, when they simply burn lamps (R., 71-72).

Wittgenstein also offers the observation that those very practices which Frazer presents as "error" or "superstition" are presented through images that are also present in his own culture, as, for example, when Frazer chides the "savages" for believing in "ghosts" and "shades" without realizing that his audience must also have some "belief" about such things in order to understand Frazer.[27] "Much too little," says Wittgenstein, "is made of the fact that we count the words 'soul' and 'spirit' as part of our educated vocabulary" (R., 70).

Wittgenstein may be too harsh on Frazer, but he is certainly correct in pointing out that our explanations may

not be very informative about the practices of others when they are drawn from our own "forms of representations" (R., 69). Our explanations are inaccurate or incomplete, but they are not deliberate attempts to slight the other's belief system, or their world view. They are simply portrayals fraught with a mechanism of explanation that does not extend beyond certain limits.

We are, as Wittgenstein says in his Philosophical Investigations, "held captive" by a "picture" (PI., 115).[28] "One thinks," he goes on, "that one is tracing the outline of a thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it" (PI, p.114). We must explore the picture, he warns us, "if we want to understand the sense of what we are saying." He realizes that the picture is very pervasive:

> . . . The picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in (PI, p. 184 e, vii).

Our "forms of representation" or ready-made pictures provide us with explanations that satisfy us in our quest for understanding. These are the limits to our understanding, but Wittgenstein does not see these limits as insurmountable. He has a method for getting us out of this dilemma--he urges us to explore the issue of concept formation:

> . . . If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts

> different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him (PI, p. 230e).

Confronting a culture unlike our own requires that we be open to the possibility that there will be entirely different concepts at work, and that they will be valid concepts. They will be valid in the sense of which Whorf speaks when he refers us to "geometries other than the Euclidean."

Along with an understanding that there are going to be different concepts involved in the understanding of an alien culture, we must be aware that such concepts are not explicit. They are not part of the language structure which is amenable to linguistic analysis as Wittgenstein clearly show when he says the following,

> . . . One human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them.
>
> If a lion could talk, we would not understand him (PI, p. 223).

Meaning is embedded in a context--in a "community of life"--as Wittgenstein says. The context of understanding of a lion would be very strange indeed. The peoples of a "strange country," however, are at least of the same species. And, as I hope to show, are accessible with certain effort.

A philosophical approach to the problems we confront in examining a culture which is not the same as our own

differs from the standard approaches which derive from the fields of anthropology and ethnography. The philosopher seeks to understand the concepts that are embedded in a structure of meanings which themselves exist in a context. Cornford, Whorf, and Wittgenstein all show that it is important not only to be aware that there are different contexts but that our own context may intrude on our understanding and may influence our interpretation of the actions and thoughts of others.

A perspective such as that shown by Cornford, Whorf, and Wittgenstein differs from the approaches used by the anthropologist and ethnographer in that there is no pretense of objectivity. They assume that there is no "innocent eye" that is capable of simply recording *objective* facts. Their approaches differ also in that they do not have as a basis of their research the search for similarities. The research and problems posed by the Greeks, as Cornford points out, may not be "seen in the same light" as that of the researcher. Wittgenstein points out, in his criticism of Frazer, that we are too quick to impute meanings to the actions of others according to how those actions *seem* to reflect our own ("Identifying one's own god with the gods of other peoples . . .). He directs us to seek out the "community of life" in which a specific context develops; and to try imagining "very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to." Wittgenstein alerts us, also, to the fact that we must

examine our own context of meanings and our own concepts. He says that it "may be" that certain of our propositions about the world may be founded on some "kind of mythology" and that at the heart of our beliefs (and facts) may lie "belief that is not founded."

Whorf's research points to conflicting *metaphysics* or *Weltanschauungen* that seem to be at the root of language. Whorf's exemption of the "modern relativity metaphysics," which is the result of the findings of a subatomic physics, from the metaphysics that he credits to the commonsense view of the SAE seems to imply that there can be differing world views even within an otherwise homogenous group. This would indicate that even though his research deals primarily with language there is something more which goes into the making of a specific and unique context or "community of life."

NOTES

CHAPTER II

[1]F.M. Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation, (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1957), 45.

[2]Ibid., 7.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Eugene T. Gendlin, What is a Thing, (U.S.: Regency, 1967) 252.

> "Heidegger presents the historical steps and philosophical decisions that brought us to the current approach. He re-opens decisions that were made and are now implicit (are now "happening") in our assumed approach. Philosophy thus makes the current, implicit context *explicit* . . . ."

[6]Benjamin Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," Language, Thought and Reality, ed. John B. Carroll, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956) 59.

[7]Ibid., 58.

[8]Ibid., "Language, Mind and Reality," 253.

[9]Ibid., "An American Indian Model of the Universe," 57.

[10]Ibid., 59-60.

[11]Ibid., "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behaviour to Language," 152.

[12]Ibid., 153.

[13]Max Black, "Linguistic Relativity: The Views of Benjamin Lee Whorf," Models and Metaphors, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962).

[14]Ibid., 255.

[15]Ibid., 245.

[16]Ibid., 247.

[17]The last four points that Black omits in responding to Whorf's argument are as follows: 7) that facts said to be perceived are a function of the language in which they are expressed; 8) that the nature of the universe is a function of the language; 9) grammar does not reflect reality, but varies arbitrarily with language; and, 10) logic does not reflect reality but varies arbitrarily with language.

[18]Language, according to Whorf, "represents the mass mind" ("The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," Language, Thought and Reality, op. cit., p. 156); it is a system, a network, a shared context. This factor would prohibit the statement "every man is his own metaphysician." It is the systems that can be spoken of as "relative" but even they lack the arbitrary quality of Black's statement which implies that every man can choose to designate whatever he likes as "reality." Each linguistic and/or cultural group *selects* from "the flux of impressions;" this selection is similar to the selection that the physicist makes in selecting his proper area of study.

[19]Whorf, "Language, Mind and Reality," 263.

[20]Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," 147.

[21]Black, 256.

[22]Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives, ed. C.G. Luckhardt, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979) 61-81.

[23]James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, 3d, (N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1935).

[24]Wittgenstein seems to use the term 'myth' as a cognatewith "belief that is not founded" (On Certainty, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, [N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1972]) as when he states that, "An entire mythology is stored within our language" (OC, 95) and, "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded" (OC, 253).

[25]Note the similarity of this comment to Black's comment that even though the Navajo language has two words for black and only one for blue and green they distinguish colors "just as good . . . as we."

[26]Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1972).

[27]Frazer, while informing his reader "that if we could strictly interrogate the phantoms which the human mind has conjured up out of the depths of its bottomless ignorance and enshrined as deities . . we should find that the majority of them have been nothing but the ghosts of dead men," also adds a note of caution to those readers: "lest . . . these volumes . . . might lend themselves to an exaggerated estimate of their own importance and hence to a misinterpretation and distortion of history." Nevertheless, Frazer, as Wittgenstein points out, proceeds to use notions well-known to his readers to inform them of "savage" practices (which are to be assumed as having derived from the "bottomless ignorance" of the "savage" mind)."Strange as it may seem to us civilized men," says Frazer, "the notion of theimmortality and even of the resurrection of the lower animals appears to be almost as familiar to the savage and to be accepted by him with nearly as unwavering faith as the obvious fact of their death and destruction." This belief, according to Frazer, indicates that there is "a refusal" on the part of the savage "to recognize in death a final cessation of the vital process." Is Frazer here chiding his readers' own belief in immortality and resurrection or is he finding only the fact that "savages" extend this belief to animals unworthy? (The Golden Bough, Vol. 5, preface.)

[28]Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 3d ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1968).

III

WELTANSCHAUUNG

Both Whorf and Wittgenstein make reference to the term *'Weltanschauung.'* Whorf uses this term synonymously with "metaphysics" and "a description of the universe." Wittgenstein refers to a "perspicuous representation" which he says "denotes the form of our representation, the way we see things." He compares these phrases to a *Weltanschauung* when he goes on to say that there is a *Weltanschauung*, "apparently typical of our time," that is also a "perspicuous representation."[1] He speaks of this "form of representation" as a means of providing the connections within a "community of life." For both Whorf and Wittgenstein meaning exists in a contextual setting. Wittgenstein says that there are "connecting links" that hold that setting together. He thinks it important to find these "links" in order to understand what a culture is about. He illustrates what he means here when he speaks of the links between "certain races" and the oak tree, or between fleas and dogs.[2]

Both writers grant that there are different descriptions of the universe possible and that these are made in and by very different groups existing in varying circumstances. These descriptions, within their own context are what they refer to as *Weltanschauung*.

Weltanschauung, or world view, is a set of concepts or interpretations of the world that are based upon some initial observation of an existential circumstance. This view then comes to provide the context that grants meaning to a cultural and/or linguistic group's "knowledge" and expectations of the world and of man.

An attempt to understand the world view of two very distinct groups is an extremely difficult task. Native Americans, however, are in a unique position to examine contrasting world views. They are acculturated to one view from birth and then upon reaching school age are confronted with what constitutes an "alien" world view. This set of circumstances forces one to the conclusion reached by Wittgenstein" there are "communities of life" and those communities are predicated on entirely different circumstances and points of reference. These communities allow for the creation of different "forms of representation" or "presuppositions: that in turn become foundational belief structures that serve as the implicit background that grant meaning to our everyday discourse and expectations of other people. These structures, because they are implicit, are left out of the field of inquiry. Wittgenstein: "It may be for example that *all enquiry on our part* is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated (OC, 88);" and, " . . . the *questions* that we raise and *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it

were like hinges on which those turn (OC, 341)."*[3] (* footnote for the bottom of this page: * The numbers here refer to passages and not to pages.)

We confront the implicit structure of a "community" when two very different cultures come into contact with each other. It becomes vitally necessary to understand or even attempt to uncover those implicit structures only when one culture is in a position to replace the other. If one culture is not threatened by the other, then there is no reason to examine the implicit constructs of each group. A construct can continue to stand unexamined and serve as a *true* framework of explanation as long as it is not threatened by competing frameworks.

Native American frameworks are threatened by a competing framework when a child enters the compulsory school system. The average American student does not have to confront this dilemma as the system he encounters is predicated on the "reality" which is taken for granted by his peers and reinforced by his teachers. It is the Native American child who is made aware of and must learn to deal with the competing *Weltanschauung*.

That Native Americans are aware of the existence of competing world views cannot be doubted. I have heard, many times, from numerous and diverse Native Americans one phrase used to explain differences in the way they look at the world and the way "the dominant society" sees it, "*They* have a different *idea* about that," it is said.

