

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Melioristic genealogies and Indigenous philosophies

Helen De Cruz¹  | Johan De Smedt² 

¹Danforth Chair in the Humanities,
Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis
University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA

²Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis
University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Correspondence

Helen De Cruz, Danforth Chair in the
Humanities, Department of Philosophy,
Saint Louis University, 3800 Lindell Blvd
St. Louis, MO 63108, USA.
Email: helen.deacruz@slu.edu

Abstract

According to Mary Midgley, philosophy is like plumbing: like the invisible entrails of an elaborate plumbing system, philosophical ideas respond to basic needs that are fundamental to human life. Melioristic projects in philosophy attempt to fix or reroute this plumbing. An obstacle to melioristic projects is that the sheer familiarity of the underlying philosophical ideas renders the plumbing invisible. Philosophical genealogies aim to overcome this by looking at the origins of our current concepts. We discuss philosophical concepts developed in Indigenous cultures as a source of inspiration for melioristic genealogy. Examining the philosophical concepts of these communities is useful because it gives us a better idea of the range of ethical, political, and metaphysical approaches that exist in the world. Members of western societies do not get a clear view of this range, in part because living in large groups presents its own constraints and challenges, which limit philosophical options. We argue that features of Indigenous philosophies, such as egalitarianism and care for one's natural environment, are not inevitable byproducts of Native material conditions and lifestyles, but that they are deliberate forms of conceptual engineering. We propose that comparative philosophy is an integral part of the genealogical project.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2022 The Authors. *The Philosophical Forum* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

1 | INTRODUCTION: HOW TO ENGAGE IN PHILOSOPHICAL PLUMBING

We write this paper against a familiar backdrop of devastating climate change, an unresolved pandemic, disillusioned and polarized electorates, and extreme wealth and justice inequality. Contrary to widely shared societal expectations that technologies are the main way to solve these problems,¹ Mary Midgley (1919–2018) has argued that philosophy is central to any enterprise that aims to improve the world. In her view, philosophy responds to basic needs that are fundamental to human life. Our political and social institutions have philosophical concepts at their basis: a well-ordered society requires philosophical concepts that are up to the task of helping us devise sustainable ways of living together. Midgley likened philosophy to plumbing:

Plumbing and philosophy are both activities that arise because elaborate cultures like ours have, beneath their surface, a fairly complex system which is usually unnoticed, but which sometimes goes wrong. In both cases, this can have serious consequences. Each system supplies vital needs for those who live above it. Each is hard to repair when it does go wrong, because neither of them was ever consciously planned as a whole... Whether we want it or not, the way our society is organized is deeply philosophical (Midgley, 1992, p. 139).

If you move into an old house you bought or inherited, the plumbing that comes with it is haphazard. It was gradually fashioned, expanded, repaired. As a new resident you wonder: should I repair the plumbing, perhaps replace it? Does it still meet my needs? Similarly, melioristic projects in philosophy attempt to fix or reroute the plumbing that underlies our societies. It does this, in some cases, by trying to reimagine entire systems. As Midgley (2018, p. 5) makes explicit, philosophy is not the discipline of solving a fixed set of puzzles, rather, “it involves finding the many particular ways of thinking that will be most helpful as we try to explore this constantly changing world.” As the world changes, philosophers introduce concepts that help us to transform our experiences, our thinking, and through this, the world. Philosophical traditions address practical problems we face in our day-to-day lives that do not have easy solutions, in part because they relate to the human condition. This includes our vulnerability to luck and circumstance, our mortality, finitude, the moral trade-offs we make, and the frequent frustrations of our hopes and dreams (e.g., Norlock, 2019; Nussbaum, 2001).

Being able to identify which philosophical concepts are no longer fit for purpose is an important part of philosophical plumbing. This aspect of melioristic projects in philosophy is sometimes termed *conceptual engineering*.² In David Chalmers' (in press, 2) definition, conceptual engineering is “the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating concepts.”

In the vicinity of this is a metaphilosophical proposal that holds that a lot of our philosophical projects are in fact forms of conceptual engineering, as they attempt to “fix conceptual issues or replace problematic concepts with new or better concepts” (Cantalamesa, 2021, p. 48). In this view, philosophers make headway by coining new concepts that help us illuminate aspects of our social and natural environments. In this way, they improve our thinking about these aspects, such as the concept of implicature by Paul Grice (1989) in the philosophy of language, or the concept of alief by Tamar Gendler (2008) in the philosophy of mind. These new concepts have enhanced our understanding of how language functions and how human minds represent certain states with representational content.

Other forms of conceptual engineering involve radically re-engineering concepts, taking them apart, and building them up again. Take the way disability activists are currently reconceptualizing “disabled” and “disability.” As Elizabeth Cantalamesa (2021) points out, this re-engineering is a

deliberate attempt to repurpose these labels and to reduce the stigma associated with them. It shifts the focus from individual disabled people and their medical conditions to the way societies respond to and accommodate disability. Conceptual engineering allows us to see patterns that we missed before, for example, Miranda Fricker's (2007) analysis of epistemic injustice brought to the fore dynamics in testimony, such as giving people less credibility than they are due because of characteristics that do not matter to their reliability, such as gender or social background.

