

dakota philosophy

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At the beginning of *Seven Arrows*, Hyemeyohsts Storm has a passage which I find extremely moving. He states:

According to the Teachers, there is only one thing that all people possess equally. This is their loneliness. No two people on the face of this earth are alike in any one thing except for their loneliness. This is the cause of our Growing, but it is also the cause of our wars. Love, hate, greed and generosity are all rooted within our loneliness, within our desire to be needed and loved.

The only way that we can overcome our loneliness is through Touching. It is only in this way that we can learn to be Total Beings.¹

I find in this passage a tremendous sense of isolation, a profound feeling of alienation, an intense yearning for community and a complete lack of an initial sense of belonging. Or rather, by extension, I find be-longing; a longing for more than human community, a longing for communion, a longing for participation in being itself.

But who is this person whose heart-strings are reverberating? It is not some Cheyenne or Sioux. It is not some Dakota boy responding from the life-world of his cultural ascendancy. It is me. I am a boy born before television had replaced vision, before time had become space, before men walked the moon, before pigeons played ping-pong and before rats learned to react. True, I grew up in the Dakotas. But I grew up as a white middle-class Methodist, weaned on books, inhabiting at best an attenuated family, and not a member of a tribe. And it is precisely because this passage appeals to me, because it touches profoundly on my own experiences, that I cannot trust it to tell me much about the stance of Plains Indians.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty has argued that we must learn to suspend analysis and return to our initial consciousness of social relationships, our personal experiences. Only thus can we avoid merely quantitative reflection and approach more closely the lived truth. He states:

objectivism forgets another evident fact. We can expand our experience of social relationships and get a proper view of them only by analogy or contrast with those we have lived. We can do so, in short, only by subjecting the social relationships we have experienced to an *imaginary variation*. These lived relationships will no doubt take on a new meaning in comparison with this imaginary variation (as the fall of a body on an inclined plane is put in a new light by the ideal concept of free fall), but they will provide it with all the sociological meaning it can have.²

What follows, then, is an imaginary variation, an attempt to structure a world of genuine participatory perspectivism, a world inhabited, not inhibited, a world not of absences, but of presences. And if I can construct such a world, I may be able to see, and, perhaps even believe, that for a Dakota to be was to belong.

i

ontology: to be is to belong
(space, time, cause and purpose)

Man is a symbolic animal. He neither acts nor reacts to raw experience as such. On the contrary, he *re-presents* his experience to himself and others and in so doing, acts in and through those representations. Hence, though I grew up in the same geographic location as the Dakota, I did not grow up in the same place. In fact, I did not grow up even in the same space. My space has been Newtonian and post-Newtonian space. I inhabit the transitional sensorium between a literate and post-literate culture. What could space have been like to a member of an oral-aural culture? What could space have been like to a pre-chirographic, pre-typographic, alphabetic plains person? Space must have been visually vast, non-geometric, continuous, cognitively delimited, acoustically real, centered, personal and recurrent.

Abstractly, the Great Plains are a kind of perpetual everywhere-ness. The Great Plains, after all, are *great*. City-folk, surrounded by the cacophony of never-ceasing traffic or wrapped in their air-conditioned cocoons, curse the interminable endlessness of Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas. But to one who grew up here, there is majesty in this vastness. The sea of grass extended visually farther than breaking hearts could break for it; horizons were indeed unlimited. And this sense of spaciousness brought with it a feeling of openness, a sense of the absence of arbitrary external relations and restrictions, a consciousness of a capacity to roam. The plains warrior also must have seen it so, but with this difference: he saw it concretely. Without maps or cartesian coordinates, all of his geography was contained in the eyes of the eldest members of the tribe. When the tribe moved, the eldest warriors led the way, for lived space was memorable space. Map space is an aid to or substitute for memory.

But memory-space is event space. Hence we find Black Elk providing the most minute topographic detail in every fold of land involved in a battle, but when it comes to distance he resorts to vague words such as “yonder” or “bye-and-bye.” The latter is particularly notable since it involves a temporalization of space. In the oral-aural culture of the plains, a moving culture, distance was expressed in terms of time. Thus the span between x and y was expressed as so many horse-day’s journey, so many walking days, so many suns or so many moons. This we find difficult to imagine since it is the inverse of our literal, linear natural attitude. Modern men are so used to clock time, computer time, time tables, that we are unaware that we automatically break time into sequences of spatial metaphors. As Father Ong has reminded us, we speak of a long time or a short time, though time can be neither long nor short.³ It would be better, perhaps, to speak of a fat time or a thin time, a younger time or an older time.

It is true that the Sioux had pictography. But as Ong also reminds us, pictographs serve primarily as memory aids. “They encode little. The information storage remains almost entirely in the heads of those who use such creations which are much more triggers than storage devices.”⁴ Furthermore, if we examine what was pictured in this manner, we find ourselves back with memorable events. Neither geography nor history are memory. They are records. But a record “does not belong to us as a memory does. It is an external thing.”⁵ Memory, by its very nature, is something that is held or had. Memory is personal. Hence memory-space is personal space. But if lived space for the Dakota was visually vast, temporalized, non-linear, eventful and memorable, it was also cognitively delimited. Impersonal space is infinitely extendible, but personal space is my space or your space, and your space is not mine. Space for a Dakota was at best tribal space. Hence it is not surprising that when Red Cloud, Standing Bear, or Black Elk came back with tales of a wider world inhabited by innumerable Wasichus—the Sioux word for the whites—they were not believed. Nor is it surprising that when the young Luther Standing Bear awoke on a train in Pennsylvania, he thought he had passed to the other side of the moon. Without the cognitive tools of abstraction, they could not conceive of the extent of this spaceship earth. Space merely extended a little beyond where the people were.

The Dakota were a nomadic people. Consequently, their sense of the extent of space must have surpassed that of agricultural tribes. Nevertheless, their wandering was limited. It was limited by hostile tribes such as Crow. It was limited by how much they could drag along and how far in any given move. It was limited by the ferocity of the seasons and the adaptations of habit, i.e., they wintered in the Black Hills and roamed the plains in the summers. It was limited by the erratic movement of the food supply. Hence, the inhabited space they traversed was fairly recurrent and thus that much more familiar and memorable.

But perhaps the factor most difficult for us to imagine and most per-

sonalizing with respect to space was that it was acoustically real. This is difficult for us to imagine because we are so visually and typographically oriented. Think, for example, of the *silence* of books. It is no accident that we are told to keep quiet in libraries. The space of sight is not the space of sound. Acoustic space is shared. We sit before the orchestra, we sit before the speaker (either hi-fi or personal) but we sit *within* the sounds they produce. Sound is an interior exteriorized which reverberates in an interior. Acoustic space is voluminous, non-reversible, intensively unified and not subject to division without loss of quality. The auditor always feels at its center. Space radiates from where he hears. Listen to Black Elk:

I looked ahead and saw the mountains there with rocks and forests on them, and from the mountains flashed all colors upward to the heavens. Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.⁶

Flaming Rainbow (Neihardt) identifies this mountain as Harney Peak and then has Black Elk remark in a footnote: "But anywhere is the center of the world."

Books could and should be written about Black Elk's great vision. I wish to comment on only a few characteristics. First, his vision had to be *told*. Had he not spoken it to a poet,⁷ it would have been lost. Second, the vision contains striking visual imagery. This is not merely because such images are aesthetically exciting, but, as Havelock remarks,⁸ because such imagery serves as a recall or storage device. Third, there is emphasis upon unity of shape. Shape is more concrete than structure, line or mass. Fourth, there is an emphasis upon centering. Whether it is the sacred spot, the immovable place of the Buddha, the sacral circle of St. Peters, or that navel of the universe, Washington, D.C., the idea of all things being radiated from a sacral point, an omphalos, is characteristic of verbo-motor cultures. Thus though Black Elk is speaking in ocular equivalents, he is thinking in aural terms. He is in tune with all things and at their midst. The mode of unity of Black Elk's vision is aural.