Some of the most important differences between the groups lie in the way Native Americans and European Americans look at the individual. Native Americans, in general, place a stronger emphasis on the individual's collective membership rather than on the individual *per se* which is how the individual tends to be viewed in a European American context. There is an emphasis on the "we" in Native American groups perhaps in recognition that one is expressing a shared context of a specific group which is being contrasted to another group. Each European American, on the other hand, tends, except in unusual circumstances, to see himself as expressing his own individual way of being. The beliefs or ideas of an individual are not seen in most Native American groups as isolated from the group nor as "unique" but as having a common and shared source. It is somewhat disconcerting, to many Native Americans, to learn that individual European Americans do not generally see themselves as "representative" of their group's mores or thought patterns.

The isolation of the individual from the group has implications for how one relates to the land also. Native Americans tend to see themselves not only as representative of a specific group but as stemming from a particular *ground*. The Jicarilla Apache of Northwestern New Mexico, for example, make an annual "pilgrimage" to their original (pre-reservation) *ground* in the Eastern Colorado/New Mexico

border area. Another example of locating one's identity in a specific ground is the almost commonplace view of the non-Native American that "Indians" see the Earth as their *mother* or that they see themselves as *brothers* with all things.

Native American world views are based on the assumption that contexts exist and that those contexts are important aspects of what they are as individuals. This acknowledgment of the existence of contexts may be due to the fact that few Native American groups existed in total isolation from other groups. Each group was perceived as having its own context which served as the foundation from which their ideas and actions derived meaning.

This aspect of Native American thought is taken into consideration because it seems so much in contrast with the way that the European American views his world. A Yupik/Athabascan student attempting to understand the different learning styles of her own group and that of her European American instructors explained to me, "They keep taking things apart and I keep trying to put them back together again."[4] The instructors, in her view, appeared to be taking things out of context. She wanted to "put them together" in order to understand the context that gave meaning to things.

The student's comment is not unique. I have heard this statement in various guises from other Native American students. They are aware that there are competing learning

styles at work. Entering the educational system is not just a matter of preparing oneself to acquire a new set of facts but involves also learning a new method of dealing with those facts. European American methods are generally based on the existence of distinctions between things. Native American views are based on the idea that such distinctions, though well-noted, are not as important as are relationships and connections between things. Each of these ways of learning are based on different conceptions of how the world holds together. The world of Whorf's SAE is one that consists of myriads of things that are completely distinct and separate from one another. Learning consists of refining those distinctions to finer and finer distinctions--a methodology known as "analytical." The Yupik/Athabascan student called this "chopping things up into bits and pieces" which she wanted to "put back together."

The student is not unaware that distinctions exist or that each is unique. The uniqueness of a thing, however, is not what is important; what is important is how that thing fits into a larger context of relationships. This method of learning, or of describing the world, is not *backward* nor even all that unusual: it is a method called *synthesis*. In the student's world, the identity of a thing also contains its relationship to its surroundings. In the world of her instructors, identity consists of isolating a thing from everything else.

The following example may serve to illustrate the difference between the two methods of learning. Until recently, an American scientist or student in order to learn something about a particular animal, say a bird, would "take it apart" into its constituent parts.[5] The bird would be isolated from its environment by taking it into a laboratory to "study" it. Other students could then learn about the bird by reading the findings of such studies. The Native American student, on the other hand, would be required to enter the bird's habitat and watch its behaviour within the totality of that habitat.[6] Her purpose in doing this is to learn how the bird "fits" into its environment as a whole. The major question here is not how the bird itself is structured or how it functions as a singular being but to learn how it fits into a larger scheme of things. If the bird is migratory, for example, it would be important to gauge its comings and goings in connection with the seasons and with the appearance of other seasonal phenomena such as vegetation or other animals. It would be necessary to note not only what it eats but what eats it. The purpose of this type of learning is not to take an *objective* stance but to become *involved*--to *understand* and not merely to know. The understanding gained in this manner is of a more "intimate" sort and may be the source of the respect with which Native American peoples hold other animal forms.

The purpose of this illustration is not to focus on

the differences between analysis and synthesis as learning style but to ask the further question: why do the two groups choose their respective methods? And, furthermore, what is it that makes these methods seem the "right" ones to each group? My conclusion is that there are different world views at work here. We base our methods on initial descriptions of encountered phenomena and try to "fit" our observations into the world as we think it is.[7]

Whorf's studies in linguistics posits the existence of a metaphysical view at the root of language. This is a perspective that has been missing from the usual studies done on non-literate peoples. There seems, however, to be something more than mere language that is at work. Wittgenstein's concerns appear to point to there being something that lies implicit in language. The implicit is the "community of life" (not only the human group but also its environment) that provides the contextual meaning and sense which the language bears for its users. The reason that I have chosen not to focus on language and instead to focus on conceptual notions is that today many Native Americans do not speak their own languages fluently, yet they share the world view of their own group which seems more *real* than the *reality* offered by the European American. They have also managed to maintain an identity based on that world view that makes them recognizable to other Native Americans. The world view, in this respect, must consist of something that can be handed down through

generations despite language differences.

Getting at that world view is not quite so difficult as proving that one does indeed exist.

The world view of the European American can be traced through historical records. These views can be referred back through various epochs and disciplines: the Greek, Roman, and Christian era; through science, religion, or politics. The only "texts" that are open for examination to those wishing to look for descriptions of the universe in non-literate cultures are those texts compiled by anthropologists and ethnographers. The drawback here is that these texts come with ready made interpretation. There is, however, a growing awareness on the part of some (Witherspoon, Farella, McNeley, e.g.) that interpretations may be skewed by the interpreter's own view. The world views of non-Western peoples are not longer seen as mere "primitive" notions borne out of superstition or imagination but can be seen as actual viable alternative descriptions and interpretations of the world.

Early recorders of Native American life and mores encountered the Native American groups in a fashion similar to one that would be equivalent to exploring Catholicism by focusing on folk superstition concerning the numerous saints and ritual practices. A higher order of exploration would be to focus on the makers and upholders of myth, i.e., the church hierarchy of priests and officials. An even higher order would be to focus on the ideas and

concepts that serve as the pivot points of all that is connected with the Catholic Church. This would entail asking questions about what "God" was and how one knew that humans were privy to the ideas of an extra-terrestial "being." The questions would be about metaphysical and epistemological issues and not about mere ritual or legendary accounts of church heroes. The majority of information about the many Native American groups today usually contains the accounts derived from lower level analysis (legends, myths, rituals).

It is only when a higher order of explanation and examination takes place that fruitful interpretation of the world view held by those who do not share our own view actually begins. Gary Witherspoon and James Farella attempt to engage in this higher order of examination but give interpretations to material from their own context. Witherspoon, for example, interprets the Navajo universe as a universe of "dualities" (duality, as Whorf points out, being a characteristic of interpretation by the SAE) even though he observes that most Navajo ritual practices are geared to a celebration of <u>wholeness</u>. He quotes Gladys Reichard to illustrate this latter point:

> Navajo dogma connects all things, natural and experienced, from man's skeleton to universal destiny, which encompasses even inconceivable space, in a closely interlocked unity which omits nothing, no matter how small or stupendous (Reichard, 1943).[8]

Farella's otherwise excellent analysis of the reasons that motivate the work of most researchers in the field of

Navajo studies, himself, ends with an exposition of the Native American Church which is not of Navajo origin and in traditional circles is rejected as an amalgam of little understood Christian and Native American beliefs.

The idea of wholeness, or unity, in Navajo (and Apache) belief systems is seldom explored, yet it is of great importance. One grows up with the concept of "everything being one thing" and fails to find exploration of this view in any of the literature on the Navajo, Apache, or any other Native American group. Since I began the study of philosophy I have wanted to say: At the root of an Apache belief system lies the concept of monism. But there was no corroborating evidence.

Once, however, I was able to give a label to the view of "wholeness" then I could direct my studies to finding a way to prove this. Gladys Reichard did mention the term 'monism' in connection with the Navajo: "The classes of deity illustrate the monistic principle." She also notes that the Navajo strives for a "oneness" with the universe.[9] But she does not explore the implications of holding a monistic view of the universe.

Another avenue that seemed closed to my research is the type of field research that an anthropologist performs. I lacked this training and even had I had such training I would not have been equipped with the "language" of monism with which to frame my questions.

A discovery of James Kale McNeley's Holy Wind in

Navajo Philosophy provided me the "key" with which to explore a Navajo concept. (I also saw a relationship here between the Navajo Wind concept and the Apache concept of *Usen*. There is little written on the Apache in comparison to the Navajo but the two groups are similar enough [both are Athabascan] that I felt I could explore both concepts through the Navajo presentations.)

McNeley focuses on one single term expressed in the Navajo language: *nilch'i*. *Nilch'i* is translated by McNeley as *wind*. Others have translated this term as *air* (Witherspoon) or *Air-Spirit People* (Zolbrod).[10] The use of the term 'wind' to talk about *nilch'i* indicates that McNeley assigns to the term an aspect that is implied but missing from other translations, that is, that 'wind' more closely approximates the action inherent and necessary to the concept of *nilch'i*, whereas the term 'air' carries with it certain connotations of stasis. The term 'Air-Spirit People' ties the concept down to anthropomorphic characteristics that McNeley, correctly, does not choose to ascribe to the Wind concept. Instead McNeley and the information he solicits from Navajo philosophers point to another quality of Wind that previously had not been seen as important: that Wind is seen by the Navajo as something which "suffuses all of nature."[11]

McNeley finds this concept of such importance because he has detected something similar in other Native American groups:

> [An] . . . area for further research relates to the broader cultural context of the Wind concept. It would be informative to examine the belief systems of other Athabaskan-speaking groups, and also of the Puebloan groups that have influenced Navajo culture, in order to determine whether this concept is rooted in either or both of these traditions. It should also be noted that there are evidences of similarities of the Navajo Wind concept with the Dakota concept of Skan, "the Great Spirit" (Walker 1917), suggesting that the Navajo Wind concept may be a variant of a pan-Indian concept having a wide distribution among Native Americans.[12]

The purpose of my work is not to pursue the "pan-Indian" quality of the Wind concept, though I, too, agree with McNeley that there is such evidence. My own contribution to this effort is to explore the concept within the Navajo context in order to broaden its implications.

It should be noted, however, that this concept is often dismissed. A good example of this dismissal appears in Howard L. Harrod's Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality.[13] In the chapter titled, "Experiencing the Sacred Visions of Power," Harrod makes reference to a quoted passage by an earlier researcher:

> . . . The Blackfoot theory is that there functions in the universe a force (natoji-sun power) most manifest in the sun but pervading the entire world, a power (natoji) that may communicate with individuals making itself manifest through any object, usually animate. (Wissler 1912, p. 103)

"It is doubtful," Harrod responds to this claim,

> . . . that Blackfoot metaphysics was as abstract as this description indicates. It will become clear, however, that this basic solar imagery was central to the constitution of their religious and moral experience . . . even more interesting in this context is the claim that the sacredpower pervading the universe reveals itself to humans by means of speech. Harrod dismisses the implications of

> Wissler that the sun is merely symbolic of "natoji" and goes on to construct his entire presentation of Blackfoot "religion" as being based on "solar imagery."