We can see how conceptual engineering is an important element of the enterprise of philosophical plumbing. A conceptual engineer can examine to what extent a piece of plumbing is functional and whether it (still) fits within the bigger infrastructure. They might decide that a new piece of plumbing needs to be added, or an old piece removed as it is no longer fit for purpose. However, as Midgley (1992) points out with her plumbing metaphor, the fact that philosophical concepts become part of the fabric of how our society functions makes them resistant to change. For example, we do not typically question the (modern western) concept of private property, as something inherently transactional, where the value of goods is determined by their exchange value rather than their intrinsic usefulness. Within this concept, nature is conceived of as a standing reserve, the energy and resources of which can be exploited. This concept is the result of a complex history that started in the medieval period, when property gradually lost its moral meaning as a bond between lord and tenant. Property became increasingly atomized during the rise of capitalism and industrialization (Bryan, 2000). It is suffused with philosophical plumbing by, among others, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Mill. Property is conceived of in different ways across cultures (Bird-David, 1990; Bryan, 2000), as we will examine in more detail in Section 2.

Inhabiting our political, economic, and social reality, imbued as it is with philosophical concepts, makes it hard to even envision alternatives to deeply entrenched concepts. As Widerquist and McCall (2017) point out, one reason why concepts such as private property or nation state receive little scrutiny is that philosophers typically do not challenge the empirical claims on which such concepts were first based. For example, both Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704) posited a presumed state of nature in which people would be worse off without the political structures of nation states and their institutions. Social contract theorists seriously underestimate human behavioral complexity in societies lacking formal institutions (Seabright et al., 2021). Many philosophers rehash and pass on concepts and their origin stories, “without clarifying whether they illustrate important empirical premises or whether they are pure metaphor” (Widerquist & McCall, 2017, p. 6). The philosophical ideas of Hobbes and Locke have become part of the philosophical plumbing of western nation states. It becomes hard to imagine alternatives.

We use concepts such as property, inheritance, and representative democracy in a similar way as we unthinkingly use concepts such as gravity or oxygen. Such concepts structure our lives and our everyday dealings with the world. Empirical work in cognitive psychology confirms that human imagination is structured: even our wildest imaginations are constrained by existing conceptual schemas. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in a wide range of contexts, including scientific creativity, fiction writing, and product innovation (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2010). If, as seems plausible, our philosophical imagination is likewise constrained, a critical part of conceptual engineering requires the ability to overcome these imaginative limitations.

Genealogy is one way to broaden our philosophical imagination, by pointing out how concepts have evolved, could have evolved differently, and in fact have evolved in various ways in different cultures. As José Medina (2013) and Catarina Dutilh Novaes (2020) have pointed out, genealogies have melioristic potential. If we conceive of philosophical concepts as vital for the functioning of our society, it is worthwhile inquiring into the origins of the philosophical concepts that underlie our daily lives. This inquiry can help us see whether, and how, parts of our philosophical plumbing need

an overhaul. In Midgley's (2002, p. xxvii) view, philosophy is "like speaking prose, is something we have to do all our lives, well or badly, whether we notice it or not. What usually forces us to notice is conflict." The job of philosophy is to help us scrutinize our concepts. Given that a lot of our assumptions are riddled with inherited and unexamined assumptions of past philosophies, genealogy is an integral part of philosophy.

In the remainder of this paper, we examine how genealogies can achieve this. In doing so, we expand the notion of what counts as a genealogical project by starting a comparative, cross-cultural analysis. For our comparison, we focus on a particular subset of large-scale societies, namely as they developed in Europe and across the world in the wake of colonial expansion of European societies. The term "western" is often used to refer to such societies.³ Our use of this term is restricted to contemporary large-scale societies that fall within that framework, loosely corresponding to what Joe Henrich (e.g., 2020) terms WEIRD societies, i.e., societies that are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic. Western societies have philosophical plumbing that encourages ecological negligence and exploitation of the environment. As medieval historian Lynn White (1967) pointed out, this goes back to an enduring influence of the Christian idea that humans are formed in God's image and that they have dominion over the world. It became further entrenched with industrialization, with its massive scaling up of factory farming, monocultures, and the unsustainable extraction of fossil fuels. With the advent of modern science, the environment is increasingly seen in a purely utilitarian light, as made for our purposes. We compare these to philosophical concepts developed in Indigenous communities as a source of inspiration for melioristic genealogy. With "Indigenous" we mean diverse communities that live in areas where European colonizers and the states they built attempted (and still attempt) to name, categorize, and subjugate these communities. Typically, these are small-scale societies, though historically some of them were large-scale civilizations. Their ethnic identity is different from those of the surrounding majority, and their culture has a historical continuity (however disrupted) with pre-colonial political and cultural entities.

