Ontological Reconciliation:
A Dialectical Approach to Generating
Unity in Difference

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DECLARATION

The material contained in this thesis is my own account of research
carried out by myself during the Honours year.

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ABSTRACT

The formal process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is fraught with tensions, ambiguities and mutual misunderstandings. Overall, this paper argues that these problems are primarily due to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people having divergent views concerning the ultimate aim of reconciliation; with the former generally promoting Indigenous autonomy and the latter generally expecting Indigenous assimilation. Also, the non-Indigenous notion of 'white' superiority is identified as the foremost cause in thwarting both the reconciliation process, and the ability for Indigenous people to have their reconciliatory needs acknowledged and met. Drawing on Hegelian philosophy, the idea of fostering a dialectical or ontological approach to reconciliation is proposed as a counter-measure to these problems. The theory of ontological reconciliation is expounded upon in context of three interrelated motifs – unity in difference, knowing the self, and knowing the Other – and each is also juxtaposed against key problems inherent to the 'white' dominated formal reconciliation process. Practical examples of what ontological reconciliation looks like are provided, first by comparing the notion with Langton's three categories of intersubjectivity, and then by examining three cross-cultural projects in Australia. The demonstrated effectiveness of these projects in reconciling differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews, and in contending with serious problems in Indigenous communities, supports the proposal of adopting an ontological approach to reconciliation on a national scale. Finally, in the spirit of ontological reconciliation, this paper also proposes that the teaching of English and an Indigenous language be introduced into the curriculum of all schools for all students, as a nation-wide strategy for bridging the gap of miscommunication and misunderstanding that prevails between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews.

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