The denial of the existence of "abstract" notions in Native American thought is not uncommon. John Farella, in his work, The Main Stalk: A Synthesis of Navajo Philosophy, sheds some light on this practice.[14] "Natives," he says, "have been assumed to be fundamentalists [as in Christian fundamentalists]." Researchers assume, according to Farella, that native peoples are "cognitively operating at a very literal level." Farella sees that this results in "disqualifying much of what others have to offer by taking it too literally."[15]

Farella makes another important distinction in pointing out the problem with interpreting the ideas of Native Americans. We make distinctions, he says, between *facts* and *beliefs*: " *'facts'* are debated, accepted, denied, or modified . . . they require active participation in the form of judgment on the part of the observer." *Beliefs*, on the other hand, are seen as "artifacts" by researchers, says Farella, and because they are "artifacts" they can be "passively collected" and taken literally. The job of the ethnographer, according to Farella, differs from that of the native informant in that it is the task of the ethnographer to apply "metaphor" or "interpretation" to the "artifacts" offered as *beliefs* by the informants. This act, he points out, is "presumed to be either an entirely different sort of thing than what the native does, or a

different level of abstraction than how the native conceptualizes."[16]

McNeley takes as a *fact* of the Navajo universe the idea that there exists some "unitary" force in the universe that is the source of motion and life. Because McNeley goes beyond a mere acceptance of the literal qualities which can be and are assigned to the Wind concept, he can explore the concept to a greater depth than have other researchers. McNeley does not tie the concept to the theory of monism but offers research that is much more extensive than has been done before in regard to the "unitary" quality of the concept. His work does, in effect, provide a text with which a philosopher can work. McNeley's exploration of the Wind concept offers a "link" which serves to connect some deeply held notions in a Navajo belief system, such as the ideas of *balance, harmony, beauty,* and the view that the universe is essentially moral.

F.M. Cornford's examination of ancient Greek thought came as a result of his attempt to "eliminate all formulas, creeds, and the supernatural" in order to get as some "inalienable and ineradicable framework of conception . . . within which . . . thought is compelled to move." McNeley and those in the Navajo community with whom he discusses the concept of the Wind point to the fact that although the Wind may be given anthropomorphic characteristics and is spoken of in the plural, there is only one Wind, which,

says McNeley, "suffuses all things." McNeley chooses to focus on the abstract quality of Wind. There is an attempt here, similar to that of Cornford, to get beyond what is easily encountered to get at the substance of the concept.

My own attempt to show how the Wind concept may indicate some underlying monism is to tie together, or provide the link between, the Navajo ideas of balance, harmony, beauty and the other noted aspects of Navajo thought. I believe, also, that introducing the theory of monism to Navajo thought will assist in elevating that thought out of the realm that makes it possible to see "other" peoples as mere *living fossils* of the development of Western man. I, as does Whorf, claim that Navajo thought is an "equally valid" interpretation of the universe.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

[1]Wittgenstein, "Remarks," 69.

[2]Ibid., 72-73.

[3]Ibid., On Certainty, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1972).

[4]The comments are taken from observations by Virginia Spaulding, a student at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, in 1990.

[5]The value of "field studies" has been best illustrated in the methodology used by Jane Goodall in her study of chimpanzees.

[6]Virginia Spaulding, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1990.

[7]There is an interesting observation made by a contemporary physicist concerning this method of explaining our findings about the world: "We have turned to physicists to find what the world is really made of, and they have told us. But their answers have hardly reassured those of us looking for certainty. In our attempt to get to a world outside of language, we have apparently wound up squarely in the net of language. When someone argued with Niels Bohr that reality is more fundamental than language, he responded, 'We are suspended in language in such a way that we cannot say what is up and what is down. The word 'reality' is also a word, a word we must learn to use correctly.'" Bruce Gregory in Inventing Reality: Physics as Language, (N.Y.: John Wylie and Sons, 1988), 196.

[8]Witherspoon, Language and Art, 61.

[9]Reichard, Gladys, Navajo Religion: A Study of Symbolism (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990),5, 14.

[10]Paul Zolbrod, Dine Bahane': The Navajo Creation Story, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

[11]McNeley, Holy Wind, 10.

[12]Ibid., 61.

[13]Howard L. Harrod, Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality, (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

[14]John R. Farella. The Main Stalk: A Synthesis of Navajo Philosophy, (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1984).

[15]Ibid., p. 8-9.

[16]Ibid.

IV

THE NAVAJO *WELTANSCHAUUNG*

Presentations of a Navajo world view usually begin with an account of a creation story. One of the most recent is that of Paul Zolbrod, Dine Bahane': The Navajo Creation Story.[1] In Zolbrod's compilation what McNeley calls "Holy Wind" is present when creation begins:

> Of a time long, long ago these things are said. It is said that at *To bil dahisk'id* white arose in the east and was considered day. We now call that spot Place Where the Waters Crossed.
>
> Blue arose in the south. It too was considered day. So the *Nilch'i dine'e*, who already lived there, moved around. We would call them Air-Spirit People in the language spoken today by those who are given the name *Bilagaana*, which means White Man.
>
> In the west yellow arose and showed that evening had come. Then in the north black arose. So the Air-Spirit People lay down and slept.[2]

Unlike McNeley, who stresses the abstract quality of the Holy Wind, or *nilch'i*, Zolbrod chooses to emphasize the anthropomorphic characteristics, or "qualities" of the term. In a later passage of the same work, Zolbrod identifies the Air-Spirit People, or *Nilch'i din'e*, as a group of twelve consisting of Dark and Red ants, Dragonflies, six different kinds of beetles, two kinds of locusts, and bats. Zolbrod says of these "people" that "they are people unlike the . . . people who come into the world today . . . they are people who travel in the air and fly swiftly like the wind."

In a note to his statement here Zolbrod notes the confusion surrounding explanations of the concept of *nilch'i*:

> I have seen the phrase *Nilch'i dine'e* translated as "mist people" (O'Bryan [1956], p. 2), and as "air people" (Witherspoon [1977, p. 58). Literally the expression means "wind people." I have chosen to avoid that translation, however, so as not to confuse the *niilchi dine'e* [sic] with a supernatural character who is later identified as *Nilch'i ligai*, the White Wind, who breathes animating life into First Man and First Woman or with *Nilch'i* the Wind, a tutelary god who helps the Monster-slayer twins. . . . There is a close relationship between the god *Nilch'i* and *Nilch'i dine'e* it seems to me, and to all them wind people or air people would be accurate enough. But I choose to translate the term as "Air-Spirit People" to keep them distinct as a group from the more highly deified winds and to underscore something typical in Navajo mythology" the objects and forces of nature are frequently seen as possessing an animus or life-force that corresponds roughly with our concept of the soul . . . .[3]

Zolbrod elaborates on the "animus" concept as it relates to another difficult concept in Navajo mythology--the "inner forms" which are seen as inhabiting and animating non-human things (Zolbrod's emphasis) of the world:

> Whether we wish to consider "inner forms" in terms of a soul-like existence, or in terms of a more "primitive" sort of animism, their existence as an essential part of the Navajo conception of the creation represents a belief system which manifests poetic sophistication beyond what the usual literate person expects of preliterate verbal artifacts.[4]

Zolbrod recognizes that the Wind concept, together with the concept of the "inner forms," consists of something more than mere "poetic sophistication" when he refers his readers to the treatment given these concepts by other

researchers in the area of Navajo thought:

> See Witherspoon (1977), p. 29, for a suggestion that *Nilch'i* provides a common denominator for understanding conceptions of "inner forms . . . ."[5]

and,

> See also McNeley . . . and see Reichard . . . .

"I am tempted," says Zolbrod, "to match some of what *Nilch'i* seems to represent with such terms familiar to western culture as *spirit, inspiration, a priori knowledge, insight, inscape, imagination,* and *wit.*"[6] Zolbrod, however, opts to equate the concepts to "imagination" and to unexpected "poetic sophistication."[7]

Zolbrod is not alone in appearing somewhat perplexed by what it is that the Wind concept means and implies in Navajo thought. Gladys A. Reichard, whose massive study of Navajo religious symbols speaks of "wind" in the singular, does say about this concept that it "may be personified." She cites mention of "Wind People" in the various accounts of the time before our present day:

> Wind . . . may be personified. The appearance of Wind People is mentioned incidentally in the Hail Chant: "All the Wind People looked exactly alike with their curly hair hanging down."[8]

Reichard informs us that the Wind People are depicted in sandpainting as associated with "flint" (fire/energy" and "lightning on their bodies." She also enumerates the various forms or manifestations of the Wind: Left-handed Wind, Striped, Spotted, and Shiny. And she sees that other figures may be associated with Wind: "Big Fly and Wind are closely related. Dark and Blue Winds were sometimes

substituted for Big Fly." And, "Wind gods are connected with Whistling God; perhaps he is another manifestation of Wind . . . ."[9]

Gary Witherspoon says of the Winds that they are the "inner forms" of people and things, "people also have inner forms . . . referred to as *nilch'i bii sizinii*: 'in-standing wind soul'." Witherspoon prefers to interpret the term *nilch'i* as 'air' rather than 'wind.' 'Air,' says Witherspoon, "is the only substance or entity in the Navajo world that has the inherent capacity to move and to bear knowledge. *Air* is the ultimate source of all knowledge and animation."[10] Witherspoon goes on to say that "Air is not only the source of human life," "it is the source of life . . . in plants, animals . . . mountains, water . . . ."[11] *Air*, according to Witherspoon's interpretation "contains the supreme power of motion in the universe."[12] He goes on to say that *air* is "not only omnipotent and omniscient, it is also omnipresent," that it "connects, encircles, and fills the whole world."[13] Despite recognizing the importance of *air* or *wind* to the Navajo world view, Witherspoon goes on to explain that world view through two other and distinct notions: these are *sa'ah naaghaii*, which he equates with thought and *bik'eh hozho* which is equated with speech. The terms, taken together, he says, are used to "express happiness, health, beauty of land, harmony of relation with others."[14] He also refers to the notions as "the central animating powers of the universe" and says

that they "produce" the "ideal environment" of beauty, harmony, and happiness.[15]

Witherspoon equates *sa'ah naaghaii* with the "inaudible wind" when he says that the "inner form" of *sa'ah naaghaii* is this "inaudible wind." The "inner form" of *bik'eh hozho*, he says, is "smooth wind." It would appear here, from Witherspoon's account, that *wind* (or *air*) has a pre-eminence as a "central animating power of the universe" since it is the "inner forms," which he equates with *air*, that animate or underlie all things--including the notions of *sa'ah naaghaii* and *bik'eh hozho*.