Vision arrests. Vision is spectation; sound is participation. Sound engulfs, surrounds and envelops us. It unifies and unites according to interior relationships. It reveals presence with an immediate fullness that vision cannot. Images may reflect or refract; sound resonates. Sound reciprocates.⁹ Sound centers. Sound engenders simultaneity, not sequential-

ity. "Sound situates man in the middle of actuality and in simultaneity, whereas vision situates man in front of things and in sequentiality."¹⁰ Vision, as Merleau-Ponty has remarked, is not merely a distance sense, it is a dividing, a dissecting sense. But sound, and hence acoustic space, is organic, and ultimately, indivisible. Vision displays surfaces; sound reveals interiors. Since the space of the Dakota was tribal space, unifying space, it was also a space, which by its very nature was socializing. The Dakota inhabited a space where he belonged.

This tribal, personal life-world was destroyed by that engine of progress, that father of all time-tables, that sanctifier of the pocket watch and ultimate applied Cartesianism: the iron horse.¹¹ How strange that the range should become a grid. Look, for example, at western towns with their neat numbered streets intersecting named avenues with perfect symmetry. Follow the Union-Pacific across Nebraska, and you will find even the towns ordered according to the alphabet. How could a man who grew in the presence of shape make any sense of dividing the land into sections, quarters, and sixty-acre plots? As Black Elk remarked, the Wasichus are so crazy they even fence the grass.

If Sioux space was different from ours, the same thing must have been true of their concept of time. Not only was there a shift in the sensorium between an oral-aural culture and an alphabetic one, but, as we saw, space became temporalized. *Mutatis mutandis*: it would seem to follow that time was not spatialized. For the Dakota, time must have been non-spatial, memorable, recurrent, fluid, durational, eventful and clustered. The other senses—taste, smell, touch—do not move with time but dwell in it. And they become increasingly attenuated with time's passage. Sight seeks to arrest time. Sound is inherently temporal. Sound is progressive in or through time. From the viewpoint of typographic man, verbo-motor man's sense of time is especially frustrating. Verbo-motor man's sense of time appears vague, amorphous and chaotic. But that is the way it appears *to us*.¹² The more spatialized consciousness becomes, the more specialized it becomes. Thus we must pity the most precise among us, the historians who struggle to determine exact dates for Indian events. But there is no such things as precise time or "being on time" in an oral-aural non-clock-work culture. Time consists of happenings, doings, goings-on. Such events form clusters which are, from our point of view, disorderly, but which from the Dakota point of view are eminently memorable.

It would appear that the Dakota "organized" time in the following ways: as durational flow, by natural recurrent events, by natural non-recurrent events, by recurrent human events and by human non-recurrent events. Time thus organized is instantiated, i.e., clustered around the standing instance. Hence we find a predominance of the non-literal, the mythic, the parabolic and the symbolic. These tales do not need explanation, they *are* explanation. It is much more important that they be suggestive and resonant, true goings-on themselves, than that they be

literal pinpoint of history. Since the cruelty of vision is abolished, time is warmly remembered.

I do not wish to spend too much time elaborating this. Actually, only abstract time can be "spent." Happening-time is either endured or lived. Let me give an instance of this. Time and time again, we find Black Elk using vague and imprecise transitional phrases. His favorites are "and then," "bye and bye" and "afterwhile."¹³ All of these express, though they may not denote, the direction of durational flow. As for natural recurrent events, each month has its own specific experienced name. Thus March is The Moon of the Snowblind, May, The Moon When the Ponies Shed, November, The Moon of the Falling Leaves, etc. A natural non-recurrent event would be a striking, memorable, vivid event. Thus Momaday¹⁴ dates the events of the Kiowa by the rain of falling stars. Examples of recurrent human events could be "during my first buffalo hunt," "during the second Sun Dance with the Cheyenne," "during the fourth raid on the Crow," or "during the last Ghost Dance." Certainly a non-recurrent human event was the wiping out of Long Hair, the death of Crazy Horse or the massacre at Wounded Knee.

Since time was neither abstract nor quantified, it was not subjectivized but was objectively concrete, i.e., clustered. Time moved according to the work; work was not forced to accord with quantified time plans. Luther Standing Bear describes the shaping of tepee poles:

When all the trees had been brought to camp, one would be leaned against a standing tree for a brace. A block of wood was fastened to the butcher knife to be used as a draw-shave. Before the Indian had steel knives he used a sharp stone to do this work. As most of the poles were cut to about the required size, it was not very hard work to finish them. The Indian had no boss standing over him, and he took his own time.¹⁵

Furthermore, though there were certain times of increased tension, i.e., the buffalo killing, fighting the enemy, or fleeing the blue coats, normal time was without intensive urgency. Nobody was in a hurry. Compare this to our sense of mechanized time: "In the early spring, when we moved away from our winter quarters, our band of Indians looked better than any circus parade. Each family had its place in line. Nobody was in a hurry to get ahead of those in advance—as the white man in his automobile tries to do in this day and age."¹⁶ Since normal time was not hasty time, the white man saw the Indian as unmotivated and lazy. This was a mistake. Dakota time was not lazy time. It was leisure time. Such time converts labor into work and work into serious play.

Exactness is a virtue only when events are pregnant. Otherwise, the world is a flow of happenings. But memorable happenings are also personal. Hence Dakota time was, at best, tribal time. The Dakota lived in a time where he belonged.

Now happenings and events are not Cartesian nor Humean. They are

neither clear and distinct nor simple. Happenings imply movement and change; they flow out of one another and into one another; they are cumulative, mutually penetrating, conditionally constitutive and evanescent. Any one can be the transverse summation of the others. It depends on how you slice them. Consequently, we should not be amazed to discover that the Dakota sense of cause was much more Eastern than Western. It was not that the Dakota were not interested in proximate efficient causes. They simply did not have the tools to look for them. It takes an enormous fund of knowledge and a high degree of abstraction to ask whether X is the cause of Y. In fact, it is doubtful that logic can even arise without dead print. Hence, cause as we know it was de-emphasized among the Dakota and again, personalized. Instead of asking "what is the cause of X?" the Dakota was much more likely to ask "what likes to happen with X?" In this mode of thinking, *how* and *when* replace *what*. Relations are once more internal. Those things happen together which belong together.

As for teleology, it is a commonplace that purpose dominates consciousness in an oral-aural culture. Speech, after all, is not merely the presence of power, but its exhibition. Thus all things are seen to have powers for good or ill. All things have meanings to be unravelled. All things are symbolic for they are living and semi-animate, they are not reduced to their bare thing-hood. A world of made is not a world of grown. Hence we find the sense of purposiveness expressed in the sense of unity, relatedness, movement and growth.

Perhaps Luther Standing Bear best expresses the sense of centering, the sense of being grounded in the unity of being:

The man who sat on the ground in his tipi meditating on life and its meaning, accepting the kinship of all creatures and acknowledging unity with the universe of things was infusing into his being the true essence of civilization. And when native man left off this form of development, his humanization was retarded in growth.¹⁷

Unity and relatedness are not just there. Unity and relatedness are directional and their direction is that of human growth. "The old Dakota was wise. He knew that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his youth close to its softening influence."¹⁸ But this is not merely human growth, it is also growth in brotherhood. Standing Bear adds that the Dakota became so close to their animal victims and friends that "in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue." And this acknowledgement of brotherhood engendered an awareness of respect, individuality and purpose. Listen to Okute (Shooter):

From my boyhood I have observed leaves, trees, and grass, and I have never found two alike. They may have a general likeness, but on examination I have found that they

differ slightly. Plants are of different families. . . . It is the same with animals. . . . It is the same with human beings; there is some place which is best adapted to each. The seeds of the plants are blown about by the wind until they reach the place where they will grow the best—where the action of the sun and the presence of moisture are most favorable to them, and there they take root and grow. All living creatures and all plants are a benefit to something. Certain animals fulfill their purpose by definite acts. The crows, buzzards and flies are somewhat similar in their use, and even the snakes have a purpose in being.¹⁹

Persistence in existence was not mere continuance. To be was to be for the best.