We show in Section 2 that genealogies can play a vital role in laying bare otherwise invisible philosophical plumbing, i.e., the concepts and assumptions that underlie our societal institutions. For example, the institution of inheritance rests on the concept of private property, and in order to discuss the right to inherit, one must first discuss how it came about that philosophers started to think that there is a right to private property. Genealogies do so by outlining the history of these concepts, indicating ways in which particular bits of plumbing may no longer be fit for present purposes. They can also provide different imaginings, by showing how we came from there to here, highlighting forks in the road, and how our concepts could have turned out differently. As we argue in Section 3, our current philosophical concepts, as used in western societies, were not inevitable. Moreover, we argue that philosophical plumbing in Indigenous societies, with concepts such as egalitarianism and environmental care, are not inevitable byproducts of the ways of life that are often distinctive of these communities. Rather, they are also underpinned by philosophical plumbing, sophisticated ideas that are vital to the ways these societies function. Section 4 demonstrates this by means of examples from contemporary Indigenous philosophies, with a focus on Native North American traditions, highlighting concepts in ethics, metaphysics, and environmental philosophy. Section 5 concludes that members of contemporary and historical Indigenous societies do not and did not live in an unreflective state of nature. They are our philosophical peers, and their different imaginings can be relevant for our philosophical plumbing as well.

2 | THE MELIORISTIC AIMS OF GENEALOGIES

Genealogies tell a story of how we ended up with our present philosophical plumbing. As Bernard Williams (2002) points out, genealogies can either justify or vindicate our current concepts and

traditions, or can cause us to feel less confident about them and call them into question. Justifying genealogies explain our current institutions and concepts such as private property, the monarchy, or centralized political power. They do so by appeal to a state of nature that we happily escaped because of these institutions. In the view of social contract theorists such as Hobbes and Locke this justifies those institutions.

Other genealogies have the power to subvert, question, or cause anxiety about what we believe and value. Amia Srinivasan (2019) notes that although analytic philosophers have traditionally shied away from this kind of genealogy, they no longer do so. We can see this, for instance, in debates on evolutionary debunking arguments which examine whether evolution casts doubt on the justification of our beliefs (e.g., Street, 2006). It also occurs in the literature on irrelevant influences which considers how our upbringing and education mold our beliefs and values, such as our moral attitudes and religious beliefs (e.g., Vavova, 2018).

Genealogies not only comfort or cause anxiety, they can also lead us to act. Notably, Michel Foucault (1926–1984) conceived of genealogy as action-oriented. For instance, in his genealogy of the prison system, Foucault (1975 [1995]) disabused us of a notion of necessity: imprisonment was not always, and hence need not continue to be, the primary form of legal punishment. This puts those who benefit from unexamined concepts on the defensive. It puts prisons in the broader context of the need of industrialized societies to acquire docile bodies to be trained so as to carry out factory work, and to be controlled and molded, with punishment meted out in a predictable fashion. This genealogy shows that the shift from corporeal punishment to confinement was not driven by humanitarian concerns. As a concrete outcome, Foucault cofounded the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* (Group for Information on Prisons) which gave incarcerated people a platform to share their experiences, as opposed to statements by criminologists, judges, and wardens.

Genealogies can help to improve our understanding of concepts, principles, assumptions, and methods that we take for granted, by showing that they have a history that can be described (Foucault, 1977, pp. 139–140). Foucault cautions that drafting a genealogy requires patience; it is “grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary” (p. 139) as it requires a nuanced examination of historical evidence. We tend to see the history of concepts as either unchanging or as developing in a linear fashion toward some clear utilitarian end. Foucault emphasizes the non-linearity of this history, as well as the role of struggle: “the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys” (p. 139). Moreover, genealogy should not only involve the patient reconstruction of concepts throughout history, but should also explain why our philosophical plumbing ended up the way it did, and not some other way: “genealogy must define even those instances where [words and their meanings] are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized (Plato, at Syracuse, did not become Mohammed)” (p. 140).

However, countering the linearity of philosophical origin stories is more than just engaging in historical work. As we will show, it is also a comparative project, comparing the philosophical plumbing in different societies, both across time and across cultures. The project of genealogy as a way to do philosophical conceptual engineering has recently enjoyed renewed attention. For example, Medina (2013, pp. 283–284) sees genealogy as a central element of his epistemology of resistance, an epistemology that is focused on seeking out epistemic friction between the accepted mainstream (in politics, metaphysics, and other fields) and minority voices. He argues that genealogies are useful because they help us to bring to the fore forgotten struggles, oppression, and lived experiences of people. We did not end up with our current moral and societal norms as a result of an inevitable march of history; rather, they are the result of historical processes and individual choices. The project of genealogy can help us to question states of affairs that may seem inevitable to us, but that are actually the result of contingent historical events. It can help us decide whether the ideas that are expressed in

philosophical concepts that we accept as immutable and eternal are still what Medina (2010) terms *living truths*, i.e., useful parts of our philosophical plumbing, or if, on the other hand, they are *dead truths*, and therefore up for replacement. Accepting philosophical plumbing as a collection of immutable truths would mean, for example, agreeing with Aristotle that other people can be private property, which has clearly become a dead truth.