The references to the interpretations of three noted researchers, Witherspoon, Reichard, and Zolbrod, serve to illustrate the complexity which surrounds an attempt to say anything definitive about the Navajo concept of Wind. However, despite this complexity it should be noted that no researcher into the ideas and thought of the Navajo has failed to take into account the importance of the Wind concept to the Navajo. James McNeley's work represents the first attempt to isolate and explore the complex concept.

What McNeley has done with the *nilch'i* concept that distinguishes his research from that of other is, first of all, that he has succeeded in isolating the abstract quality of the concept, and this is a quality that the Navajo fully appreciates. The use of the term 'Wind' rather than "Air-Spirit People" or "Wind People" removes all of the anthropomorphic characteristics which other

researchers tend to emphasize. The removal of these characteristics take the Wind concept out of the realm of mythical or mystical discourse and into the realm of philosophical analysis.

The second distinguishing mark of McNeley's work is that he seeks to portray the Wind concept as a "unitary" concept. Other researchers have noted the fact that Navajos speak of Wind in the plural, e.g., as Blue Wind, Spotted Wind, Wind's Child, In-standing Wind. McNeley's informants stress that even though Wind may be spoken of as having anthropomorphic and pluralistic characteristics, "there is only one Wind."[16] McNeley stresses this point when he states, "Wind is conceived of as a single phenomenon." His informants say, "there is only one Wind," and, "it has five names" or "twelve."[17] McNeley makes an analogy here between naming the various seas of the world, ". . . naming of a sea does not imply that the waters referred to are distinct from the great body of water." He sees that the names used in making reference to the Wind all have a common referent. His informants reinforce this view when they say of the Wind(s), "they all come back together."[18] The various names arise as a result of the Wind's dynamic nature and are derived, says McNeley, from the fact that Wind has the following characteristics: direction, loci, size, appearance, character or possible effects, and direction of rotation--all of which are also occurring in different situations at different times.[19]

McNeley defines the term *nilch'i* in a prefatory note to his work:

> . . . The term *nilch'i* has been translated in this book as "wind" although this clearly does not adequately convey the sense of the Navajo word. *Nilch'i* refers to the air or atmosphere in its entirety, including such air when in motion, conceived as having a holy quality and powers that are not acknowledged in Western culture.

McNeley further defines this term when he describes the Wind as "suffusing all of nature" wherein it gives "life, thought, speech, and the power of motion to all living things and serves as the means of communication between all elements of the living world."[20] McNeley's Navajo informants say, "We . . . live by this Wind," and, "Winds exist all around and within the individual." But they also note that, "All [meaning the Wind(s)] is the same and it is holy"--"it is both within and all around."[21] McNeley gives no definition of the term 'holy' as it is applied in this context but his informants stress that there is a sacredness felt to be attendant here; i.e., the Wind is worthy of awe, reverence, and close attention.

Until McNeley chose to focus on the Wind as a type of "substance" that "suffuses" the entirety of the universe, researchers appeared to be committing the error of which John Farella speaks when he says that researchers "assume" that natives are "cognitively operating at a very literal level." We give credit to the ethnographer for applying "metaphor" or "interpretation" to the accounts given by natives but we presume that such thinking does not take

place among natives; natives are seen as not being capable of thinking in abstractions, says Farella. This attitude is not unusual. It was pointed out earlier that complex notions are routinely ignored or dismissed by researchers; Harrod, for example, dismisses the Blackfoot concept of *natoji*; he finds it "doubtful" that "Blackfoot metaphysics" was so "abstract." Zolbrod sounds amazed that the implications of the Navajo views about the "inner forms" (as animating forms underlying nature) come close to a "sophistication beyond what the usual literate person expects of preliterate verbal artifacts."

McNeley's exploration of the Wind concept indicates, possibly for the first time among anthropologists and ethnographers, that the usual ready acceptance of mythological and anthropomorphic constructs may be masking some more crucial ideas in Native American thought which now go unexplored. The Native American concept of an "all-pervasive force" that seems to underlie all subsequent notions about the universe has been ignored in an attempt to see Native Americans as "primitive" peoples capable of creating only "preliterate verbal artifacts."

McNeley's focus on the Wind concept should make it clear that Native Americans are fully capable of postulating a highly abstract notion out of the plethora of experiences to which the human is exposed in his environment. It is the examination of the abstract notion of Wind to which McNeley turns our attention.

McNeley allows us to see the Wind concept devoid of its anthropomorphic characteristics and he show us that the concept is to be understood as a "unitary" concept. He also exposes other difficult and related notions which have not been fully examined.

McNeley states that "in the beginning" there are *mists* which are either "light" or "clouds."[22] (The idea of the *mists* is present also in accounts of the creation by the Tewa Puebloan people; see Alfonso Ortiz's account in his Tewa World.) McNeley's account states that "a single mist or cloud became the source of the Winds."[23] He speaks of "Wind created by mists of light" and quotes another researcher (Fishler) as relating that "the mists came together and laid on top of each other, like intercourse, and Supreme Sacred Wind was created." However, it is Wind that is credited with "being endowed with the power to give life and movement to other beings." McNeley's informants lead him to believe that "Wind made life possible."[24] It does this by providing "a means by which breathing could occur."[25] McNeley quotes an informant, JT, as saying that "Wind existed first." JT gives the following account:

> We started existing where Darknesses, lying on one another, occurred. Here, the one that had laid on top became Dawn . . . what used to be lying on one another back then, this is Wind. It (Wind) was Darkness.

It would appear from the accounts recorded by McNeley that the *mists* and the Wind may be one single phenomenon.

Another seemingly contradictory account of creation

concerns the *inner forms*. Zolbrod attempts to define the *inner forms* when he says that they are seen (by the Navajo) as "inhabiting and animating non-human things;" he refers to them as "soul-like" and sees them as a "more 'primitive' form of animism."[26] Witherspoon mentions that all things have *inner forms* and *outer forms*.[27] He relates these as being "generated" by two equally complex terms in Navajo discourse: *sa'ah naaghaii* and *bik'eh hozho*. Witherspoon equates *sa'ah naaghaii* with thought and *bik'eh hozho* with speech. He then goes on to call thought the *inner form* of speech and speech the *outer form* of thought.[28] He says also that people are thought by the Navajo to have *inner forms* (contradicting Zolbrod who sees that only non-human things have *inner forms*). Witherspoon: "People also have inner forms. These are referred to as *nilch'i bii'sizinii*, usually translated as the 'in-standing wind soul'."

McNeley, through his informants, offers another account of the *inner forms* when he relates that it is the *inner forms*, "lying on top one another" who create, or cause various things to come into being.[29] He goes on to quote his informants as saying that "What was formed as the result of the intercourse of the inner forms . . . was the same thing as the Wind that forms inside of a human embryo when it is conceived." Whether the *inner forms* create Wind or whether it is the other way around is difficult to discern. The *inner forms* are spoken of in the same manner as the *mists*--both are said to be the means by which breath

or Wind is instilled in things animate or inanimate.[30] McNeley says that "the mists of light and the mountains . . . are believed to have been living, breathing phenomena." However he points also to the fact that Wind is that which animates, or causes things to breathe or *be*: "Wind made life possible . . . not only by providing a means by which breathing could occur but also by providing guidance." McNeley also says that "inner forms brought their winds together to form the Wind by which that being created would live." We are left here with some confusion as to whether the unitary quality which McNeley claims for the various Wind(s) is to be extended to the *inner forms*. His informants constantly stress that the "in-standing wind" that animates humans and non-humans is the same as that which is the *one* Wind.

McNeley, however, continues to talk about the *inner forms* and the Wind as though they were two distinct things: "Natural phenomena . . . [have] been endowed with inner forms and Wind by which they live and think." McNeley does this despite the fact that his informants seem to use the two terms interchangeably: "Wind existed first . . .;" and, "Winds give breath of life; and, Within the one called Earth Mother two winds formed . . . these lying on one another will be holy; will move us . . . ."[31]

McNeley's account, despite having synthesized the Wind concept from its seemingly diverse characteristics, still leaves us with the complexity of *inner forms*, *mists*, and

wind as possible *forces* that participate in the universe. The difficulties may be due to the fact that though the Wind concept is seen by McNeley as unitary, he may not be acquainted with the language of monism which might solve these confusing and contradictory elements in Navajo thought.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

[1]Paul Zolbrod, Dine Bahane': The Navajo Creation Story, (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1984)

[2]Ibid., 35.

[3]Ibid., 347.

[4]Ibid., 362-363.

[5]Ibid., 63.

[6]Ibid., 372.

[7]Ibid., 363.

[8]Reichard, Navajo Religion: A Study of Symbolism, 497.

[9]Ibid., 498.

[10]Witherspoon, Language and Art, 53

[11]Ibid., 54.

[12]Ibid., 60.

[13]Ibid., 61.

[14]Ibid., 18.

[15]Ibid., 25.

[16]McNeley, Holy Wind, 17.

[17]Ibid., 17.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., 18.

[20]Ibid., xviii.

[21]Ibid., 35.

[22]Ibid., 8.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., 9.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Zolbrod, 362-363.

[27]Witherspoon, 25.

[28]Ibid., 29.

[29]McNeley, 22.

[30]Ibid., 8.

[31]Ibid., 9 and 13.

V

THE LANGUAGE OF MONISM

Wittgenstein suggests we try imagining "some very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to" and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible . . . ."[1] However, in the "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," Wittgenstein shows how difficult this may be. "Frazer," says Wittgenstein, "cannot imagine a priest who is not basically a present-day English parson." Because Frazer cannot do this Wittgenstein sees that the explanations and interpretations of "savage" practices offered by Frazer will be plausible only "to people who think as he does."[2]

The exercise in "imagining some very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to" is exactly what is required in order to understand the fact that the Navajo define their universe as *something* (essentially *Wind*) in motion. When McNeley says that the Wind concept is "unitary" and "suffused" throughout the universe, he is indicating something very like the monistic view postulated by the seventeenth century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza.

Both Spinoza and McNeley use the analogy of water in describing the "unitary" quality of the one thing that comprises the universe:

> McNeley: Navajo naming of a particular aspect of Wind does not thereby differentiate it as a kind of Wind having no relationship

> to the whole of which it is a part, just as our naming of a sea does not imply that the waters referred to are distinct from the great body of water encompassing the whole Earth.[3]

Spinoza: . . . If we remember that matter is everywhere the same, and that, except in so far as we regard it as affected in different ways, parts are not distinguished in it, that is to say, they are distinguished with regard to mode, but not with regard to reality. For example, we conceive water as being divided, in so far as it is water, and that its parts are separated from one another, but in so far as it is corporal substance we cannot thus conceive it, for as such it is neither separated nor divided.[4]

McNeley is speaking of the Navajo Wind concept and Spinoza is speaking of what he calls "substance," "Nature," or "God." Both analogies are being used to demonstrate the monistic quality of the universe.

