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Koerner, Catherine (2019). Ever widening circles of compassion. *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, June 2019.

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CRITICAL RACE AND WHITENESS STUDIES JOURNAL

INAUGURAL ISSUE

Ever widening circles of compassion

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This paper argues that Darwin's work relied upon patriarchal white assumptions of entitlement to knowledge, their objects and the processes of knowledge production. It assumed an objective observer and fashioned their conquest of knowledge, knowledge production and the objects of knowledge to fit patriarchal white supremacist views. I posit that this materialist view has been promulgated as the only legitimate view, despite being debunked within quantum physics and quantum cosmology, and has led us to these dark times. The consequences risk the future of the planet and all its sentient inhabitants. However, Charles Darwin also posited in his meticulous observations that evolutionary development depends on ever-widening circles of compassion as the deepest primal instinct of all creatures – a view shared by First Nations peoples, such as Indigenous Australians colonised under Liberal/Neoliberal regimes and Tibetan (and others) colonised under Communist regimes. Neoliberalism has increased the intensity of consequences in Australia; however, this paper argues that the concept of a shared origin is the fundamental error about the nature of reality presented in metaphysical realism in triad with extractive possessive consumerism. The latter prioritises economic growth and hedonism and values only external happiness rather than a Eunomia understanding of wellbeing, where Eunomia refers to a general sense of inner wellbeing not caused by perceived external stimuli. CRAWS scholars can draw on ever widening circles of compassion as First Nation and critical ally scholars, educators and activists, to re-orient our past understanding and present mindful embodiment for a fiercely compassionate future.

Overlooking compassion

When biologist Charles Darwin (1859) recorded and published his revolutionary work, he made his observations through the lens of white, colonial, patriarchal and Christian world views. This led him to conclude that competition and survival of the fittest are the building blocks of evolution. That view was taken up by Thomas Huxley in his worldwide promotion of materialist approaches as the only legitimate approach to teaching and researching science (see for example Huxley, 1863). Huxley's vision was that science be embedded into education and it was a materialist vision. This vision was birthed after 300 years of persecution of mostly women who were

subjected to witch trials throughout continental Europe. Additionally, the aftermath of 8 million dead from the cumulative effects of plague, famine and the 30 year wars (1614-1648) fought in Central Europe, purported to resolve theological differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and left many emerging scientists queasy with superstition over anything not physical and measurable. In an attempt to drive out superstition, a gradual distancing of European thinkers from Christianity climaxed with Huxley and has since dominated scientific thinking. Huxley's materialist world view was taken up by Karl Marx and integrated into communist thinking. Thus, central Europe entrenched materialist patriarchal and androcentric assumptions into both Liberal and Communist political theses. Why is it that another key finding of Charles Darwin's, that living beings' very survival depends on 'ever increasing circles of compassion' as the basic driving instinct for survival, did not receive the same prominence? This question will be considered in the following section to understand the contemporary dark times outlined in the editorial.

Eunomia flourishing comes from the nature of reality: Relationality and compassion

Ironically, an often overlooked perspective is that both Liberal and Communist political endeavours required hegemonic expansion. For example, Herbert Spencer applied to civilisations this reading of Darwin that was used by emerging fields of academia to justify the genocide and colonisation in Australia and elsewhere under the guise of 'survival of the fittest' (Anderson & Perrin 2008), thus fabricating racialised hierarchies of white supremacy. Australia was founded upon racial and patriarchal supremacist assumptions by way of a constitution that was based on the exclusion of women and the ongoing exclusion of First Nations people and those simultaneously racialised as non-white, for instance (nowadays) asylum seekers (Hollingsworth, 2003; Lake & Reynolds, 2008). Meanwhile Chinese occupied territories suffered an estimated 80 million deaths from multiple effects of military violence and famine. However, what is often overlooked by the promulgators of Darwinist evolutionary theories are two things: 1) that Darwin observed evolution as dependent on an ever-increasing circle of compassion, 2) that compassion was a primal instinct.

At this point I want to raise the ingrained view of superiority that afflicts the development of science and therefore the academies within which we find ourselves. Continuing with the case of Darwin and his contemporaries in never ceded First Nation lands, they thought to impose a whole system of naming and categorising every visible phenomenon, person, animal, waters, land and so on. They falsely believed they were entitled to name and label despite the fact that all things already were named in relation with a 65,000-year-old civilisation and philosophy of relationality, belonging and visiting (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, 2018; Watson, 2016, 2018). First Nations peoples are the first agriculturalists, aquaculturalists, bakers and engineers (Pascoe, 2018). The planet's first settled human civilisations were developed with a pan-continental First Nation philosophy constituted from love and care (Leatham, 2018) as a natural phenomenon that emerges from closely attending to the inter-dependent relationality of all beings. It is founded on impartiality, built on consensus without hierarchy or possession, and is neither patriarchal nor anthropocentric (Moreton-Robinson, 2018; Watson, 2018). This oldest continuing, surviving civilisation is empirical evidence of the truth of reality as inter-dependent circles of compassion.