Being was *being-for* and being-for engenders a sense of movement, purpose and numinous value, what Otto called “the sense of the holy.” Flying Hawk, an Oglala, states, “If the Great Spirit wanted men to stay in one place he would make the world stand still; but He made it to always change, so birds and animals can move and always have green grass and ripe berries, sunlight to work and play, and night to sleep; always changing; everything for good; nothing for nothing.”²⁰ And Ohiyesa reflects on the holy quality of motion and rest:

Everything as it moves, now and then, here and there, makes stops. The bird as it flies stops in one place to make its nest, and in another to rest in its flight. A man when he goes forth stops when he wills. So the god has stopped. The sun, which is so bright and beautiful, is one place where he has stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds, he has been with. The trees, the animals are all where he has stopped, and the Indian thinks of these places and sends his prayers there to reach the place where the god has stopped and win help and a blessing.²¹

In Heidegger’s language, the Dakota was *Gelassenheit* to Being. He was not next to being. He was with it. And what he was with was presence; what he was with was power. The greatest of the Oglalas, Sitting Bull, expressed it best: “Every seed is awakened and so has all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being and we therefore yield to our neighbors, even our animal neighbors, the same right as ourselves, to inhabit this land.”²² In such a world, learning is not cerebration, but celebration, for man participates in being; he is a brother of all beings; he is a care-taker of being. In such a personalized, purposive world it is not possible to not belong. The Dakota inhabited a world where he belonged.

ii

institutions: to be is to be responsible
(language, society, art and religion)

Reflection upon Dakota ontology in terms of space, time, cause and purpose has revealed a way of relating to being which engendered a sense

of belonging, a sense of objective relatedness and felt identity. If these qualities are true of the ontological representation, then we should expect them to be embodied in more concrete modes of behavior, i.e., in institutions. An institution may be described as behavior objectified and constructed to insure cultural continuity. Let us turn, then, to a brief examination of Dakota language, social relations, art and religion.

We inhabit and are shaped by a mass language. Not only do uncounted millions speak English, but the deaf also speak it through type. Furthermore, this mass language has been expanded—not only by typography but also by electronic technology. The whispering voice (telephone) covers the world. Television extends us to the planets, and radio listens to the echoes of galaxies. Although we may know *of* everyone, we may never truly know anyone in an intimate sense. Our language is dispersed and ceasing to be disparate. As the electronic web intensifies, local differences and nuances disappear. Such was not the case for the Dakota. He lived within a highly restricted tribal language. Restriction engenders unity.

It is true that there was inter-tribal communication. But this communication consisted of either standard signals or sign language. The standard signals were few. Sign language was gesture. Now gesture, like voice, is an interior exteriorized as progression through time. The meaning of an upraised hand resides in the movement to an upright position. Yet gesture encodes less than voice. Furthermore, gesture must be highly formulaic and typic. Gesture is movement visually and/or imaginatively apprehended. It lacks the true interior quality of speech. Since its use among the plains Indians was to diminish the gap of disparate tongues, gesture demanded set patterns of movement or formulas to clarify meanings and provide proper context. Due to these limitations, the sign language of the plains could not have extended the Dakota's sense of language to anything beyond narrow practical purposes. Nor could it have engendered much sense of unity. Walter Ong, writing of gesture, states,

gesture is “interfering.” It demands the cessation of a great many physical activities which can be carried on easily while one is talking. Further, it is not so directly interiorizing as sound by the fact that it is visually apprehended. Gesture has surface, although it does not consist simply of surface. Finally, it is not so socializing as sound, nor so reciprocating, nor so versatile. The intertribal sign language of the plains Indians of the United States did not unite the Indians so intimately as did the spoken languages of the individual tribes.²³

If the sign language of the Sioux provided him with a sense of relatedness, belonging, and felt identity, it must have been minimal. Just the opposite must have been true of his tribal language for his tribal language

was limited both quantitatively and qualitatively. Furthermore, it was spoken.

The Sioux language is a member of the linguistic group, Siouan. But "Siouan" covers a wide range of languages and is not an adjectival form of the word "Sioux." The two are not to be confused.²⁴ Perhaps we should refer to the language as Dakota. Even this term is less than precise. The Dakota were divided into seven bands and these bands were further grouped into three divisions: the Santee or Eastern Dakota, the Yankton or Middle Dakota and the Tetons or Western Dakota. Each division had its own dialect. Hence, the Santee spoke Dakota, the Yankton spoke Nakota and the Tetons spoke Lakota. The Tetons (Dwellers-on-the-Plains) were by far the largest group, their number exceeding that of all the other bands combined. Furthermore, they were the most historically dramatic and are the best known, consisting of the Hunkpapa, Minneconjou, Sisasapa, Oohenonpa, Brule, Sansarcs and Oglala bands. Since the Tetons were the largest group, the most dramatic and the best known, I shall refer to the language as Lakota. What do all these divisions mean? They mean that if you were a plains warrior, perhaps less than 20,000 people in the whole world spoke your own tongue and many of those spoke with a different dialect. Since there were no modern media and since the language was unwritten, it meant that you could always ask somebody, but you could never look anything up. Such quantitative restriction would foster a strong sense of tribal identity and group loyalty. It would also foster hostility to those who did not speak your tongue. In short, Lakota was chauvinistic. Hence you would refer to yourself as "Dakota" (The United People) while others, the Ojibwa or Crow would call you "Sioux" (Enemies). You would call your neighbors "Sheyela" (Speakers-of-Difficult-Language), and they would call themselves "Cheyenne" (Human Beings). You knew your brothers. They spoke your language. A quantitatively restricted language, a language of a few speakers, is an intimate language.

This progressive and intensive intimacy was carried out even in the behavior of naming. Hence, a plains warrior often had three names. He had the name given to him, the name he achieved, and his personal name. Few, if any, knew the latter, and those few could use it seldom. Hence, Luther Standing Bear had the name given to him by his father when he was born: "Ota Kte" or "Plenty Kill" because his father had killed many enemies. Later, when Luther Standing Bear had displayed his courage in hunting, battle and a vision quest, his name was changed from Plenty Kill to Standing Bear. If Luther Standing Bear had a personal, private name, we do not know it. He did not write it down. In any case, one often had a given name, a social name and a personal name. The latter might be analogous to the phenomenon familiar to members of a subgroup in our mass culture: the nick-name.²⁵ Such naming practice designated acknowledged achieved status, and conferred personal identity. The Lakota had names which belonged to him.

Beyond this, one might say that Lakota was concrete, non-dogmatic, motion-oriented, durational and action and person directed. It was an eventful language. Lakota lacked many generic concepts, hence it was concrete. One could not ask "What color is this?" but one could ask: "Is this blue?" It was non-dogmatic, i.e., personal and qualified. Print language, spread out in impersonal page space, becomes dogmatically assertive. Hence we say "This is an automobile" or "Custer is approaching." There is no specification of the stance of the speaker, he "stands" nowhere, nor any indication of his attitude. With both Black Elk and Luther Standing Bear and others, one finds constant use of personal qualifications, i.e., "I think," "It appears to me" and of attitudinal perspective, "perhaps," "maybe" and so forth. Hence they are much more likely to say, "I think this is an automobile, maybe" or "It appears to me that Yellow Hair is approaching, perhaps."