Take as just one early modern example, Locke's discussion of the role of private property in his genealogy of life in western nations. One of the key elements of his conceptualization of the state of nature is a lack of land property. Propertyless people, so Locke (1713) argued, use land as a kind of commons, i.e., land that can be used by everyone, but that belongs to no-one. In his view, nature could be transformed from a useless thing to a usable thing by mixing it with one's labor, which amounts to appropriating it. Lack of private property makes for a less comfortable existence even for those who do not own any land. It should be the case that land can be appropriated, with the proviso that enough would be left for others to take and enjoy. In practice, this resulted in the British colonizers usurping lands that Native Americans used, something Locke was well aware of. As a matter of fact, he thought it permissible to claim Indigenous land for the British settlers:

There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several Nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in Land, and poor in all the Comforts of Life; whom Nature having furnished as liberally as any other People, with the materials of Plenty, i.e. a fruitful Soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for Food, Rayment, and Delight; yet for want of improving it by Labour, have not one hundredth part of the Conveniences we enjoy: And a King of a large and fruitful Territory there Feeds, Loges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England (Locke, 1713, Chap. 5, Section 41).

For Locke, conveniences of modern life are only possible in a world that allows for private property. From this, he derives the normative notion that it is good to own private property, because this would make everyone better off. These ideas have become key components in the western conception of property, effectively being part of the invisible philosophical plumbing that underlies our society: nature as an untapped reserve to be appropriated, for the improvement of the individual and, thus, indirectly, society. The sheer familiarity of these underlying ideas renders the plumbing invisible.

Locke's idea has since become subject of a rich literature in anthropology and archaeology. Notably, the cultural anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1930–2021) questioned a key premise of Locke, namely that we should look only at material plenty to judge how well or poorly members of a society fare. He described hunter-gatherers as the “original affluent society”:

By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny then that the human condition is an ordained tragedy, with man the prisoner at hard labor of a perpetual disparity between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means. For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be “easily satisfied” either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception ... makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable: thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that “urgent goods” become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an

unparalleled material plenty—with a low standard of living. That, I think, describes the hunters (Sahlins, 1972, pp. 1–2).

Sahlins' perspective shift indicates we can look either at material wealth or at satisfaction of demands to understand the concept of affluence. Such a shift in perspective allows us some distance between philosophical concepts we accept as obvious truths (e.g., the modern western concept of private property) and the haphazard paths through which we came to endorse them. Someone who grows up in a society where everything is property of someone and there are no common goods might think that it is just impossible for members of any society to live together in any other way. She might not want to challenge the inequalities that come about through private property (e.g., unequal inheritance, unequal taxation of labor versus assets), because she could not imagine how else we would interact with our fellow human beings or the natural environment. A piece of land, in her view, is either private property, or holds the potential for property.

To give an example of an alternative way to flesh out the notion of property, consider the Nuu-chah-nulth (formerly referred to as the Nootka), a tribe on the west coast of Vancouver Island (British Columbia). They regard the relationship of humans to nature as foundational, as it determines the social institutions that help to regulate their procurement of natural resources. Humans are not seen as opposite of nature, but as part of the ecosystem; the degree to which one uses natural resources arises out of this relationship, as recognized and affirmed by elders in the community. The concept of *klu kwana* is foundational in property relations, and refers to continuity (*klu*, memory of what is important), reality (*kwa*), and community (*na*, “our”). Property transactions and acquisitions need to be mindful of past and present relationships within the community. Elders balance these property relations by regulating one's entitlement to use natural resources “by virtue of one's particular relationship to the community, which is a function of *klu kwana*” (Bryan, 2000, pp. 23–24). Moreover, across human societies wealth can be stored in ways other than through personal property. For example, some Indigenous groups, such as the Jul'hoansi (hunter-gatherers in southern Africa) and the Lamalera (whaling communities from the Nusa Tenggara Islands, Indonesia), express richness primarily in relational wealth that results from ties of food-sharing, marriage, and friendships, rather than in personal possessions (Borgerhoff Mulder et al., 2009). Likewise, having exceptional knowledge or skill is in many cultures acknowledged as an independent, invaluable source of wealth.