Spinoza, in fact, is the nearest one can come in a Western context to the view that the Navajo seem to hold about their world. Therefore, before making comparisons between the Navajo Wind concept and Spinoza's monism, I offer a short introduction to Spinoza's theory.

Benedict de Spinoza's particular description of monism is called by Roland Hall in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy a "classic monism."[5] Monism is the idea that whatever comprises the universe is only one thing which differentiates, or manifests, itself into many things. Spinoza calls this one thing "substance," "Nature," and "God."

The term 'substance' has an ancient origin. The early

Greek cosmologists sought to define the "basic stuff" of the universe and spoke of "substance." Some thought of things as comprised of one substance: Thales thought it to be water; Anaximander called it the *undifferentiated;* and Heraclitus saw it as the "ever-lasting fire."[6] There were still others who postulated that there might be more than one "stuff" such as earth, water, fire, and air. In the seventeenth-century philosophers were still using the Greek notion of "substance."

Spinoza's first recognition as a philosopher came as a result of his work on the thought of another seventeenth-century philosopher, Rene Descartes. Spinoza's work regarding this topic is known as The Principle of Descartes' Philosophy. Descartes' opts for the existence of two substances with the implication of a third. The first two are thought (incorporeal and equivalent to *mind*) and extension (equivalent to matter or *body*). The third is God which "guarantees" the other two. Spinoza's own work, The Ethics, eliminates the multiplicity of substances--he opts for only one substance and sees it as absolutely "unitary." Spinoza maintains Descartes' distinctions between "thought" and "extension" but relegates them to being "attributes" of the one substance, i.e., "God" or "Nature" (*Deus siva Natura.*) (*Deus siva Natura* is equivalent to: God and/or Nature). All of the "things" that we discern in the universe are "modes" of these two basic attributes. The one substance has an infinite number

of attributes, but we can only know two: thought and extension.

Substance, itself, is defined by Spinoza as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself . . . the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed (Def. 3, Part 1)." In Spinoza's "sixth definition" he equates "God" with "substance:"

> By God I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes . . .

He further sees this substance to be matter and finds no problem with crediting "corporeal substance" to God or the "divine nature":

> I do not know why matter should be unworthy of the divine nature . . . (Proposition 15, Part 1).

Spinoza's substance, like the Navajo Wind, "suffuses" all things because it is all things. There is not even room for a vacuum, or "empty" space, in Spinoza's universe:

> Since, therefore, it is supposed that there is no vacuum in Nature . . . , but that all the parts must be united so that no vacuum can exist, it follows that they cannot be really separated, that is to say, that corporal substance, in so far as it is substance, cannot be divided (Prop. 15, Part 1).

If we happen to see things as distinct and separate entities, Spinoza has an explanation for this:

> If, nevertheless, anyone should ask why there is a natural tendency to consider quantity as capable of division, I reply that quantity is conceived by us in two ways: either abstractly or superficially, that is to say, as we imagine it, or else as substance, in which way it is conceived by the intellect alone (Prop. 15, Part 1).

The distinction between things and our perception of them as separate is a mental act of abstraction. However, "with our intellect," says Spinoza, we can see that there is only one stuff. Our ability to abstract is not necessarily a bad thing for it is in this way that we can detect the "attributes" of God. This is what we can perceive of the nature of God: "By attribute I understand that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence" (Definition 4, Part 1). What we perceive is "thought" and "extension: (mind and matter). We also experience the "modes" or "things" that Spinoza says are "modifications of substance" (Def. 5, Part 1).

The modifications of substance, according to Spinoza, are a result of God's fullness--*things* (modes) *flow* from God/Nature/Substance:

> . . . From his infinite nature, infinite things in infinite ways, that is to say, all things have necessarily flowed . . . (Prop.17, Part 1).

And he says further,

> Individual things are nothing but modifications or modes of God's attributes, expressing those attributes in a certain and determinate manner (Prop. 25, Part 1).

Spinoza does make some distinction between the modes of substance and substance itself when he introduces the terms *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (Prop. 29, Part 1). *Natura naturans*, says Spinoza, is to be understood as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself," i.e., the self-created substance. *Natura naturata* is that which

"follows from the necessity of the nature of God or of his attributes," i.e., the *modes* or things. The distinction, however, is merely a convenience and is not indicative of any inconsistency in Spinoza's monism. The terms might be compared to Whorf's idea of the "manifesting" and the "manifested": *natura naturans* is substance manifesting itself and *natura naturata* is that which is manifested or *created* in the process of manifestation or, as Spinoza sees it, *flowing*.

Spinoza's monism was seen as a highly complex and obscure view by many, but there were other aspects of his philosophy that bothered his readers even more--this was his use of the terms 'necessary' and 'determinate.'

Spinoza says that the many modes are an *expression* of God's attributes which come about in a "certain and determinate manner." All things that exist, says Spinoza, are necessary manifestations of substance; they follow from "the laws of [God's] . . . own nature only," and,

> From the necessity of the divine nature infinite numbers of things in infinite ways . . . must follow (Prop. 16, Part 1).

One implication of Spinoza's emphasis on "necessity" was that free will would be denied God. Previous to Spinoza there was a general view that God had made a *decision* to create the world and to create it in just the way he had intended. He could, thought others, have made it any other way he liked. By injecting the terms 'necessary' and 'determinate,' Spinoza threatened the usual definitions of

God. He did not, however, see that this was a threat of any sort. God, or *natura naturans*, creates the things that it does, or *becomes* the things that it does, because it follows its own rules of being:

> Things could have been produced by God in no other manner and in no other order than that in which they have been produced (Prop. 33, Part 1).

To propose that God could have manifested itself as something other than it does, in Spinoza's view, would imply that God had "models" for what it did. God's intellect was not, for Spinoza, an intellect of *potentialities* or of things that might have been, but of *actualities*. Spinoza's own words on this subject are as follows:

> In order that things may be differently constituted, it would be necessary that God's will should be differently constituted; but God's will cannot be other than it is . . . . Things therefore cannot be differently constituted. I confess that this opinion, which subjects all things to a certain indifferent God's will, and affirms that all things depend upon God's good pleasure, is at a less distance from the truth than the opinion of those who affirm that God does everything for the sake of the Good. For these seem to place something outside of God which is independent of Him, to which He looks while he is at work as to a model, or at which He aims as if at a certain mark. This is indeed nothing else than to subject God to fate, the most absurd thing which can be affirmed of Him whom we have shown to be the first and only free cause of the essence of all things as well as of their existence (Prop. 33, Part 1).

Spinoza's use of the term "indifferent" to describe the manifestations of substance is calculated to stress his view that God manifests itself as it does because there is no other way to do so:

> In Nature there is nothing contingent, but all things are determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and act in a certain manner (Prop. 29, Part 1).

and,

> . . . God does not act from freedom of the will (Prop. 32, Part 1).

Spinoza does not even allow that God/Nature/Substance has any purposive intent:

> . . . Nature has set no end before herself, and all final causes are nothing but human fictions.

"I have shown," says Spinoza, "that all things are begotten by a certain eternal necessity of Nature and in absolute perfection (Appendix)."

Spinoza notes that "if God works to obtain an end, He necessarily seeks something of which He stands in need." This would lead to conceiving of a god that is less than perfect, which, says Spinoza, would be contradictory not only to his own definition of God but to the definitions proposed by the "theologians and metaphysicians" who object to his view. Any attempt to ascribe "final causes" or any other teleological notion to God's "will," says Spinoza, is "a refuge for ignorance" (Appendix, Part 1). According to Spinoza, people persist in such practices because they have "persuaded" themselves that "all things which exist are made for . . . [them]" (Appendix). It is men's "prejudices," claims Spinoza, that allow them to think that because they imagine themselves to be free (in the sense of *arbitrary*) that God must also be "free." It is "prejudice" that keeps men from seeing the necessity of Nature, and

which allows men to believe "that some ruler or rulers of Nature exist, endowed with human liberty, who have taken care of all things for [them] . . ., and have made all things for . . . [their] own use" (Appendix). It is for this reason, according to Spinoza, that men affirm "that the gods direct everything" for men's advantage in order that men "may be bound to them and hold them in the highest honor". "This is the reason," Spinoza states, "why each man has devised for himself, out of his own brain, a different mode of worshiping God, so that God might love him above others, and direct all Nature to the service of his blind cupidity and insatiable avarice."

One might sum up Spinoza's view by saying that the world is the way it is because it is and it could be no other way because that is the way that God, who manifests itself, is. Spinoza's God/Nature/Substance is "perfect," i.e., *complete*. It has no needs or goals for which it strives. Therefore, the necessity and determinate character of the universe cannot be denied. But Spinoza sees that men tend to call some things good and others evil. This, Spinoza informs us, is a result of man's imagination and his ignorance of Nature:

> The notions which I have mentioned [good, evil, heat, cold, beauty] are nothing but modes in which the imagination is affected in different ways . . . they are regarded by the ignorant as being specifically attributes of things because . . . men consider all things as made for themselves, and call the nature of a thing good, evil, sound, putrid, or corrupt, just as they are affected by it (Appendix, Part 1).

Spinoza continues this explanation with a mention of the fact that "although human bodies agree in many things, they differ in more," and, "that which to one person is good will appear to another evil, that which to one is well arranged to another is confused . . . ." "So many heads," says Spinoza, "so many ways of thinking (Appendix, Part 1)."

Spinoza's view of God and the world were very unlike those held by others in the seventeenth-century, or even today. He attempted to "imagine," as Wittgenstein asks us to do, "some very general facts of nature as being different than what people are used to." The Navajo world view requires that we participate in just such an act.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

[1]Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 3d ed. trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1968), 231e

[2]Ibid., "Remarks," 61.

[3]McNeley, Holy Wind, 17.

[4]Benedict de Spinoza, Ethics, ed. and trans. James Gutmann (N.Y.: Hafner Publishing Co., 1949). Because there are manytranslations of the Ethics and my selection is out of print, I have chosen to direct the reader to the passages quoted through parenthetical references. Spinoza's "geometrical method" of proposing his argument in *axioms*, *definitions*, and *propositions* eliminates the confusion which might arise out of the use of page number; all references will be concerning Spinoza's own divisions.

[5]Ronald Hall, "Monism and Pluralism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 5/6 (N.Y.: Macmillan & The Free Press, 1976).

[6]Philip Wheelwright, ed., The Pre-Socratics, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1966).

VI

A THEORY OF NAVAJO MONISM

There are sufficient similarities between the monism of Spinoza and the views of the Wind held by the Navajo to warrant comparison. Spinoza's view arises out of a need to deal with the contradictions that he sees in the theological and philosophical perspectives of his time.