Such a non-dogmatic language was also motion, action and person oriented. Hence one would not say, "He puts on his clothes," but rather, "He is moving into clothing." A person's way of moving in the world, his gait or the way he rode, were as important a part in his description as his nose. Hence if one were an awkward or ungainly walker, one might say, "He moves newly." The durational aspect of the language I have already noted with Black Elk's constant usage of "afterwhile," "bye and bye" and "yonder." Claude Levi-Strauss puts it this way: "The Dakota language possesses no word to designate time, but it can express in a number of ways modes of being in duration. For Dakota thought, in fact, time constitutes a duration in which measurement does not intervene: it is a limitless 'free good.'"²⁶ From the viewpoint of a literate person, such language appears vague and imprecise. But this is simply because we suffer from the illusion that if we have the precise word, the exact word, we will have the exact meaning. And that meaning, usually, is the literal meaning. But the Lakota, like the Chinese, had no letters. Hence they were unable to worship the literal. Speaking of a chirographic language, Chinese, Ong expresses some of the phrases used for the least important, the literal meaning of characters:

In Chinese, where literal meaning is ordinarily not conceived of, since the writing system provides no *litterae* or letters on which the concept literal can be built, the roughly equivalent concepts are "according to the surface of the word," "according to each word in each utterance," "according to the dead character." These are hardly laudatory expressions. Here too in a chirographic but alphabetic culture, the first or most accessible meaning appears in at least vaguely depreciatory light. The rich suggestiveness of Chinese characters favors a sense of a fuller meaning lying much deeper than the literal.²⁷

For the Lakota also, it was much more important to be symbolic than literal, to be suggestive, poetic and profound than to be clear and precise.

Like the Chinese, he could not be so unkind as to explain everything to another. Such usage fosters a high degree of participation on the part of the auditor. It even alters the function of silence. Silence in a literal language is simply a gap. Silence in poetic language is pregnant, a way of funding the nuances of meanings. Hence both the spoken and unspoken language of the Lakota was such that it engendered participation, relatedness, belonging and a sense of felt identity. The Lakota used a language which belonged to him and to which he belonged.

The Dakota still lives on in the American imagination either "standing eagle-armed on hills in the sunrise" or as a synthetic savage attacking a wagon train. Such images cannot be merely the results of inept paintings in poor motels or of stereotyped motion pictures. These media do not create belief, they reflect them. Even Longfellow would not have been popular had he not been accepted. To reflect upon the Dakota, then, is to call in question the whole concept of Wasichu individuality. To reflect upon the Dakota in his concrete cultural circumstance is to throw in relief a common mythic basis.

This mythic belief may be singularly American but it is dual in nature, grounded upon first, the myth of the unspoiled country lacking in original sin, the Garden of Eden, the Golden West or more recently, the New Frontier and second, the Promethean myth of the isolate, transcending, absolutely autonomous individual whose justification is a negative form of freedom and whose destiny is conquest and control.

From the myth of unspoiled Eden, the white man concluded the Indian was a laconic Noble Savage; from the Promethean myth, he inferred that he, himself, had unlimited power and that the Indian was a savage devil destined for extermination. Both images derived from these myths rest on a common philosophic base: the assumption that autonomy of the individual means the *absence* of relations. Freedom conceived negatively becomes freedom *from*, freedom from obligation, freedom from restraint, freedom from responsibility. Hence the pioneer viewed himself and the Indian as loners, those outside culture and against nature. This view of the isolate individual was a functional rationalization for the frontiersman. He saw himself as independent, culture-transcending, self-generating, self-sustaining and self-justified, and he saw others through that image.

These myths were partially appropriate to the plains warrior. It is true that the Sioux was autonomous. If he, or his family or his band, did not wish to move with the tribe, no one could order him to do so. It is true that he was not accountable to any other individual, but he was responsible; he was responsible to the people. For the white settler, accountability was an external relation of person to person; for the plains Indian, accountability was an internal relation of person to group. Hence it was not true that the Dakota acted without obligation, restraint or responsibility, for all action went beyond the self and was grounded in the whole. In fact, one could claim that, for the Dakota, to be was to be

responsible. Why? Because his lived philosophy was one of acknowledged relativity and objective relatedness. He was an individual who was a member of a tribe, and being a member, he never acted against, apart from or *as* the whole without good reason. Freedom for him was not negative. Freedom for him was not absence but presence. Freedom for him was positive; it meant freedom *for*, freedom for the realization of greater relationships. Thus growing and individuality for him meant corporate individuality. Individuality meant growing in enhanced relatedness.

What is at stake here is not merely the concept of individuality, but concrete community. Contrast Black Elk's views when the nation's hoop had been broken with those of Eagle Voice when the hoop had been whole, holy and one:

The nation's hoop was broken, and there was no center any longer for the flowering tree. The people were in despair. . . . The life of the people was in the hoop, and what are many little lives if the life of those lives be gone? I looked back on the past and recalled my people's old ways, but they were not living that way any more. They were travelling the black road, everybody for himself and with little rules of his own, as in my vision. I was in despair, and I even thought that if the Wasichus had a better way, then maybe my people should live that way.²⁸

And so he went to New York City and he found that the Wasichu way was not *the* way.

I did not see anything to help my people. I could see that the Wasichus did not care for each other the way our people did before the nation's hoop was broken. They would take everything from each other if they could, and so there were some who had more of everything than they could use, while crowds of people had nothing at all and maybe were starving. They had forgotten that the earth was their mother. This could not be better than the old ways of my people.²⁹

No wonder Black Elk was in despair. Community had disintegrated. Man was no longer solidary, but solitary. Man no longer thrived in tribal presence, he was alienated in isolate, negative relations. Eagle Voice is, perhaps, fictional but here fiction finds truth. Listen to the way it was before the breaking:

If you broke a law, it was like breaking the sacred hoop a little; and that was a very bad thing, for the hoop was the life of the people all together . . . (if you did a bad thing you were thrown out before all the people) and it was better to die than to see shame on every face . . . (but if I am brave and generous) even the *wichasha vatapika* (leaders) begin to talk about me in their meetings, and at last they say: "This young Eagle Voice ought to be one of us." So they have a big feast and a ceremony at the center of the hoop, with all the people sitting around. And before they take me to be one of them, the people are asked to say any

evil thing they may know about me. But all the people cry out together, “*hi-yay, hi-yay*” and not even a jealous one can say anything bad at all. So they make me a man whom all praise, and before all the people they teach me what I must do, and they say I do not belong to myself anymore, but to the people.³⁰

The ceremony described here was simply in order to be a leader or keeper of the rules, but beyond this one could become a counselor or even a chief. But being a chief had to be earned and confirmed. And Eagle Voice adds that this was “hardest of all” because a chief must be “*wachin tonka*” (great minded) standing above himself, as he stands above others.”³¹ Luther Standing Bear, a true chief, wrote this description:

But the Indian chief, without any education, was at least honest. (Contrasted to the wasichu politician.) When anything was sent to his band, they got it. His family did not come first. He received no salary. In case of war, he was always found at the front, but when it came to receiving gifts, his place was in the rear. There was no hand-shaking, smiling, and ‘glad-handing’ which meant nothing. The chief was dignified and sincere.³²

Thus the chief was not first among equals, but was sometimes first and sometimes last depending on the situation of the people. He had the authority of status, not the status of authority. Even Crazy Horse, when presented the pipe of peace in counsel said, “Ask my people what they wish to do.”