Becoming aware of the fact that concepts such as property differ between cultures should be a crucial part of a melioristic genealogical project: this can help us become aware of what is and is not contingent in our philosophical plumbing. This comparative project is already happening in other fields, including legal scholarship that takes into account Indigenous rights in Canada (Borrows & Rotman, 1997), international studies, for instance, on how Indigenous ontological conceptions of relationality can help non-Indigenous people conceptualize themselves differently within political space (Reddekop, 2022), and in the incorporation of Indigenous politics in Latin America (de la Cadena, 2010). Indeed, an important and underappreciated aspect of a melioristic genealogy is that, to do it well, one must not only engage in historical, but also in *comparative* analyses. To properly appreciate the peculiarities of our philosophical plumbing, we need to get a better sense of how other societies deal with enduring problems. This is why examining the philosophies of Indigenous societies is part of doing genealogy responsibly. To be clear, we do not want to compare our present situation to theirs because such societies would represent the default state of humanity, or an earlier stage in cultural evolution (more on this in the next section). Rather, different ways of living together and acquiring food and raw materials can make us aware of different solutions to recurring human problems, such as how to organize a society, which questions to prioritize in knowledge production, or how to share income and property. To put it differently, the relationship between material conditions

of subsistence and philosophical plumbing, while not deterministic, is a relationship of possibilities. Ways of life can make it harder or easier to envisage philosophical possibilities. Genealogies, in the comparative sense outlined here, can throw light on the history of our concepts by studying real-life alternatives to those concepts, not mere toy examples or hypotheticals. This ideally needs to be complemented with historical analysis, which gives us a sense of how philosophical plumbing can change over time. But for the scope of this paper, we focus on the comparative part of the genealogical enterprise.

3 | THE PARTICULARS OF PHILOSOPHICAL PLUMBING ARE NOT INEVITABLE

As anthropologists since Claude Lévi-Strauss (1944) have noted, we ought not to treat contemporary Indigenous societies as reflecting some default state of nature or earlier stage of cultural development. The idea of cultural evolutionism (e.g., Tylor, 1871)—that some cultures can serve as proxies for earlier stages in the evolution of humankind—has been thoroughly discredited. Just like large-scale civilizations, contemporary Indigenous societies have changed over time. Members of such communities now routinely live in close proximity to large-scale cultures; they are subject to displacement, deliberate attempts at destruction of their culture, and actions of nearby farmers, loggers, and miners to occupy their land. Anthropology is more than a catalog of cultures; it gives us insights into the range of ways in which people live together, are integrated in their environment, and interact with other groups. In order to obtain these insights, the study of Indigenous societies is vital because it gives us a better idea of this range, and so also of the possible ways that we can develop our own philosophical plumbing.

Let us consider material conditions as probabilistic constraints on philosophical plumbing. They limit and offer *philosophical possibilities*. This point is rarely acknowledged, and in fact, there is still a consensus among humanities and social sciences scholars that Indigenous societies would lack philosophical sophistication (e.g., Baumard et al., 2015; Bellah, 2011). These authors put a lot of importance on the emergence of the Axial Age, a hypothesized period between the 8th and the 3rd century BCE that witnessed the emergence of wisdom traditions and sophisticated philosophical concepts in large-scale societies such as Vedic India, Attic Greece, pharaonic Egypt, riverine Mesopotamia, and Warring States China (Jaspers, 1953). The material conditions that made this possible would be wealth accumulation, which allows for more extensive social division of labor, external storage of information (in the form of literacy and use of written records for more than just economic exchange), and slow-life strategies. For example, according to Baumard et al. (2015, p. 10), “absolute affluence has predictable effects on human motivation and reward systems, moving individuals away from ‘fast life’ strategies (resource acquisition and coercive interactions) and toward ‘slow life’ strategies (self-control techniques and cooperative interactions) typically found in axial movements.” According to these authors, to not be part of a society that has known the Axial Age shift is to be stuck in coercive fast-life strategies which seems to boil down to a Hobbesian world.

However, the way in which some philosophical ideas become *harder*, rather than easier to realize in large-scale societies, both historical and contemporary, remains underrecognized. After all, living in large groups with literacy and division of labor presents its own constraints and challenges which in turn limit the philosophical possibilities that societies like ours have. Take, as one example among many, the idea of egalitarianism. While political equality may vary among Indigenous societies, it is a strong societal component of so-called immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies, such as the Hadza from north-central Tanzania and the Jul’hoansi (Woodburn, 1982). In these nomadic communities,

people procure food and other resources through hunting and gathering without means to accumulate them long-term. For a long time, anthropologists and philosophers believed that egalitarianism is a part of humanity's original condition, or state of nature. It would be an automatic byproduct of economic factors, not the result of any deliberation. This idea arose as a result of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's imaginative reflections on the origin of inequality in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755 [1990]) (see Graeber & Wengrow, 2021, Chap. 2, for a discussion of this literature).