The perspectives of his time depend on a god that is separate from its creations. Spinoza thinks it much more logical to postulate the existence of only one thing. Since this one thing (*substance*) exists, it must necessarily be infinite, if it were not, there would be something else co-existing with the one substance. An infinite substance excludes all else. Another issue which plagues the thinkers of Spinoza's time is the question about God's *decision* to create something other than himself. For Spinoza, such a question implies 1) a *need* in God; and, 2) an arbitrary characteristic in an otherwise complete god. Both these issues can be used to negate the idea of a perfect and complete deity. Spinoza also wonders about the *stuff* with which God creates: if there is something (*matter*) out of which God creates then God cannot be said to be omnipresent--there is something which is not he. If God creates something out of nothing there is still the problem of his decision to create just the things that

he does create and not something else. In Spinoza's view this implies that God has "models" from which he chooses to create: "For these seem to place something outside of God which is independent of Him, to which He looks while he is at work as to a model . . . (Prop. 33, Part 1).

Spinoza, therefore, postulates a God that is one indivisible and infinite substance. There is no separation between the creator and the created:

> . . . We may easily conceive the whole of nature to be one individual whose parts, that is to say, all bodies, differ in infinite ways without any change of the whole individual (Prop. 13, Part 2).

He compares this "one individual" to the human being which is "composed of individual parts of diverse nature, each of which is composite to a high degree" but which is nonetheless "one."

The Navajo view of the universe, unlike Spinoza's logically derived view, stems from a different source. The language of the Navajo is predicated on the perception of motion in the universe. This implies, as Whorf points through his research with another motion-oriented language (Hopi), that the Navajo's world view assumes a dynamic universe. It is possible that this view arises from a perception of motion and change in the universe. Whorf concludes that this dynamic process can be described as the "manifesting" and the "manifested." The terms are similar to, and may derive from, Spinoza's *natura naturans* and the *natura naturata*. Stuart Hampshire, in his work on Spinoza's philosophy, gives the best explanation of these

two terms:

> God or Nature is a free and originating cause, and the only free, because the only self-creating, cause; in so far as we think . . . of God or Nature as the free and self-causing cause, we think of Nature, in Spinoza's phrase, as *Natura Naturans*, Nature actively creating herself. . . .
>
> But we can also think of Nature . . . as the system of what is created. Nature is conceived in its passive capacity, as an established system, or as *Natura Naturata* . . . .[1]

Spinoza's *natura naturans* corresponds to Whorf's "manifesting" and the *natura naturata* to the "manifested." Whorf describes both these "things" as a single process. Hampshire emphasizes the singularity of Spinoza's terms:

> Throughout Spinoza's philosophy use is made of this difficult device of conceiving what is in essence or reality the same thing, as manifesting itself in two different ways, or as having two different aspects . . . .
>
> It is equally correct to think of God or Nature [*Deus siva Natura*] as the unique creator (*Natura Naturans*) and as the unique creation (*Natura Naturata*); it is not only correct, but necessary to attach both of these complementary meanings to the word, neither being complete, or even possible, as a conception of Nature without the other.[2]

Hampshire goes on to say that "this doctrine" of the identity between creator and created is not at all *mystical* or *anti-scientific*, but instead "leads logically to the conclusion that every single thing in the Universe necessarily belongs to, or falls within, a single intelligible, causal system."[3]

The Navajo thinkers interviewed by McNeley also try to point out that there is one single explanation for the whole universe. Other ethnographers have noted that there

is talk about something called the "in-standing wind" which is characteristic of human being; this is often likened to the Christian concept of a soul. The Navajo, however, stress (to McNeley) that there is, in actuality, only one Wind: "The Wind standing-within-one is the same as that which is in everything."[4] They also emphasize that "the Navajo . . . are made of the same elements as are other aspects of the world . . . this vegetation . . . this that we exist on top of [Earth], those mountains, what the Sun is made of, were made in the same way."[5] McNeley states that the Wind "suffuses" all things; his informants state that they "live in it." As "proof" of this connection to the Wind they can point to the whorls (wind appears as vortices, or whorls) on the tips of our fingertips, toes, and on our feet. Our hair grows in whorls, and to the Navajo this is another indicator of our "participation" in the Wind. The whorls are seen as the means by which we are connected to everything else including Earth and Sky. The Wind exists not only "within us" but is specifically seen as "suffusing" the very *tissues* of our internal organs ("soft parts").[6] From this data compiled by McNeley, it appears that the Navajo see the "manifesting" or *natura naturans* as the Wind; the "things" of the world are the "manifestations" or *natura naturata*.

Spinoza arrives at his view through a strict application of logic to the contradictions between what God is described as being (omnipresent, etc.) and the existence

of a world that seems not to be directed by a divine being nor even postulated as "suffused" with divinity. In arriving at the ideas that "everything is one thing," Spinoza chooses to call that thing *substance*. He does not say what this is except indirectly when he makes an analogy between substance and water--"we conceive water as being divided . . . but in so far as it is corporeal substance we cannot thus conceive it." He stresses that if substance is matter, "I do not know why matter should be unworthy of the divine nature, since outside God no substance can exist from which the divine nature could suffer (Prop. 15, Part 1)."

The Navajo, with a language predicated on motion see their "substance" as being of a more dynamic nature. Gary Witherspoon states that the world [of the Navajo] is in motion ". . . things are constantly undergoing processes of transformation, deformation, and restoration . . . the essence of life and being is movement." This, says Witherspoon, seems to indicate a cosmos composed of processes and events, as opposed to a cosmos composed of facts and things. Witherspoon, like Whorf, uses the language of *processes* and *events* to describe the Navajo worldview.

Gladys Reichard, in giving a description of the various Wind deities, points out that the figures are often depicted with sources of fire ("flint") or accompanied by lightning. McNeley's choice of the term 'wind' instead of

the term 'air' (Witherspoon) captures the Navajo sense of a universe in motion, dynamic, active. The term 'matter' as used in most Western contexts implies an *inert* quality. Native Americans, like the Navajo, generally tend to associate this primal stuff with the term 'power'--as in *energy* or *force*. The modern idea of matter as a form of energy comes closest to the idea of what is implied by 'wind.' Matter, in this case, is a form of "embodied" or "stabilized" energy. There is, however, no dualistic implication in a distinction of matter and energy--the Navajo world is comprised of both at the same time--therefore, the more appropriate term to indicate this unity would be 'matter/energy.'

Spinoza, in order to eliminate the duality of creator and the created, sees the act of creation as "flowing" from "God's fullness" (Prop. 17). He makes no distinction between what is created and the creating: "Individual things are nothing but modifications or modes of God's attributes" (Prop. 25). But there is also in Spinoza an emphasis on motion; when he discusses "individual things" he says that they do not consist of different substances but are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest (Prop. 13, Part 2). For the Navajo, there is a view that "things are merely attired in external . . . forms by which we recognize them."

Another point of comparison between Spinoza and the Navajo is that both see the one substance as "sacred"--

Spinoza calls it *God* or *the divine nature;* the Navajo call it *holy*. For both, *power* or *substance* is of a whole and therefore *complete* within itself, or "perfect."

Spinoza, by postulating a God or "divine nature" that creates from necessity, "out of its fullness," does not allow any teleological notions in his philosophy--"There will now be no need of many words to show that Nature has set no end before herself, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions" (Appendix).

The Navajo do not spend time postulating on final causes--everything is as it is and should be, and presumably--with some care--will be. If a philosophy proposes a world that is complete or "perfect" there is no room for the final causes which Spinoza terms "human fictions."

The similarities between Spinoza's notion of "substance" and the Navajo conception of Wind have been shown. It is necessary to round out this comparison by incorporating the views of Whorf that postulate a universe as a dynamic process. These two views have allowed the ground upon which a claim may be made that the Navajo *Weltanschauung* is essentially monistic. The implications of holding a monistic view have not been fully explored and it is to the Navajo that we must turn in order to understand these implications.

NOTES

CHAPTER V1

[1]Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza, (London: Penguin Books, 1951), 46.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]McNeley, HolyWind, 88.

[5]Ibid., 27.

[6]Ibid., 35, 38.

VII

IMPLICATIONS OF MONISM

There are some descriptions of Native American thought that are rather generally accepted: the idea that Native Americans see a connection between all things (this is expressed by the notion that "we are 'brothers' with all things"); the concepts of "balance" and "harmony"; and, of course, the idea that the Earth is the Mother of all things. The idea that "everything is one thing" is less generally known but often encountered in presentations of Native American belief systems.[1]

What is not ever encountered is an examination of what it would be like to live in a "world" conceived as being "only one thing." The people called Navajo offer a good example of life in a monistic universe.

The numerous accounts of Navajo ritual focus on the fact that such rituals are undertaken for the purpose of maintaining and/or restoring balance and harmony in themselves and in their surroundings. The universe, however, in order to be subject to "restoration" must have an essential balance which is "restored."[2] The universe, for the Navajo, is not a static place of essentially unchanging and inert material--it is a dynamic process that operates in a balanced and harmonious fashion.[3] It, like water, has various "characteristics": currents, vortices, densities, motions. To be closer to the analogy which the

Navajo make, the universe is like an "energy field." Extremes of motion or appearance occur in this field but they are eventually balanced by another motion. There is an element of randomness here but no chaos. Randomness is best explained by likening it to the pattern in wood--there is always a pattern (this is predictable and non-chaotic) but the pattern is always unique.

The Navajo do not "invent" the concepts of balance and harmony and apply them to the universe. Their conception of balance and harmony is more in the nature which Whorf describes when he says that different peoples "segment" the universe; i.e., they select out an aspect of the universe and see it as indicative of the whole. The Navajo "see" balance and harmony in the universe they inhabit. This process, in which they are participants, is seem also as "beautiful."

The Navajo see their duty in this universe as one of contributing to and maintaining the harmony of the world. They do this through ritual and through the creation of art, including song and dance. Gary Witherspoon gives an excellent account of how the Navajo perceive the act of creating beautiful objects"

> In the Navajo world . . . art is not divorced from everyday life, for the creation of beauty and the incorporation of oneself in beauty represent the highest attainment and ultimate destiny of man. . . .
>
> But beauty is not separated from good, from health, from happiness, or from harmony. Beauty--hozho--is the combination of all these conditions. It is not an abstractable quality of things or a fragment of

> experience; it is the normal pattern of nature and the most desirable form of experience.[4]

A human being in this universe is, as is the universe, essentially good, or "complete" but he has a characteristic that other "beings" (animals, rocks, air, etc.) do not have: he alone of all things can have knowledge. Humans can exist passively in the world, being tossed to and fro in the process of which they are a part, but they also have the capacity to know the consequences of various actions.[5] This ability allows him to take some control of his life and his surroundings.

