

**Further Applications of the Turning Wheel**  
(deleted from original keynote address)

Rodney Frey – August 2011

Certainly throughout all my teaching and research, understanding the interplay of the unique and universal, the diverse and shared in common, has invariably played itself out in a myriad of ways, expressed in a rich and vibrant tapestry – be it while glimpsing the narratives of the Indigenous Aranda of central Australia or Inuit of the central Arctic, the narrative of Christianity, Hinduism, or Taoism, the narrative of Science or Capitalism, the narrative of Abraham’s Covenants with the Lord or Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, the narrative of in a Pablo Picasso painting or a Sufi Nasrudin tale, or the narrative view from atop a tower at Jericho of 10,000 years ago, through Galileo’s telescope, or from within Plato’s Cave.

If I was to travel the territory of the spoke, indeed the many spokes of the Apsáalooke, the Schitsu’umsh and other Indigenous peoples of this land, as a student myself, and then as a teacher, I’d need to attempt to gain some level of competency in being able to don the regalia as an ethnographer. “Ethnographer,” a distilled definition, “one who seeks to understand others.” Something we all seek? The ethnographer’s competence is predicated on first obtaining permission from our host and then of traveling in collaboration, he as our guide, and always attempting to see from his perspective. This is a competence predicated on acquiring the language of our host and being, as if a child, swaddled in the fabric of his Indigenous blanket – of being skilled in my application of sampling techniques, semi-structured interviewing, and participant-observations, all in consort with our host. This is a competence

predicated on adapting our research design and methods, our research legitimizing criteria, our publication format and classroom pedagogy to his learning style and worldview to access and then better disseminate the epistemological and ontological foundations of our hosts' spokes – and for our Indigenous hosts, a non-Cartesian world of oral traditions and power words. This is a competency that seeks to offer respect and to “give back” to those in need, of doing applied collaborative-based anthropology. In so doing I've come to realize the rich and vibrant terrain of this very unique Indigenous landscape, as well as just how much differentiates the landscape of this spoke from that of my own spoke.

And using our powwow regalia metaphor, the ethnographer's regalia is so remarkably akin to that of the contemporary powwow . . . . clown! Certainly devoid of spiritual qualities that can be imbued in the powwow clown, the ethnographer is nevertheless like the clown with its own distinctive regalia, often a combination of styles, Indian as well as Euro-American, fused in a amusing if not contrary fashion. While clearly standing out from the crowd, the clown is begrudgingly accorded a place within the Grand Entry and on the dance floor. And while dancing, the clown/ethnographer provides a translation, an interpretive, albeit comic pantomime of the fancy, the traditional, and the many other styles about, for the benefit of the on-lookers in the bleachers. And you know where I'm going with this; both clown and ethnographer can be made to look . . . . the fool! We should never take ourselves too seriously, too self-assured, too Coyote.

When teaching anthropological research methods, I have sought, with renewed commitment, to offer my students some level of competency to be able to don the regalia of both head and heart spokes, of both positivist and constructionist research design, methods and interpretations; of both empirical (validity and reliability) and post-modern (authenticity, trustworthiness and appropriateness) criteria for legitimizing research, of both scientific (formal) and aesthetic (narrative) forms and styles of writing.

When teaching the ways of Plateau Indians, I have sought to offer my students a classroom infused with an Indigenous pedagogy, rich with teaching methods that are family-based as opposed to solely individual-based, experiential and place-based as opposed to solely analytical-based, orality-based as opposed to solely literacy-based. I needed to attempt to swaddle my students in the fabric of an Indigenous blanket, and nourished on an appetite of heart knowledge, so they could begin to appreciate and engage the regalia of the Plateau People's spoke.