However, this idea changed through the work of social anthropologist James Woodburn (1934–2022). Overturning centuries of conventional wisdom that egalitarianism is a byproduct of a hunter-gatherer economy, he argued that it was a deliberate choice. As Woodburn (1982, p. 432) observed, “Many hunter-gatherers have social systems in which there is very marked inequality of one sort or another.” Yet, some societies (e.g., the Hadza) do not have political leaders. The only leadership is on an ad hoc basis, such as hunting expeditions. Equality thus requires an explanation. According to Woodburn, hunting and gathering is a mode of subsistence that allows for egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is the deliberate collective choice not to be dominated by fellow human beings. Woodburn used the term “egalitarianism” rather than “equality” to emphasize that choice. He drew a distinction (now standard in anthropology) between two kinds of hunter-gatherer subsistence systems: immediate-return systems where fruits of any labor (e.g., hunting and gathering, childcare, tool repair) are immediate, and delayed-return systems, where food can be stored and accumulated to some extent. Egalitarianism occurs only in immediate-return systems. Achieving egalitarianism requires deterrence against self-aggrandizers, bullies, and coercers. Among the Hadza, eating an animal killed without sharing it is regarded as a most heinous offense which might be met with violence, and is also thought to cause illness or misfortune for the perpetrator. The most successful Jul’hoansi hunters are expected to be self-deprecating about their success—any attempt to boast is met with scorn (Cashdan, 1980). Moreover, any effort to use hunting success or its proceeds as a means to garner political or other influence is nipped in the bud by the group, by either ignoring or mocking the successful hunter who tries to do this. Whereas being a successful entrepreneur is seen as a qualifier for political office in many western societies, it would be disqualifying among the Jul’hoansi.

These mechanisms of social vigilance indicate that being egalitarian is not a simple byproduct of hunter-gatherer ways of life, but a deliberate result of political action. Rather than seeing such political mechanisms as knee-jerk responses to fast-life strategies, as Baumard et al. (2015) do, they are deliberate mechanisms set up to guard political egalitarianism against hoarding, boasting, and trying to get leverage out of one's talents or luck. As Polly Wiessner (1982, p. 61) puts it, “the apparent flexibility of organization among the !Kung [Jul’hoansi] is... the product of a structured system of social relations operating according to certain principles.” Political egalitarianism is part of the philosophical plumbing of the Jul’hoansi, Hadza, and other immediate-return cultures.

Although delayed-return hunter-gatherer societies do have political hierarchies, they also have mechanisms to limit the amount of political power or to avoid it getting too entrenched. For example, many historical Inuit communities on the Arctic coast had flexible political arrangements with smaller dispersed units with no central authority in summer. In winter, they gathered in larger, more centralized units under charismatic political authority (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021, Chap. 3). As another example, take the importance of humility among the Lakota (currently inhabiting North and South Dakota). Unlike the Jul’hoansi and the Hadza, who only tolerate leaders for specific tasks and during limited time periods (and those leaders always need consent from the rest of the group), historically, Lakota had chiefs and war leaders who were vested with significant political authority. Within Lakota virtue ethics, humility is an important virtue; especially for leaders it is important to be humble. Like Aristotle, the Lakota accept that virtues are innate, but that they have to be cultivated. Whereas Aristotle sees this cultivation through practice (by repeatedly performing acts of bravery, one becomes

naturally brave), the Lakota see this cultivation also happening by listening to stories. In many North American Indigenous cultures stories are used as vehicles for the transmission of philosophical ideas. Take the story of *No Moccasins* (retold in Marshall, 2001, pp. 1–8): by repeatedly hearing and contemplating the story of a chieftain's wife who rescued her husband from an enemy camp, and whose bravery went untold but was all the more admirable for it, the listener gets to cultivate the virtues of courage and humility. Lakota historian Joseph Marshall (2001) notes how Crazy Horse, the Lakota war leader who defeated General Custer at the battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn in 1876, was noted for his humility. Marshall notes that, unlike in mainstream American politics, a self-aggrandizer could never gain significant political prowess among the Lakota.

4 | PHILOSOPHICAL PLUMBING IN INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES

We will now briefly look at two examples of philosophical plumbing in Indigenous societies from North America, both of which have substantial interactions and various extents of integration with surrounding large-scale societies. Indigenous philosophies are deeply impacted by recent historical upheavals, including harmful and rapid environmental transformations, social change, and violent loss of populations. Because of these disruptions, Indigenous people see themselves in a broader historical framework of past and future generations compared to people in the surrounding majority cultures. Kyle Whyte (2018, p. 229) characterizes these philosophies as “counterfactual dialogue”: they ask themselves how “our ancestors and our future generations would interpret today's situations and what recommendations they would make for us as guidance for our individual and collective actions.” In our two case studies, we are centering voices by Indigenous authors—being members of these societies they have first-person access to their philosophical plumbing. To position ourselves with respect to the philosophies we discuss, the authors are recent immigrants in the United States. Johan is a Belgian, Helen is of Belgian-Malaysian origin. Both authors acknowledge that they work at an institution that is located on unceded ancestral lands of the Osage Nation, Missouria, and Illini Confederacy, who were removed unjustly; and that our university is the beneficiary of that removal.