What we see here is an ontology of relatedness translated or embodied as social responsibility. What was communion in metaphysics is community in society, a form of autonomy *with* responsibility for not all autonomy nor all responsibility were the same. Such matters depended on the individual’s place within and relationship to the whole. Dorothy Lee expresses it this way:

Wherein lies the responsibility of the Dakota? Primarily, I believe it derives from being—being a member of a family, or of a specific camp circle; being Dakota, being human, and being part of the universe. Not all parts of the universal whole carry the same responsibility. It is the responsibility of the four-leggeds to furnish food for the two-leggeds, for example; this was determined in the beginning, before beings were differentiated into four-leggeds and two-leggeds. As I understand it, it is the responsibility of man alone to actualize the universe; it is his unique role.³³

Since no one else has expressed this embodiment so eloquently nor so adequately, let me quote Ms. Lee once more:

The Dakota were responsible for all things, because they were at one with all things. In one way, this meant that all behavior had to be responsible, since its effect always went beyond the individual. In another way, it meant that an

individual had to, was responsible to, increase, intensify, spread, recognize, experience this relationship. To grow in manliness, in humanness, in holiness, meant to plunge purposefully deeper into the relatedness of all things. A Dakota never *assumed* responsibility, because responsibility was had, was there always. Where we would say that a man *assumed* a new responsibility, they would consider that, in such a situation, a man made an autonomous decision to carry out this particular *had* responsibility; or, perhaps, that at that moment he was able to recognize his responsibility. . . .

It remained for the Dakota to recognize his relatedness, and his responsibility; it was there for him to discover.³⁴

This translation of ontological relatedness into the social sphere changes what we normally mean by the word "choice." Choice, for us, normally means a free decision of alternatives, the assumption of a relationship or a burden. But in this perspective, choice becomes coextensive with awareness. Choice is acknowledgement. One does not choose to relate. One is already related. Hence, one chooses which relations to acknowledge and on the basis of that decision, which ways to actualize that acknowledgement. The good for the self thus became coextensive with the good for the tribe.

This way of relating also changes the meaning of "responsibility." Responsibility, for us, normally means being held accountable by the other. But in a shame culture, as distinguished from a guilt culture, there is no single given other to whom one is responsible. Responsibility here comes closer to the Chinese virtue of *chun-tzu*; it does not mean accountable, but something like spiritual availability, or perhaps, reciprocity, for responsibility is responding, re-spondere, speaking-back-to. To be responsible is to be responsive. And it means to be responsive to a web of relationships already objectively existing. Dorothy Lee states this strongly:

Responsibility and accountability had nothing in common for them. Ideally, everyone was responsible for all members of the band, and eventually for all people, all things. . . . Yet no Dakota was accountable to any one or for any one. Was he his brother's keeper? Yes, in so far as he was responsible for his welfare; no, in so far as being accountable for him. He would never speak of him, decide for him, answer prying questions about him. And he was not accountable for himself, either. No one asked him questions about himself; he gave information or withheld it, at his own choice.³⁵

From our vantage point of negative freedom, this is a difficult concept to grasp. From the Dakota point of view, where the ideal was the real, responsibility simply meant growth. To realize greater relationships was to grow in being. To be responsive was to grow into greater wholeness and thus enhance the hoop of the people.

The basic education of the Dakota child was learning to grow in enhanced relatedness. The method was positive ideals and the divorcing

of the material consequences from acts of achievement. Responsibility began early and was appropriate to the age of the child. Hence, Luther Standing Bear, at the age of three, was given the privilege of bridling his father's horse and finding the village whetstone. Such tasks must have been difficult for a small child, but his father never ordered him, never checked on him, and trusted him to carry them out. From time to time, he would say to him, "When you are older, you may do this" or "When you are a man you will do this." Higher ideals were constantly set beyond his given state of development. One knew one's place but one also knew the direction in which he was expected and privileged to grow. Children were neither bribed nor coerced. They learned to recognize what was demanded by the situation, to acknowledge those demands, and to do them. Such an option was never posed as a restriction on the child's right to play, but as an opportunity to become what all children desire to become: adult.

Perhaps the most effective and profound of the methods used to train the Dakota child was the divorce of material consequences from acts of achievement. When Luther Standing Bear, after several failures, shot his first bird, his father immediately notified the town crier who went through the camp announcing that Plenty Kill had killed his first bird, "and that Standing Bear, his father, was giving away a horse in consequence. . . . On this occasion the horse was given to an old man who was very poor."³⁶ Again, when he returned with his first deer meat, his father had the crier notify everyone in the village that his son had brought home his first meat. The father then gave away another horse to another poor old man. Standing Bear says that this was the beginning of his religious training. It was certainly his social training. He was accorded all verbal praise, praise shared by every member of the band, and then gifts were given to the needy. This is how one was taught to acknowledge wider relatedness. This is how one was guided to become a man whom all praise, a man who did not belong to himself anymore, but belonged to the people.

Art and religion were intertwined for the Dakota. Most songs were chants, most stories were myths, most dancing was sacral. Even the functions of art and religion were parallel and highly analogous. The problem of art was how to restore harmony. The problem of religion was how to present and maintain the numinous. Both were socially grounded and cosmic in function. Common to both was the sacred center, the omphalos, and the basic shape was the circle. Richard Erdoes describes the cosmic, social and personal meaning of the circle:

The Great Mystery's symbol was the circle. It stood for the Sun and the Earth, the Tepee and the Sacred Hoop of the Nation. As long as the circle was unbroken, the tribes would flourish. The sacred powers always worked in circles. The eagle, a holy messenger of the "ones above," describes a wheel in its flight. The wind moves in round whirls. The sun comes and goes in a circle. If a man is not aware that

he, too, has within himself this sacred center, that he is part of the mystic circle together with all other living creatures, then he is not really a man.³⁷

Even those things which appeared to be linear were not. The four stage ascension in Black Elk's vision is really a movement for completion and a preparation for return. An examination of ritual also shows a four phase movement to closure. All good things for the Dakota happened or were done in fours. But these were not the four corners. They were the four quarters.

The circle is the visual and aural symbol of what Hegel called "good infinity" as distinguished from linear endlessness. And the task of most art and all religion was to translate the eternal into the phenomenal realm. One's parents could only teach one to acknowledge the ever-widening spread of phenomenal relationships. Art and religion could introduce one to the eternal. Relatedness and responsibility permeated being. Consequently, even in the most intimate of all Dakota rituals, the vision quest, one's responsibility was to come in touch with and actualize what already was. It was not one's responsibility to create. Creation became translation. And the power to create, to see the unseen, to hear the unheard and to heal, came from the circle, a manifestation of the Great Spirit itself. Black Elk eloquently describes the power of the sacred as manifest in *natura naturata*:

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back to childhood, and so it is in everything, where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of the birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.

But the Wasichus have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us any more.³⁸

The circle was manifest not only in the tepee and the hoop of the people, but also in the sacred shield.

Painting, among the Dakota, and quill and bead work, too, had three functions: to invoke power, to record events and to decorate harmoniously. One might paint one's shield to invoke the power of his vision, to record past deeds of bravery or simply for decoration. One might also paint on the outside of one's tepee for the same purposes. Another purpose was also fulfilled in tepee painting. Like the totem poles of the northwest, tepee painting functioned as history and as advertising. It announced to all viewers, here lives a brave man, one must take notice.

The body, also, was painted on such occasions as going on the war path. Clothing was painted for decoration, or again, for special protection or rituals. The Dakota did not make a painting and then hide it in a museum. Painting was public. Painting was a means of unification. Painting was for the people.

The act of painting was divided according to sex. There were two styles: one used by men and one used by women. Men painted in a vivid, animated, non-perspectival style. Their paintings were generally naturalistic representations (lacking the third dimension) of hunting scenes, battles or other memorable events. These paintings were rendered on skins, clothes, shields and tepees. The painting of women was restricted to abstract designs either of geometric balance or of flowers. Neither sex worked in the style of the other. "This appears to be due to the fact that their naturalistic arts are often connected with magic and religious practices, which belong in the realm of men."³⁹ Porcupine quill embroidery was the province of women. Quill decoration is a native American craft, found nowhere else in the world. Feather work, such as in the war bonnet, had the function of invoking power and expressing status.