While teaching about world religions, for example, my students have found similarity between Tom Yellowtail's Wheel and the Hindu narrative. We learn from Hinduism, that while there are many different religious paths or *yogas* expressed in this religion, for example *Bhakti, Jnana, Karma and Raja Yogas*, and while there are literally millions of distinct manifest Gods and Goddesses within whom each individual can find affiliation, nevertheless, all the Gods and Goddesses are subsumed within the ultimate divinity of a singular omnipresent Brahman and all the *yogas* inevitably lead to the same Infinite bliss, *Moksha – a vivid expression of the interplay between the many spokes and the hub and rim.*

The Wheel has affinity with the Taoist narrative as well. Ultimately each narrative emanates out of a monism - for Taoism, the nameless Tao, and for the Apsáalooke, the varied-named Creator – *Akbaatatdía* – “the maker of all things first,” *Isáhka* – “old man, *lichíhkbaaleeish* – “the first doer.” Nevertheless, both manifest the myriad expressions of reality beginning with and continuing through a binary – for Taoism, the Yin Yang, and for Tom Yellowtail, with the hub/rim and spokes, and among with the spokes. The binaries embedded within the Taoist and Apsáalooke narratives relate as interdependently and balanced. Complementarity, rather than opposition or hierarchy, highlights these binaries.

And closer to home for most of us, the interplay of the particular and ubiquitous, the diverse and universal, plays its self out in most revealing ways in the Christian and Science narratives. In contrast with the previous Apsáalooke, Hindu and Taoist narratives, it could be argued that these stories both revolve around a dualism that is fundamentally oppositional and hierarchically in character, rather than complementary. This can be witnessed in the Christian vignettes of Genesis and the Fall, and in the Abraham’s covenants with the Lord – of the birth knowledge of good and evil, of being vanquished from Eden and living in sin, yet the possibility of atonement and salvation in the Kingdom of God – of being a “chosen people,” your children blessed and your enemies cursed by the Lord.

This oppositional and hierarchical dualism can also be observed in a series of Science vignettes forming the foundations of our scientific method. Beginning in the writings of Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.), through that of René Descartes (1597-1659) and his Cartesian Dualism, of mind/body, of thought/material exclusive binaries, neither reducible to the other, and his method of deductive logical reasoning, that of John Locke (1632-1704) and his inductive

empiricism, to that of Galileo (1564-1642) with his emphasis on quantifiable variables and their relationships, a reality of discrete numerically-based chunks, i.e., statistics – “the language of nature is numbers,” to the writings of Isaac Newton (1642-1727) seeking to establish universal generalizations – “laws” to describe, explain, predict and ultimately control nature – the “laws of motion,” and to the writings of Francis Bacon (1561-1625) and his utilitarianism, that science holds the keys to unlocking the power over nature – in embracing the scientific method we adhere to a dualism that separates us from nature so that we can ultimately control nature.

My students have come to learn that Tom’s Wheel is not static and stationary, but always on the move; it’s a dynamic Wheel – a turning Wheel. Though certainly not an explanatory theory, the Wheel offers my students an approach to categorizing and differentiating the temporal dynamics and changes found within and between narratives. Witnessed are alterations in the character of spokes, as well as the geniuses of new spokes themselves and the eclipsing of others. As we have seen, Tom Yellowtail had effectively traveled a spoke his distant forefathers had not known, that of Christianity. The dynamics of the turning Wheel can entail processes such as “incorporation” and “syncretism.” The first involves the barrowing and inclusion of a trait from another spoke, and the second, the blending of characteristics from distinctly separate spokes to form a new integrated spoke. This latter process is wonderfully exemplified in our own Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, in American blues and jazz, the blending of elements from distinctly African and American musical traditions to form a new tradition.