First Nations, such as Tibetan peoples, successfully farm while flourishing in relationship with all living things. The Tibetan First Nations based on Buddhist philosophy posit inter-dependent origination and the emptiness of self and other as co-extensive with a compassionate mind (Jinpa, 2015). The Tibetan Government have operated in exile in India since 1959 after fleeing Chinese military invasion and forced occupation, including re-settlement of Chinese mainlanders. The Chinese have imposed governance, extractive industries (mining and de-forestation), plundered the extensive wealth of Tibetan peoples and destroyed 6000 monasteries that held their libraries. Tibetan languages and spiritual practices and responsibilities have been banned. The Tibetan government in exile have developed a strategic solution. Initially they rightly demanded full political independence. But since the 1970s the Dalai Lama, former temporal (retired) and current spiritual leader of the Tibetan peoples, proposed a middle way. This includes Tibetan self-determination, self-governance, education, language, spiritual practices, cultural heritage, environmental control and an end to the militarisation of the Tibetan plateau especially nuclear disarmament, which is crucial for international peaceful relations. The middle way includes mineral rights and land rights to stop de-forestation and to protect the rivers which include four headways that supply most of Asia's water (including the Ganges and Yangtze). The Dalai Lama founded the constitution on compassion (Dalai Lama, 2012). Consecutive Chinese governments have nevertheless refused to negotiate with the democratically elected Tibetan Government in exile (Dalai Lama, 1991). Similar to Australia's *Barunga Statements* (1988 and 2018) and *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (2018), this is another example of First Nations never ceding sovereignty while providing the solution and path to decolonisation.

Perhaps we need a bigger view to respond to the Editors' proposed question: 1) How to engage in processes of knowledge production that ultimately support decolonising agendas? and 2) how to contribute toward critical race and whiteness studies in ways that honour critique while fortifying action? The Editors trace three key responses in critical race and whiteness studies literature: 1) Fight from within; 2) Fight from outside; 3) Insider-outsider action of subversive space. These approaches to a clearing for radical empirical engagement to decolonise cultural artefacts (Jackson, 1989; Simpson, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2015, 2018) invite a decolonising of the triad – knower, knowing and the object of knowledge – in order to respond to the Editors invitation: "Amidst 'dark times', what now has critical race and whiteness studies to offer?"

In brief, I wish to consider a third option. Wallace (2018a, 2018b), a Buddhist scholar/practitioner and quantum physicist outlines in depth this quandary. He draws on divergent scholarship from so-called Western science, including quantum physics and classical Indo-Tibetan debates to elucidate both extremes in the question of how the self exists and how other phenomena exist. That is, what is the nature of reality and how does it exist? Through this exploration it becomes evident to the reader that no self is to be found in the body (including the brain). If we go right down to the smallest particle of the body, there is no self to be found. Neither is a self to be found separate from the body. But there is a self, a being who is the agent. That self, or agent, exists in dependence on the body and mind merely as a concept designated by the mind. That is the interdependence of body and mind that makes up what is labelled and experienced as a sentient being. This entire process depends on a conscious being. A knower. In quantum physics, John Wheeler (1983; Davies, 2011) explains that rather than the classical physics explanation of matter giving rise to

information that gives rise to the observer, it is the inverse. The observer/knower gives rise to information based on the object observed.

This means, as First Nations epistemologies and ontologies demonstrate, multiple bodies of knowledge that are internally coherent in logic. There are multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. This is a truth, also empirically demonstrated by science even though materialists still deny consciousness. Wallace (2018) cites Audre Linde (2011) who says that since there is no object or knowledge without the knower (and likewise for each of this inter-dependent triad) there is no inherent existence without the perceiver. Following in the footsteps of Wheeler's argument outlined above, could consciousness be the primary contributing interdependent condition with space, time and matter? I wonder, if that is the case, then the cause of suffering is our ignorance of the true nature of existence, and our grasping of ourselves as separate autonomous selves. The self is empty of inherent nature and rises in dependence of the body and mind entangled with all living beings. "Relationality is where it's at" (Watson, 2018a). Therefore, the deepest impulse and drive is one of caring. With critical intelligence, the conceptual elaborations of patriarchal possessive/consumer colonising mindsets can be laid bare for critique and deconstruction. Critically aware of the power-relations particular embodiments bestow, CRAWs scholars can do our collective work. There is hope for a better future. Our role, as critical scholars and activists, is to have a big view and take up the responsibility that comes with understanding. The more one understands, the more responsibility one has to act with intelligence and compassion to the best of our capability without causing harm to others.

Author Note

Motivated by an engaged compassion, Dr Catherine Koerner is currently a Lecturer in Community and Human Services at Federation University Australia, Berwick Campus. She has studied and/or worked at Flinders University, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, The Northern Institute of Policy Research (CDU). She completed her PhD at Flinders University entitled *Beyond a white Australia? Race, Multiculturalism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Australian Identities* and has 12 publications on related matters including a forthcoming book, book chapter and peer reviewed articles. Additionally she undertook a CRC Post-Doctorate published as Koerner & Widodo 2017. Finally she undertook collaborative research with Tenzin Choephel with Tibetan peoples living in exile in Nepal and India (work in progress).

Acknowledgements

Koerner acknowledges global Indigenous sovereign lands never ceded and in particular those under Australian and Chinese occupation. A big thank you to Mr Corrie Leatham, Taunurung for the cause and Carlie Nekrasov for solidarity and editing.

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