It may seem strange to talk about the architecture of a nomadic people, but the Dakota had architecture. He had the tepee, the sweat lodge and the sun dance lodge. All three were circular, functional and symbolic. The number of poles and size of a tepee varied according to the wealth and status of the owner. The tepee, by its very nature, fostered sociality and sharing. There is no privacy in a tepee. One could obtain privacy only by putting a blanket over one's head, a practice used by courting lovers, whereupon the rest of the village pretended that they had ceased to exist. In the summer, the tepee was even more social since the lower sides were rolled up for air conditioning. The most important tepee faced the east since this was the direction of enlightenment and the morning star. The circle of tepees was open to the east; the sweat lodge also faced east. It was small, circular and had a circular pit in the center for the placing of heated stones.

The most complex form of Dakota architecture, the sun dance lodge, was also the most sacred. The center pole of the lodge was the ritualistically consecrated "whispering brother," the cottonwood. This was surrounded by twenty-eight poles. The numbers four and seven were sacred for the Dakota. As Black Elk said, when you add four sevens you get twenty-eight. Furthermore, he added that "the moon lives twenty-eight days, and this is our month" and informed Joseph Epes Brown "You should also know that the buffalo has twenty-eight ribs, and that in our war bonnets we usually use twenty-eight feathers."⁴⁰ When one realizes that the sun dance was the most sacred of all Dakota rituals, and that it was not merely a sacrifice for the good of the people, but also for the good of their buffalo brothers—to insure that the sacred species would survive and multiply—one can see the profound meanings in this numerology.

Black Elk is even more specific in his description of the cosmic significance of the sun dance lodge:

I should explain to you that in setting up the sun dance lodge, we were really making the universe in a likeness; for, you see, each of the posts around the lodge represents some particular object of creation, so that the whole circle is the entire creation, and the one tree at the center, upon which the twenty-eight poles rest, is *Wakan Tanka*, who is the center of everything. Everything comes from Him, and sooner or later everything returns to Him.⁴¹

The architecture of the Dakota engendered a sense of relatedness, belonging and felt identity.

Most dancing was done in a circle accompanied by the drum, also round. Most was done by the men alone although women did participate in the ultimate dance of desperation, the ghost dance.⁴² Singing and chanting were formulaic and exhibited a high degree of parallelism, repetition and symmetry. The same was true of narrative stories, most of which were mythical and symbolic. Thus one finds little narrative suspense in Dakota stories, for the epic dominates and as in singing, the whole usually comes first. The rest is articulation of that whole.

Dakota religion was not based on nausea, fear, nor a desperate yearning for another world. It was a religion of awe and acknowledged presence. Prayer was not primarily propitiary, but sacramental. Its main function was to express gratitude and hope, hope for the good of the people. Sacrifice and ritual had the same communal goal, the unity and good of the people. This was a religion of felt identity, of wonder. Its function was to conjure presence, to present, maintain and provide access to the holy. At the same time, it united the people, providing them with a sense of wholeness. Hence it was also therapeutic, for the word "therapy" means "to make whole." Even the most painful sacrifice, the sun dance, was not done to exhibit bravery on the part of the dancer, but to provide benefits to the people. Beyond the individual lay society, beyond society lay the cosmos. Hence, even the most individual of all religious acts, the vision quest, was a quest for awareness of wider relatedness. Although the experience was personal, its meaning was communal. Thus Black Elk's heirophantic realization was a *mysterium tremendum* which happened to him, but it was also a vision for the people and he felt himself to be a failure for not having translated the eternal adequately into the phenomenal realm. And so he laments:

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.

And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth,
—you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing,
for the nation's hoop is broken and splintered. There is no
center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.⁴³

Even lamentation was social. When the one who lamented prayed, and especially when he prayed with the sacred pipe, he prayed for and with everything. No wonder the Dakota had a sense of objective relatedness, belonging and felt identity.

iii

behavior: to be is to share
(fortitude, fidelity, bravery and generosity)

We have seen that the ontological stance of the Dakota was embodied in their institutions, thus engendering a sense of objective relatedness, belonging and felt identity wherein the individual was autonomous and responsible. He saw it as his responsibility to exemplify the ideal, to actualize it, to translate the eternal into the phenomenal realm. The task remains to examine what the ideals of behavior were which the Dakota perceived himself destined to embody. The normative values which he believed to be necessary—not merely regulative, but constitutive of his behavior—were four: fortitude, fidelity, bravery and generosity. These will be discussed in order of increasing value.

The Dakota were great orators. Council meetings were often as much an opportunity to display verbal pyrotechnics in the fullness of time as an opportunity to come to a decision about what was right for the people. Yet the Dakota learned something as important as oratory very young. He learned to shut up. A squalling baby is no desirable asset if you are fleeing danger or huddled in the close dark surrounded by enemies. Hence, when the baby would cry, the Dakota mother would pinch its nostrils until it learned to be silent. Silence, that out of which sound comes and that into which it returns, was the first lesson learned with firm love. Fortitude began in the tepee or travois.

The early training in silence and patience would serve the boy well when he later went on his vision quest. This training was equally important for the girl. The Dakota believed that a desirable woman was one who exhibited poise, reserve and dignity. Girls were taught not to laugh. Laughter can be a danger in a world where silence has strategic value. One learned early to adjust the expressions of one's feelings not to what one wanted, but to the objective demands of the given situation. It is not that the Dakota were laconic stoics. They were simply realists.

Plains weather is extreme. In winter the blizzards are brutal; the snow is deep, and the air is crackling cold. Always there is the wind. In summer the heat rises visibly from the plains in writhing strands. In the spring there are hot tornadic winds. Only in fall are there the cool, re-

assuring breezes to create true Indian summer. To live in a world like this demands that one cultivate patience, endurance and fortitude. Furthermore, the life of the hunter is different than that of the settled round of the farmer. Sometimes the deer would be scarce, the buffalo would not be tempted to run, and the people would be starving. Even the sacrifice of a finger joint to the world powers might not help. Again, patience, endurance and fortitude were necessary. They were necessary not only for the individual, but for the good of the people.

The most important event in the young boy's life was his vision quest. It was this which put him in direct touch with the absolute, which provided him his adult name and his destiny. After instruction and purification, he had to walk forth alone clad only in a breech cloth, protected only by a few symbolic feathers and a sacred pipe, sit down in a sacred circle in the great solitude, and in utter humility and complete self-abnegation, pray and await his destiny. He never kneeled in stuttering supplication; he never grovelled; he faced the Great Mystery as a man and alone.

Eventually, the lamenter climbed to a selected spot on a mountain, where alone, exposed to the elements, without defense against the constant danger of lurking enemies, without shelter, naked and fasting, walking in a sacred manner within the sacred circle prepared for him, emptied of self, straining to penetrate beyond the senses, he prayed continually, "O *Wakan-Tanka*, have pity on me, that my people may live!"⁴⁴

If he received a vision, he returned to have it interpreted and it then shaped his future. If thunder beings came in his vision, he had to become a *heyoka*, a contrarywise or backwards man who lived as a tribal clown. If his spirit broke and he fled in fear or if he refused to go on the vision quest at all, he joined the women. No one condemned him.