These are processes resulting in what are characterized as “discovery” and “creativity.” They entail the cognitive and affective capacities to freely envision, going beyond and transcending the idiosyncrasies of one's own spoke, and then reconfigure characteristics from distinctly separate spokes – re-envisioning once overt manifest exclusive properties in a novel way. And this “going beyond,” this transcending, I would suggest is akin to that found while in that “liminal” timeless and placeless, that “betwixt and between.” But if the discovery or creation is to take hold and flourish, it must also find some sort of “lodging,” some sort of integration, within the pervading “driftwood.” It must be aligned within the larger configuration or paradigm, be it an artistic narrative, economic, scientific, social, philosophic, political, religious, or some other narrative. Of course the “aligning” occurs in varied ways, some of which are not so cohesive or supportive.

With discovery comes the possibility of new spokes and the dissolution of “out-dated” others, as the scientific narrative of Ptolemy was replaced by that of Copernicus and Newton, and, in turn, perhaps replaced by that of quantum mechanics and chaos theory. With creativity comes the possibility of new spokes supplementing and building upon, though not so much replacing existing spokes, as the artistic narrative of 19th century Neo-Classicism was followed by Realism, by the Romanticism as exemplified in John Gast’s *American Progress* (1872), by Impressionism, by the Cubism as reflected in Pablo Picasso’s *Still Life with a Bottle of Rum* (1911), by Surrealism, by Abstract Expressionism, by . . . . And when you take a closer look, each style is itself expressive, in differing ways, of the interplay of the unique and ubiquitous, of the diverse and universal.

The demise of spokes can also come about when the turning Wheel has gone awry. From other narratives my students and I learn what happens when the equality between the spokes is dismissed or even challenged. When the focus is only on the spokes, devoid of a hub/rim consideration. When any sort of a shared humanity, any sort of hub/rim, seems implicitly or explicitly understood as something exclusively embedded only within "my" particular spoke. When the binaries are oppositional and hierarchical, the result can be hegemonic. And when the wheel goes awry, so too goes civility, communications, collaborations, community, and certainly creativity. There was a reason why Tom Yellowtail, along with the Dalai Lama and other spiritual leaders, were invited together on that October 1993 day in Chicago to offer prayer for world peace. Three descriptive processes exemplify a wavering Wheel.

Compartmentalization is a narrative involving an exclusive separation of the spokes, without any form of integration between them. It can be witnessed in the schisms resulting from the contemporary "culture wars" in the ever increasing polarizing partisan politics between conservatives and progressives, or even within the academy itself, between the humanities and sciences, between positivists and postmodernists. And it is exemplified at a more insidious level in the history of segregation in the United States and of apartheid in South Africa.

Assimilation is a narrative entailing the dominance of one spoke resulting in subjugation and often incorporation of another. It can be exemplified in the intentions, beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, of the European Christian Inquisitions and Crusades toward "heretics" and

"infidels," and in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century United States federal policies toward the Indigenous populations. Today it can be seen among some religious fundamentalists, of varied persuasions, towards others of differing orientations. And even the in the "ivy towers of academia" there's another kind of fundamentalist ideology; "scientism" holds that there is but one valid epistemology and method of inquiry, only to be found in the "natural sciences." The suppression of others is most appalling in the levels of "human trafficking" going on world-wide today; that there are now more people suffering under the yoke of "slavery" than at any other time in human history. And our subjugation of the natural world, our insatiable appetite for energy and other natural resources, has yet to meaningfully addressed. And that leads us to . .

Extinction is a narrative involving the dominance of one spoke resulting in the elimination of another. It is certainly exemplified in the policies of Nazi Germany toward Jews and other minorities during the 1930s - 40s, and in the Rwanda of 1994, in genocide re-occurring far too often, in far too many places, to far too many species, right now.

But out of the demise can also come a "rebirth" of a spoke, or even the genesis of a new one altogether. Out of the oppression and subordination can come a "revitalization" – a rejuvenation of ideas and ideals, or even a coalescing of innovative ideals, and their practices, often leading to the overturning of a hegemonic tyranny. We've witnessed such in the birth of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This process was at the core of the birth of American Democracy, and we were getting glimpses of it again with what was being called the "Arab Spring."