Gary Witherspoon, in an otherwise excellent portrayal of Navajo practices, sees that the Navajo occupy a universe of "dualities."[6] He portrays the world as ridden by "static" and "dynamic" forces. The Navajo world, however, has no "static" elements. There is a striving for stability in the face of continual transformation and motion. Stability, too often, is seen by Western peoples as synonymous with "stasis." Neither of these terms, however, need carry the implication of immobility. An analogy of this notion of mobile stability would be that of a balancing board on a rolling ball or a keg: picture the universe as a mass of subtly shifting sand--a human stands on the balancing board and must work to maintain his upright posture as the keg underneath the board reacts to the shifting of the sand. Stability in this sense requires an activity on the part of a human being; the activity is both physical and mental--one must be alert to the shifting

and remain capable of acting.

No one has fully described what it is to be human in the Navajo (and/or Apache) context (the analogy above is from my father). McNeley's informants describe a human as being "connected to" or "suffused with" Wind--"it is within us"--"we live by it." But the Wind within and without is only one Wind. A human being is, in effect, a vortice, or whirlwind in the greater field which is Wind.[7]

A human being, in a Navajo context, is, as Spinoza's "individual," a "modification"--a part of a whole. This view often leads researchers to reach the conclusion that "tribal" peoples have not reached a state of full self-consciousness. This is very far from the case. It seems that the "signature" of Nature is to create only unique things. The uniqueness of the individual is a given in Navajo culture. This uniqueness, however, is not the sole source of "self." A person is considered unique (i.e., "individual") but merely "humanoid." A "humanoid" becomes fully human only through the intercession of the group. The group "incorporates" the individual into the group through language, tradition, values, place, and family. "Pure" individualism is seen as an alienating factor and many healing rituals are, in effect, means of re-integrating the individual back into the wholeness of the group.

Another description of a human can be drawn in contrast to other animals. There are no monkeys or apes on

the North American continent--no analogy or contrast can be drawn there--but a bear is similar enough to humans to be used as contrast: a bear walks upright, is an omnivore, is protective of its family--so too is a human. A human, however, unlike a bear, has a greater memory capacity and therefore a greater capacity for knowledge. This requires that humans exercise a greater responsibility for their actions in the world. Memory, knowledge, and language allow us to know the consequences of our actions, and because we can know these consequences we can be held accountable for most of our actions.[8]

It is assumed that unless our actions are merely reactions there is purpose in human activity. A bear's actions are purposive to only one end: survival. It does not know all of the consequences of its actions (therefore no animal is seen as culpable).[9] A human does. A human can see how he affects his fellows and his environment and he, unlike the bear, is capable of controlling his actions. But to what purpose?

When we define a world, and we settle on an accompanying (i.e., consistent) definition of a human we then derive our expectations of a human from those definitions. For the Navajo, the world is a dynamic process which operates in a harmonious manner (disruptions are of a temporary nature and perhaps only seen as "disruptions" by us) and humans must "fit" into this world. The world is beautiful. Humans must participate in this

harmony and beauty by establishing themselves in the natural order of things. The aesthetic and the ethical come together in the Navajo universe. What is beautiful is balanced and harmonious; what is good is balanced and harmonious. And if everything is "only one thing" then a human must be aware that everything is necessarily interdependent and interrelated. There are no separate, or alien, or meaningless acts in such a universe.[10] Humans, however, are potentially disruptive factors. They can become so through losing sight of the monistic quality of the universe. If they disrupt the universe (or their immediate surroundings) they will suffer the consequences. There is no anthropomorphic god lying in wait for transgressors as in the Christian scenario. The Navajo universe can handle any disruptions with its tendency to balance and harmony but as it "balances" itself a human may be harmed; the method is simple: action = consequence, or perhaps, cause = effect.

Witherspoon takes note of this view when he says the following:

> Navajos believe that by careful and deliberate attention of oneself and one's environment, accidents and misfortune can be avoided. By exercising the powers of his mind and by utilizing ritual knowledge a Navajo believes he can avoid tragedies, overcome evil, and insure a long and happy life."[11]

It is appropriate after the above mention of "evil" to comment on this as it pertains to the Navajo universe.

Some of the earliest works on the Navajo (specifically

Clyde Kluckhohn[12]) portray the people as existing in a malevolent world against which they must continuously guard themselves. It is not the world, however, that is seen as malevolent. There would be no recourse to evil if the universe were itself evil. There are no literally equivalent terms to good and evil in Navajo. There is instead hozho, which is usually translated as 'good' and refers to beauty, balance, harmony, and completeness. The negation of hozho is hochxo and implies a lack of harmony and/or the ugly.

The more appropriate language for speaking about Navajo moral perspectives would be the terms *correct* and *incorrect*. The universe, because it operates in a balanced and harmonious manner is the model for *correctness*. The *incorrect* would be any act that does not correlate to this model. The universe, though seen as essentially *correct* can occasionally exhibit *incorrect* "behaviour"--there may be drought or disease. These are still essentially natural occurrences in the universe. If, however, they persist or become repeated occurrences then they may be thought to have been "caused" and they would most likely be credited as having been caused by human action (or inaction when action was required). The results of human behaviour can be incorrect, i.e., they can be contrary to the natural order of things. They are *incorrect* in the same sense that putting one's left shoe on the right foot is *incorrect*. A child may put the wrong shoe on his foot out of ignorance;

an adult might do so out of inattention; these are *incorrect* but not necessarily "evil." If an adult consistently chooses to wear his shoes on the wrong feet then he could be said to be doing something intentional. Only intentional behaviour can be the cause of "evil." The Navajo is not so quick as he is portrayed to find malevolence in the universe; he seeks first to find an explanation for *incorrect* behaviour. Alcohol, for example, is seen as something that robs one of a sense of correct behaviour; incorrect actions that follow from use of alcohol may be seen as non-intentional. Again, participation in non-Navajo cultural systems may rob one of a sense of the correct way to behave--hence the rituals for re-incorporating a member back into the group after a sojourn into the non-Navajo world. A person intent on committing incorrect acts, in other words, has to be very persistent about his intent before he is seen as malevolent.

Just as in any culture, some of the Navajos are more readily given to finding causes for certain behaviours or conditions in their world, thus the researcher, who is most likely to interview the willing but perhaps not as informed "common" man in the culture, may come to the conclusion that all Navajos are in a state of perpetual fear of malevolent factors in their environment. Greed, which may often be merely the practice of European American acquisitiveness and consumption, may lead to someone being

termed a 'witch,' implying a participant in intentional incorrect behaviour or actions. Greed is a "sin" in a Navajo society. It is equated with insatiable hunger which would be an abnormal or *incorrect* state of the human being.

Another characteristic of human beings that is central to Navajo thought (and to many Native American groups) is that a person, unlike a bear, a wolf, or a rock, can change himself. This view is consistent with a view of the universe as a process of transformation and change. A bear is what he is and one can normally expect that a bear will act like a bear. But a human being can change his whole way of being. He can choose to commit incorrect actions but he can just as well choose to act in a correct manner. In fact, the normal state of affairs of a human being is to act correctly, i.e., to act in such a manner that he is seen by others as leading a balanced and harmonious life. The behaviour of the individual in the group is of interest to the welfare of the whole group. Rituals are developed to assist the individual in regaining his *natural* behaviour whenever balance and harmony appear to be disrupted.

Because the Navajo universe is one dynamic and natural process and because all of its "parts" are actually a "mode" of that process, there is a necessary interdependency and interrelationship at all times with all things. A human being, as part of that process, is a "necessary" (in the sense of Spinoza's use of the term) part of that process. Breathing, eating, elimination are a

part of that process. Coming into existence, growing up, reproducing, participating in the group, and dying are a part of that process. But to do only these things would be to be only a passive *re-actor* to the process around him--a swirling leaf in a stream. Human beings have the capacity to be aware of their interrelationships and interdependencies and can note the consequences of existence, because of this, there are obligations that the Navajo has in this world. His first obligation is to be aware of the consequences of his actions in the world and in relationship with other beings. The second (but equally important) obligation is to create, or *add to*, the beauty of the universe. He does this through adjusting his behaviour to harmonize with his surroundings and he does this also through the creation of beauty through ritual, song, and artistic objects. In the celebration and creation of beauty, he participates in the balancing of the universe. All such acts are *religious* acts, i.e., acts of homage to the universe. The deliberate creation of ugliness or introduction of disorderly elements is a disruption of the universe. No right-thinking Navajo would willingly create disruptive art forms. A creation of disruptive forms would be to call them into existence, thereby adding them to the universe.

The implication of a monistic *Weltanschauung* are sometimes invoked in the fields of ecology or environmentalism but they are not carried to the extent of

the Navajo world. The latter is a world that has a language, a belief system--both religious and moral, and a logic that are all predicated on the idea that "everything is one thing." There are here no hierarchies of *higher* and *lower* life forms. All forms are merely, and necessarily, *different*. There are no hard distinctions between *animate* and *inanimate*--if the universe is in motion, then it is, in its entirety, alive. Life forms exist in different states of motion and/or stability--they range from mountains, to humans, to sub-atomic particles. The place of a human being in this universe of motion, change, and transformation is not one of superiority. Whatever it is that distinguishes humans from other beings (and it seems to be "knowledge" i.e., an awareness of consequences) does not make them superior beings. It makes them RESPONSIBLE. The Navajo takes this distinction very seriously. It is this seriousness that leads him to believe that he lives as a sacred being in a field of sacredness. He is a vortice in a field of Wind. And it is all ONE.

NOTES

CHAPTER VII

[1]See, for example, the works of Reichard, Harrod, and McNeley which have been previously cited.

[2]Robert Young (private correspondence, March 1992): "One does not "get well" in Navajo unless he was born sick - he "re-gets well," returning to his previous well state. . . . This requirement to distinguish linguistically between events and conditions that occur for the first time and those that involve reversion to a previous state reflect a feature of Navajo culture that stems from the way speakers of the language are conditioned to view certain events.

[3]Philip Wheelwright, Pre-Socratics (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1966), 53. In the section on Anaximander it is noted that the universe has a tendency to right itself when imbalances occur (the theory of *tisis* [lit. *revenge*]): Each actually existing thing . . . is a usurper; for during the time that it exists it "commits injustice" by preventing its opposite from existing; accordingly it must eventually pay the penalty by yielding up its overt existence and returning to its submerged place . . . .

[4]Witherspoon, Language and Art, 151.

[5]Knowing the consequences of one's actions is similar to what Spinoza sees as man's goal in attaining knowledge, i.e., to know the causes of things and thereby achieve man's limited freedom. Knowing the causes of things and actions are all that allow us to control our behaviour and environment.

[6]Witherspoon, Language and Art, see his Chapter 3 on the dualism of active and static forms.