Perhaps the situation which called for the greatest endurance and fortitude was the sun dance. This was an exhausting four-day ritual invested with intense holiness. The men who volunteered to be the dancers had their breasts and sometimes their backs pierced by bones which were then attached to the central sacred pole. Their task was to dance until the bonds tore loose from their flesh. On occasion they were additionally burdened by buffalo skulls. What might appear to us as torture was to the Dakota a highly sacred sacrifice. Suffering alters the focus of the mind. And although one might dance for some personal reason, i.e., to have a relative cured, the ultimate reason for the dance was the good of the people, the continuance of the buffalo and the identity of all. The dancers wore rabbit skins, for the rabbit represented humility ". . . because he is quiet and soft and not self-asserting—a quality which we must all possess when we go to the center of the world." Black Elk continues his description:

When we go to the center of the hoop we shall all cry, for we should know that anything born into this world which you see about you must suffer and bear difficulties. We are now going to suffer at the center of the hoop, and by doing this may we take upon ourselves must of the suffering of our people . . . the flesh represents ignorance, and thus, we dance and break the thong loose, it is as if we were being freed from the bonds of the flesh. It is much the same as when you break a young colt. . . . We too are young colts when we start to dance, but soon we become broken and submit to the Great Spirit.⁴⁵

Eagle Voice also interprets this ritual: "In the sacred dance the proud heart dies with pain and thirst, hunger and weariness, that the power of Wakon Tonka may come in and live there for the good of all the people. . . . It is a happy time; but it is also a time to suffer and endure, for pain is wise to teach and without courage there is nothing good."⁴⁶ The Dakota endured. When it came to the wider Wasichu world, he did not prevail.

Oral-aural cultures foster a high degree of interdependence and strong loyalty. The Dakota were no different. Killing those outside the group was sanctioned. Killing within the group was absolutely condemned. Regardless of his motives or justification, a kills-at-home was banished from the tribe. Only under truly exceptional circumstances was he ever accepted back among the people, and then his name was changed. Murder, for all practical purposes was practically unknown. One was faithful to the people. Fidelity meant that one also trusted the word of the other. When scouts returned with news of the enemy or of buffalo, no one questioned their word nor checked their information. Their word was their bond. Promises were meant to be kept; otherwise promises were not made. A forked tongue was destructive of the people for it made trust untenable. Luther Standing Bear's father advised him repeatedly that a man who lies is not liked by anybody, and so he learned to tell the truth, and it made him feel better. He describes his father running Wannamaker's, a country store, in violation of "good American business practice":

Father did not need to look through a lot of books to determine what Running Horse owed him. When the other five dollars were paid, Father just crossed out all the lines. There were no receipts given. If Running Horse, or any other Indian, wanted credit in those days, they got it. They did not need to bring any security. Their word was as good as gold; they were still honest and uneducated.⁴⁷

The lessons Luther Standing Bear learned when he worked for Wannamaker's were not those taught by his father.

Besides fidelity to individual others and fidelity to the people, one had to be faithful to his personal vision. This destiny, once had, was never to be betrayed. To do so would have been worse than being inhuman; one would have been non-Dakota. Such intense fidelity was also exhibited

in male bonding. A brother-friend did not have the same parents, but he was closer to you than your consanguinal brothers. You were as one person. If that meant you had to risk your life or even lose it for him, you did. Crazy Horse brought great honor on himself by turning alone against a band of Crow and rescuing a Sioux on foot. No matter how successful a war party, the leader was disgraced if he lost so much as a single man. Fidelity in everyday matters brought honesty and trust. Fidelity in war was an absolute necessity.

War, for the Dakota, was a great adventure. Eastman likens it to our current game of football. The Dakota did not fight like the white man did. They did not fight to conquer and subdue another tribe nor to exterminate them. They fought to gain horses, gain status, and exhibit valor. Killing did not mean much, and killing the white man meant even less. There was little bravery in such an act. Counting coup—touching an enemy with a stick—brought much greater honor. Touching him alive, or touching him with a hand, taking his gun from him while he was alive, was an even greater deed. Being wounded, especially in front, showed great courage, but the utmost of valor was to rescue an on-foot comrade who was surrounded by the enemy. Admiration of courage did not apply to one's warrior-brothers alone. Hence when Standing Bear and others had a brave Pawnee surrounded, and he, refusing to move, wounded all five of his Dakota foes, they did not kill him nor take him prisoner; they withdrew from the field.

Although bravery in concert was as good as it was necessary, individual bravery was even better, perhaps, in part, because it was not necessary. Going on a raiding party and stealing horses from the enemy brought great honor. Going on one's own and returning with booty brought even greater prestige. Going alone, on foot and unarmed was the ultimate demonstration of courage and skill. Again, we are back to the concept of facing things alone. When, at the age of eleven, Luther Standing Bear volunteered to go to the Wasichu school at Carlisle, he did so, not because he had the faintest idea of what a white education would be or do for him, but because he was convinced that he would be killed. He believed that if he died a brave death in Wasichu country, it would bring great honor on him and please his father very much. The Dakota did not fear death. He feared the bad death—the death of betrayal, the death of cowardice, the death of decrepitude and non-accomplishment. When the good death came, he sang.

The courage initiated in the vision quest was carried throughout life. Facing the Great Ultimate without running away, without fear and trembling, but tall and proud, confirmed one in his life's course and conferred his true name. One's name could also be changed by great acts of valor and bravery, especially in warfare. These were the names one earned. Bravery brought status. But even bravery was not enough to make one a chief. One could be a great warrior, hunter and trusted

brother, but to be a man whom all looked up to, something of even greater value than valor was necessary: generosity.

Generosity was the highest of Dakota virtues, a virtue so high, that, perhaps, no man ever achieved it adequately, the ultimate expression of humanheartedness and the good of the nation, the ground for the life and succor of the Life of the lives of the people. Paraphrasing Confucius, one might imagine Black Elk to have said: "All of my doctrine is strung on one sinew: generosity."

Embedded in our ordinary language are a multitude of unkind cuts against the Indian. But the most unkind of all is this: you're an Indian-giver. The Dakota gave. They gave freely and without strings. And they gave for good. This does not mean that the Dakota was seeking to create for himself some guaranteed, birth-proof safety-suit of social selflessness. He was no saint, no noble savage. He knew the trauma of birth, the frustrations of life, the decrepitude of age and phobia of a disgraceful death. He knew that among him there were those who were venal as among others. But he also knew that to share was to survive. He had a different view of property. Sitting Bull remarked that the white man acquires things to keep them, but that the Oglala gather things to give them away.

Territory and property are not the same thing. Territory is the habitation of the nation. It must be remembered, fought for and cherished for the good of the nation and for the good of the four-leggeds and the wingeds of the air as well. Property implies a *who*; property belongs to somebody, property is a principle of division. But if space is one, indivisible, centered, recurrent, auditory, memorable, personal and continuous, how could land ever possibly be *private* property? The land, the great rolling plains, belonged to everybody or nobody. The Great Spirit ultimately "owned" everything and had created everything to be shared. Not only the land but all beings belonged to him and all things. Man was but a care-taker of being and eventually all would be returned to its proper owner, even one's own body. Therefore, as a temporary trustee of being, it was proper to share. Being was not having. To be was to share.

Generosity had many functions for the Dakota. Generosity was a technique of education, a means of achieving status, an economic necessity and an expression of grieving. In the case of Luther Standing Bear, we saw that the divorce of material consequences from acts of achievement was a primary method of education. In the buffalo hunt, it was a great honor to be chosen as one of the lead killers, for this not only acknowledged one's prowess in the kill but meant that one's kills would go to the neediest in the village. Richard Erdoes describes it well:

The Plains people were forever mindful of the poor, and especially those who could no longer care for themselves. Nobody was allowed to go without food or shelter. Often the crier would admonish the members of the warrior society: "Young men, you hunt well, we know. You never fail. To-

day you will feed the helpless. Old people who have no sons. Little ones who have no fathers. Women whose husbands are dead. What you kill today will be for them! . . .”

Undistinguished and stingy men, bad fighters or hunters, were not invited to join the warrior's society. “Such men just live,” said a brave old warrior. It was really the worst one could say about anybody.⁴⁸

Since every young boy yearned to be a member of the warrior's society, the lesson of the virtue of generosity and responsibility for the welfare of others was ingrained early.