4.1 | Kincentric ecology

Enrique Salmón is a member of the Rarámuri in Mexico, who have managed an ecologically diverse area of the Sierra Madres Occidental, a rather fragile, fragmented mountainous area, for over 2000 years. They have a relatively high population density, and yet rely on hunting and gathering, next to horticulture. To sustainably maintain this lifestyle in this diverse ecological landscape requires a thoughtful engagement with the environment that is quite different from the way westerners engage in agriculture. For example, the Rarámuri practice selective burning of oak trees on mountain plateaus, allowing the vegetation to regenerate naturally after the use of the plot for growing beans during one year. The result of this is a patchwork of oak trees in various stages of maturity, which in turn attracts other plants and a diversity of animals. This yields a higher biodiversity than if there were a single, mature oak forest. The Rarámuri utilize the wild plants that spontaneously grow on the burnt patches for medicinal purposes (LaRochelle & Berkes, 2003). Areas such as springs that are particularly fragile are not agriculturally developed; they are accorded special spiritual significance, which grants them protection (Wyndham, 2009).

Philosophical plumbing plays a vital role in making this engagement possible, in particular the concept of kincentric ecology. Salmón defines this as follows:

Indigenous people in North America are aware that life in any environment is viable only when humans view their surroundings as kin; that their mutual roles are essential for

their survival. To many traditional Indigenous people, this awareness comes after years of listening to and recalling stories about the land (Salmón, 2000, p. 1327).

Kincentric ecology is the view that other creatures, in this case, the variety of nonhuman animals and plants of the Sierra Madres are kin to the Rarámuri.⁴ As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004, p. 22) points out, this connection between humans and nonhumans is a “virtually universal Amerindian notion,” which he terms “Amerindian perspectivism” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). This conceives of the world as inhabited by different kinds of persons, both human and nonhuman, who view reality from distinct points of view. Seeing other biological organisms (plants, animals, some inanimate objects) as persons is not due to some intuitive animistic tendency or biological confusion, but is a deliberate intentional stance. “We must observe that Amerindians do not spontaneously see animals and other nonhumans as persons; the personhood or subjectivity of the latter is considered a nonevident aspect of them. It is necessary *to know how* to personify nonhumans, and it is necessary to personify them *in order to know*” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 27, italics in original).

Taking this deliberate intentional stance solves concrete problems. In the case of the Rarámuri, it helps them to be better at living sustainably in their fragmented environment. Careful management of their precarious land embodies Rarámuri philosophical plumbing: seeing other organisms as kin influences your engagement with them, leading to sustainable interactions. Other organisms are seen as collaborative partners rather than a passive substrate upon which we have to act. Rarámuri land management techniques include selective harvesting (only take what is needed, leaving the stems of bulb plants so new plants can be generated), pruning (to delay reproduction and hence increase the life of the plant), seeding of some plants during the rainy season, and the earlier-mentioned selective burning of oak trees to give a nutrient-rich soil for bean cultivation and subsequently leaving the soil fallow to be naturally repopulated with pioneering plants (LaRochelle & Berkes, 2003). This kincentric ecology and the engagement with the land differ starkly from the western notion of animals and plants as property that can be exploited at will for profit.

Kincentric ecology can be situated within a broader cultural complex, the Mesoamerican cosmovision (Robles-Zamora, 2021). Cosmovision is the view that humans can be situated in a larger cosmic whole, which consists of three closely interrelated aspects: human, natural, and spiritual. Human cultural practices meaningfully engage with the two other levels and can never be seen as separate from them. Customs such as planting, weeding, and harvesting are intimately tied to local ecological circumstances. The Rarámuri further emphasize the continuity between human and nonhuman kin by seeing a continuous cycle of rebirths where humans can be reborn in nonhuman form, and vice versa (Salmón, 2000). A key concept within Rarámuri kincentric ecology is the notion of *iwígara*:

Iwígara is the total interconnectedness and integration of all life in the Sierra Madres, physical and spiritual. To say *iwígara* to a Rarámuri calls on that person to realize life in all its forms. The person recalls the beginning of Rarámuri life, origins, and relationships to animals, plants, the place of nurturing, and the entities to which the Rarámuri look for guidance (Salmón, 2000, p. 1328).

A related concept is the notion of *iwí*, or mind-stuff, which imbues biological entities (including humans), and even stones and soil. This concept stresses the continuity between humanity and the rest of the world as part of one continuous cycle. Both concepts are exemplified in local knowledge of plants, which is not restricted to the concrete usage for humans (e.g., as food, or as elements of technology, or medicine) but is far more comprehensive, such as flowering times, the shape of berries, and their ecological relationships (Salmón, 2020). In Tim Ingold's reconceptualization of animism (an

old anthropological concept that has been revamped recently), ideas such as those of the Rarámuri run counter to the deep western philosophical commitment that lack of animacy is a kind of ontological default. Ingold (2006) argues that a closer look at animistic (mostly Indigenous) philosophies helps us to see the western position as a philosophical prejudice. Animism does not equate to reading agency into a senseless environment. Rather, it conceives of humans as situated in a broad web of relations, including with plants and nonhuman animals, winds, celestial bodies, supernatural beings, and places (mountains, rivers, forests): “these organism-persons [are] not ... bounded entities but ... sites of binding, formed of knotted trails whose loose ends spread in all directions, tangling with other trails in other knots to form an ever-extending meshwork” (Ingold, 2018, p. 222). Because humans do not occupy the world, but inhabit it, and interact with it, ethics in animistic philosophies such as the Rarámuri’s has a strong environmental component.