[7]The use of the vortice to represent the act of creation is apparently common on the American continents, e.g., the swastika represents the motion of the sun in the art of Southwestern native groups; and the Cogi of Columbia use the vortice in water to depict the coming into existence of various things.

[8]There is a common notion that knowledge requires responsibility. A child, for example, is not fully accountable for his actions until he has acquired enough knowledge about his world and his actions in it--it is at this point that many tribes see him as a "human" (6 to 9 years of age) and he is initiated into the group (through

an official naming ceremony, for example).

[10]Animals, considered to be of "a different tribe" have different reference systems and can not be held accountable for human/animal encounters.

[10]Because the universe is seen as one thing which manifests itself as many things, it is important to place those things in the context of their surroundings- i.e., one cannot fully understand a thing unless one knows its immediate interrelationships.

[11]Witherspoon, Language and Art, 187.

[12]Clyde Kluckhohn in his book, The Navajo (co-authored with Dorothea Leighton in 1946 and revised in 1976) states as his reason for a study of the Navajo:

> This book was written as a part of the Indian Education Research Project. . .
> The immediate objective of the project was to investigate, analyze, and compare the development of personality in five Indian tribes. . . for implications in regard to Indian Service Administration.

"The ultimate aim," of the project according to Kluckhohn was to evaluate the Indian administrative program in order to get some idea of the effectiveness and long range plans of the program.

Some of Kluckhohn's observations include (e.g.) 1) "what is said is to be taken literally"--"the easy ambiguities, the fluidities of English speech are foreign to the Navaho. There is a little 'reading between the line,' little exercise of the imagination in interpreting utterances." 2) "The People take their views of life as an ineradicable part of human nature and find it hard to understand that normal persons could possibly conceive life in other terms". 3) "Life is very, very dangerous." "...to many whites, Navahos seem morbid in the variety of threats from this world and from the world of the supernatural which they fear and name." "The People . . . have a more overwhelming preoccupation that whites with the uncertainty of life and the many threats to personal security." (Taken from the chapter titled, "The Navaho View of Life."

VIII

CONCLUSION

When I first made the suggestion of exploring the concept of monism in Navajo thought some were aghast at such a suggestion. The philosophical system which has become synonymous with the work and name of Benedict de Spinoza is seen by many to be extremely complex, intellectual, and generally beyond the grasp of most people. I was told that I had "mistaken Spinoza for a primitive." Many years earlier in making a comparison between the ideas of the pre-Socratics and the ideas I knew to be Apache, I was informed that "the Greeks were not a 'primitive' people." My response then and my response now is that I had not viewed the Greeks, nor Spinoza, as "primitive," in fact, I had not even made the error of judging the Native American as primitive.

The view of some that Native Americans are primitive in either a sense of a regressive life style or as simply a people that have failed to keep pace with the rest of the species is not a backward, nor even insensitive, position. It comes as a result of a world view that can have no other conclusion. This world view is that there was only one creation or evolution of the entire species. The species then began a course of developmental progress which is outlined as having taken humans from the cave (or the savannah) to the present acme of European and/or American

civilization.

If only one representative of a species is taken as the standard of the whole all others are measured according to how closely humans approach that standard. Native Americans, as well as other non-technological peoples, are not--perhaps cannot--be seen as alternative adaptations to the circumstances that confront them. Such peoples are seen at the very least as living fossils of "modern" man's "rise" to this present state. At the very most they are curiosities that are studied outside the normal range of what it is to be human.

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen a change in this perspective. Whether that change has come about because of a rising respect for the integrity and autonomy of peoples that are not "Western" or if it is a result of Western man's own questioning of himself and his world does not really matter. What does matter is that there are more and more voices demanding that "other" peoples and "other" ways of looking at, or interpreting, the world be given serious consideration.

We have seen that F.M. Cornford attempted to get at the meanings underlying the thought of the ancient Greeks--not in order to understand his own culture and time (though this, too, was a consideration)--but to understand the ideas and goals that inspired the early philosophers in order to understand <u>them</u>. Benjamin Whorf, in the course of pursuing his research in languages, develops an interest in

the languages of non-Indio-European peoples. His interest leads us to discover that there are truly no "primitive" languages; they all seem to exhibit complexity and sophistication. They seem also to demonstrate ways of looking at the world that previously had not been imagined.

An encounter with world views unlike our own can be a threatening experience. It calls into question all of our established beliefs concerning "truth" and "certainty." But an encounter with "strange" people is not the only source of challenge to a set of established beliefs or world view.

Thomas S. Kuhn (who credits Whorf with having influenced him) in the early sixties wrote a small but influential book questioning the established view of how science had developed.[1] His Structure of Scientific Revolutions disputed the "linear" view of scientific development (i.e., that scientific discovery follows a route that builds carefully on the findings of previous thinkers) Kuhn introduced into the language the concept of a paradigm. Paradigms are models that serve to guide our research into specific channels. The paradigm works only so long as it can account for all data that the researcher encounters. However, according to Kuhn, eventually a "crisis" develops in which anomalies (things, or events, that cannot be explained under the paradigm) seem to overwhelm the old explanations of how things are. A new paradigm results in trying to explain the anomalies, but it

is not an arbitrary paradigm. In order for the paradigm to work it must account not only for the new data (anomalies) but also incorporate all of the data explained within the old paradigm. He called the subsequent shifting of paradigms "revolutionary" because the practitioners of the old paradigm do not give up the old view very easily. An example of a paradigm shift would be the geocentric vs. the heliocentric view of the universe which was introduced by Copernicus. An example of a shift occurring in the sciences today is in the field of physics. The search to harness fusion as a source of energy has led researchers to investigate something called "plasma"--a form of cosmic "gas" (actually a gas in a highly charged form). Research in this field has led to discoveries that threaten the "Big Bang" paradigm of the "origin" of the universe. "Normal" astrophysics is still handing out awards for theories explaining the Big Bang; the challengers, with their new paradigm, are writing articles titled, "The Big Bang Never Happened."[2]

A paradigm shift requires a new language as well as a new focus (or re-focus). Bruce Gregory, in his Inventing Reality: Physics as Language, deals with just this issue.[3] He ends his claim that physicists must create new language to deal with new insights with a comment very similar to that of Benjamin Whorf:

> Whorf: A change in language can transform our appreciation of the Cosmos.[4]

Gregory: As our vocabulary changes so does the world.[5]

and

> Language tells us that the world is made of, not because language somehow accurately captures a world independent of language, but because it is the heart of our way of dealing with the world. When we create a new way of talking about the world, we virtually create a new world. This observation is no more profound, nor any less profound, than saying that the questions we ask determine, not the content of the answers we will get, but that will count as an answer.[6]

As our encounters with the many facets of the world expand so, too, must our language change to speak of it. And with our languages, our way of organizing the world. Sometimes our new languages (or at least terms and concepts) are borrowed from others, as then twentieth century physicists borrowed the concept of atoms from the ancient Greeks. Niels Bohr borrowed his "complementarity" theory concerning atomic theory from Chinese philosophy (specifically the Yin/Yang theory). We've seen the popularization of such theories in books bering title such as The Tao of Physics by Fritjof Capra and The Dancing Wu Li Masters by Gary Zukav.

The receptivity of European scientists to Chinese ideas may have begun with philosopher Leibniz who was fascinated with such ideas. Today we know such ideas to be--not backward--but different and because they are different we can borrow them to extend our own views. For the Chinese do indeed describe the universe differently than does the average European or American. Angus Graham gives

us a glimpse of this difference:

> Chinese philosophy, as much as Western, is a quest for the eternal behind the transient, but the West has sought it through the subject, through substance. . .China through the directive, as Way. For the verb-centered consciousness [the Chinese] everything is process, and there can be constancy only in the paths of the changing.[7]

And,

> . . .the sentence structure of Classical Chinese places us in a world of process . . . But on the outskirts of this clear-cut world are water, fire, breath, air, which is varying degrees resist being categorized even as thing or process, and which Chinese philosophy classes as not things (wu) but the ch'i out of which things condense and into which they dissolve.[8]

"In Chinese thought," Graham tells us, "things appear not as independent but as interdependent . . . and the questions which isolate things from each other (as in the West) have no primacy over those which relate them."[9]

The ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the physicist, and, as McNeley has shown, the Navajo see the world as process--a dynamic, self-creating universe which infinitely manifests itself as the "ten thousand things" of the Tao Te Ching. Yet each of these groups give a unique cast to the description of the "process." Anaximander speaks of the apeiron (the undifferentiated, unlimited something) which according to the demands of tisis (literally: revenge) brings individual things into and out of existence. The modern physicist sees the "dance" of sub-atomic molecules as fields of energy swirling things into existence. The Navajo traces the swirling of the creative force of Holy

Wind in his fingertips, toes, and the pattern of hair growth.

The Navajo is not a fossil mirror of "modern" man's rise to his present state. His ideas are not "artifacts" waiting to be interpreted by an investigator superior to the informant. The Navajo is another window through which we peer at the universe. It is true that the various "windows" are framed in various complex disguises, in talk of supernatural beings and absolute certainty but perhaps it is an inescapable penchant of human beings to cast things/ideas in more manageably "human" terms. Joseph Campbell, the researcher of myth and belief, made a comment once in a PBS film on his views, that we look at the universe around us and are struck with awe at what we see. We give a name, he says, to what astounds us--"We call it God," and then we worship the very metaphor we have created.

Too often we cannot get beyond the metaphor, but as McNeley has shown, it is possible to beyond metaphor. "It is all one Wind," say McNeley's Navajo informants, even if has "five names or twelve." The Wind is seen as "suffusing all of nature," and, in the end, the Navajo see that nature as sacred. They do not see themselves as separate from that sacredness. For this reason they are careful to remind themselves of their place in that universe--they "walk in beauty."

What is important in this research is not only to have

placed the Navajo view in a context of valid human discourse but to show that there is a world view that is different from that of the dominant society. The Holy Wind is not "like" a "soul"; not is it an aspect of the Christian "God." It is not an incomplete nor distorted view of a greater and "absolute" truth. When we persist in defining the Navajo as a lesser form of being we close ourselves off to expanding our own understanding of the world we inhabit and of the diversity of thought which humans everywhere exhibit.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

[1]Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d ed. International Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[2]Eric J. Lerner, The Big Bang Never Happened, (N.Y.: Random House, Inc., 1991).

[3]Bruce Gregory, Inventing Reality: Physics as Language, (N.Y.: John Wylie and Sons, 1988).

[4]Whorf, "Language, Mind and Reality," 263.

[5]Gregory, Inventing Reality, 200.

[6]Ibid, 198.

[7]A.C. Graham, Studies in Chinese Philosophy & Philosophical Literature (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986) 403.

[8]Ibid., 408.

[9]Ibid., 395.

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