Bravery was important in being a hunter or a warrior. But bravery alone would never provide access to council nor to the status of chief. For that, as important as bravery was, one needed respect, and respect came from sharing with the people—not bribing, but sacrificing for the neediest of the nation. Since freedom meant growing in responsibility, once one became a counselor or a chief, he was responsible to be even more generous. Luther Standing Bear describes his becoming a chief:

In different places they started to sing songs of praise for me. Frank Goings, the chief of the Indian Police and interpreter at the agency, had brought over the Boys' Band from the boarding school, with all their instruments. In between the Indian songs, the band would play. I then started giving away the things I brought along.

I kept this up until I had given away everything I owned, and my wife and I walked away with practically nothing. We figured that we gave away that day about a thousand dollars' worth of goods ourselves, not counting all the presents that had been donated to be distributed.⁴⁹

Spiritual wealth and material wealth were not the same thing. A man was often wealthy in proportion to what he could afford to give away.

Beyond status, sharing was also an economic and political necessity and a method of grieving. The welfare of the whole depended on the welfare of each. A nomadic people cannot afford weak and disabled stragglers. Furthermore, at times of great productivity: for example, after a successful hunt, all hands were needed for the butchering, drying of the meat and the treatment of the skins. Sharing with the less fortunate was an economic necessity. It was also a death ceremony. When Standing Bear's father died, he gave away all possessions, and he and his relatives lived off the land for two months to express their grief. When they returned to camp, they were given numerous gifts by others, and normal life was resumed.

Perhaps even more important than the fact of giving was the way of giving. Giving meant nothing if what was given was not of value to the giver, regardless of its value to the recipient. Furthermore, one did not give in order to gain recognition or to attain ephemeral gratitude. Though a shame culture, the Dakota did not give as do the Japanese whose concept of *on*, or indebtedness, drives them to give unto others before some-

one gives unto them. In fact, giving, if done properly, was done in such a way that the recipient was never saddled with a sense of internal regret. Generosity, that burden in some cultures most difficult to bear, was intended as simply sharing, as simply doing what was right, as simply doing what was proper for the people. Or, in some cases, it simply meant doing what the other desired. George Catlin tells of a Cheyenne with beautiful leggings. He tried several times to purchase the leggings to no avail. As his boat was pulling out from shore and heading down the river, the Cheyenne rode alongside and finally threw a package on board. Catlin unwrapped the package and found the leggings he could not purchase. By the time the unwrapping was done, the Cheyenne had disappeared. "To give without embarrassing or humiliating the receiver was as important as the gift itself."⁵⁰ The Cheyenne knew how to give. He would have been a good Dakota.

This has been an attempt to describe a people's world, a world of genuine participation, a world inhabited, not inhibited, a world not of absences, but of presences. Categories are useless. But for those who like tags on things, one could say that Dakota philosophy was a combination of Platonic valuation and Bergsonian duration. This conceptualization may tell us something of the Dakota. Perhaps it will also tell us something about ourselves.

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footnotes

1. Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows* (New York, 1973), 7.
2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and Sociology," in *Signs* (Evanston, 1964), 100.
3. Walter J. Ong, S.J., *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, 1967), 43-44. We might also note that we speak of ancient time as *distant* time. We speak of *split* seconds, and a split second salvation is a *close call* or a *near miss*.
4. *Ibid.*, 35.
5. *Ibid.*, 23.
6. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), 42-43.
7. This suggests that we might learn more by sending the orally-aurally arrested, namely poets, to record verbo-motor cultures rather than sending those dominated by the quantified quotients of consciousness. Indeed, Levi-Strauss argues a favorable position for the poet when he states that "art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought." See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), 22ff.
8. Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (New York, 1967), 188ff.
9. One recalls Chief Joseph's sexist but perhaps perceptive remark: "When you can get the last word with an echo, you may have the last word with your wife."
10. *The Presence of the Word*, 128.
11. Actually, the term "Iron Horse" is a Wasichu word resulting from seeing too many movies. The Lakota word was Maza Canku, or Iron Road, very close to our "railroad."
12. This is particularly true when we are sentimental. That hunger for home, nostalgia, has since the Greeks meant a nostalgia for space. See Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe* (New York, 1969), 18. Since the Plains culture arose and disappeared in less than two hundred years, we may be here confronting a nostalgia for time. See Nancy O. Lurie, "Historical Background," in Stuart Levine and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *The American Indian Today* (Deland, Florida: Everett-Edwards, 1968), 28ff.
13. This sense of flow and the evanescence of all life was expressed with great depth by Crowfoot: "What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in winter time. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset." Quoted in T. C. McLuhan, *Touch the Earth* (New York, 1972), 12.
14. N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (New York, 1973). The time of falling

stars was November 13, 1833.

15. Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (New York, 1928), 18.
16. *Ibid.*, 23.
17. T. C. McLuhan, *Touch the Earth*, 99.
18. *Ibid.*, 6.
19. *Ibid.*, 19.
20. *Ibid.*, 64.
21. *Ibid.*, 37. Compare this with the following passage from Henri Bergson's *Les Deux Sources de Moralite et Religion* (Paris, 1970), 1152-1153. "A great current of creative energy gushes forth through matter, to obtain from it what it can. At most points it is stopped; these stops are transmuted, in our eyes, into the appearances of so many living species, that is, of organisms in which our perception, being essentially analytical and synthetic, distinguishes a multitude of elements combining to fulfill a multitude of functions; but the process of organization was only the stop itself, a simple act analogous to the impress of a foot which instantaneously causes thousands of grains of sand to contrive to form a pattern." Since the Dakota were not Bergsonians, it can only be that Bergson thought like a Dakota.
22. T. C. McLuhan, *Touch the Earth*, 90.
23. *The Presence of the Word*, 147-148.
24. Ethel Nurge, *The Modern Sioux* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1970), xii.
25. Now that we inhabit a post-literate situation, a renewed orality, it would be interesting to know whether the use of nick-names is on the increase or decrease.
26. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Middlesex, England, 1969), 172, Levi-Strauss attributes this information to V. D. Malan and R. C. McCone, "The Time Concept Perspective and Premise in the Socio-cultural Order of the Dakota Indians," *Plains Anthropologist*, V (1960).
27. *The Presence of the Word*, 47.
28. *Black Elk Speaks*, 218-219.
29. *Ibid.*, 221.
30. John G. Neihardt, *When the Tree Flowered* (New York, 1973), 33-34.
31. *Ibid.*, 34.
32. *My People the Sioux*, 59.
33. Dorothy Lee, *Freedom and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1959), 68.
34. *Ibid.*, 61. Lurie also emphasizes this sense of group identity membership and decision, "Historical Background," 43.
35. *Ibid.*, 65.
36. *My People the Sioux*, 10. Speaking of the concept of individualism in education today, Rosalie and Murray Wax state: "But these alienated and educated young Sioux might be lamenting the fact that their accomplishment signified little because it was truly individualistic. That their parents and relatives had not helped them through school seemed to be a cause for shame." "Indian Education for What?" in Levine and Lurie, *The American Indian Today*, 168.
37. Richard Erdoes, *The Sun Dance People* (New York, 1972).
38. *Black Elk Speaks*, 198-200.
39. Frederic H. Douglas and Rene D'Harncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York, 1941), 145-146.
40. Joseph Epes Brown, *The Sacred Pipe* (Baltimore, 1971), 80.
41. *Ibid.*
42. The Ghost Dance was introduced to the Dakota via Wovoka (Jack Wilson, a Paiute). Jack Wilson had travelled to the Northeast coast and had come into contact there with the Shakers. There may be a women's liberation angle here.
43. *Black Elk Speaks*, 276.
44. *Freedom and Culture*, 63.
45. *The Sacred Pipe*, 85. Compare this with the first Noble Truth of the Buddha: Sabe Sankara Dukka, know that to be is to suffer.
46. *When the Tree Flowered*, 128-129.
47. *My People the Sioux*, 102.
48. *The Sun Dance People*, 32 and 35.
49. *My People the Sioux*, 275-276.
50. *The Sun Dance People*, 83.