4.2 | The absence of human-made order as the default

Environmental philosophy, still marginal within philosophy departments, has a central place in many Indigenous philosophies. This is not unexpected, as philosophical plumbing serves the needs of the cultures they are part of. Inuit have lived for centuries on land that is considered marginal, with few resources—even wood is lacking—and traditional Inuit technology has made up for this lack by making tools in bone, and even using blocks of snow to construct housing. Inuit cultures have been impacted by colonialism, but members of these communities remain deeply committed to what they call the Land (*Nuna*). Regularly being immersed in the Land, with camping, fishing, trapping, and hunting is still an important part of Inuit food acquisition, but also plays a vital role in emotional and physical wellbeing (Robertson & Ljubicic, 2019). Spending time on the *Nuna* is a mental health intervention: “feelings of emotional wellness and wholeness [come] from being able to spend time on the land: in short, ‘the land enriches the soul’” (Wilcox et al., 2013, p. 22). This sentiment is captured among speakers of Inuktitut in the saying “*nunamii'luni quvianaqtuq*—it is a happy moment to be on the land” (Robertson & Ljubicic, 2019). Spending time on the *Nuna* is not only important for emotional wellbeing, it also fosters moral development: for the Iglulingmiut (northern Canada), it enables one to develop *suma*, reasoning skills, as well as an extensive body of knowledge of the weather, land, ice and snow conditions, and animals and their behavior (Searles, 2010). Moreover, food acquisition through trapping, fishing, hunting, and gathering encourages generosity. The yields (called “country food”) are shared with older, less mobile members of the community which strengthens intergenerational bonds (Collings, 2001).

These practices of building relationships with the Land concretely embody abstract philosophical principles about how humans relate to their environment. Thus, while philosophical plumbing is not materialistically determined, it is not entirely free-floating from our physical environment either. It is influenced by our material conditions, such as climate, ecology, and demography. Embodied practices can help to make vivid and bring to the fore philosophical ideas, turning them into lived experiences rather than mere abstract principles. Wendat philosopher Georges Sioui (2008), for example, argues that Indigenous philosophies not only explicitly affirm our connection to the environment but also involve deliberate, embodied engagement with abstract philosophical principles to make these philosophies a lived experience. For example, vision quests in some Native cultures involve a deliberate deprivation of water, food, and companionship. The aim for the person undertaking the quest is to feel how they are connected to other living beings, by experiencing how fragile a human being is alone, surrounded by a landscape devoid of other humans.

Rachel Qitsualik (2013) provides a detailed examination of the philosophy of Inuktitut-speaking Inuit communities (northern Canada), of which she is a member. The Inuktitut concept of the *Nuna* considers the Land as *nalunaqtuq*, which means something like uncanny, unfathomable, surprising, and

deserving of special respect. This conceptualization of the Land as unknowable should not be mistaken for ignorance. Rather, the Inuit deliberately frame their deep ecological knowledge as limited in scope. Because of its hostile and difficult conditions, humans are seen as just one of the many elements on the *Nuna*. We cannot, or should not desire to dominate it or to impose a human-made order (Qitsualik, 2013).

Inuit have different philosophical conceptualizations of the relationship between humans and nature compared to the Rarámuri. For the latter, humans are on the same ontological plane as other life-forms through the concept of *iwígara*. For Inuit, humans have an intimate ontological connection to the different planes of existence (water, land, sky). Inuit cosmology has three elements. Water (the open sea) is the prime source of sustenance (for the Inuit, sea mammals); it is associated with animal life, including human life, which absolutely depends on water and access to fish and mammals that dwell in it. The *Nuna* is the middle point of the cosmological structure, populated with symbolically important beings such as the polar bear and the raven. In Inuit philosophical anthropology, *Nuna* stands for human awareness and our potentiality to do things—the word *inua* (also the root for the word “Inuit”) denotes this potential, which lies dormant within us, and can become activated through the situations we find ourselves in. The sky (*sila*, breath) is the impersonal and imperishable part of life, or life-breath, which each creature borrows for a while from the sky and then returns upon death. Each living being contains a life-breath; it gets reincarnated in other things of its kind. In this way, the idea of human personhood is intimately linked to Inuit cosmology, specifically to its triune concept of water-land-sky. The balance and interaction between these three elements create a person; this includes both human and other-than-human persons (Qitsualik, 2013).

Our exploration of Rarámuri and Inuktitut ontology of human persons in their broader environments indicates differing philosophical plumbing to deal with analogous problems, namely, how to engage with a rich, but fragile ecology in a way that does not deplete it. In both philosophical traditions, conceiving of the interrelations between humans and the world is about maintaining appropriate boundaries and harmonious, mutualistic relationships. Precisely because other animals and plants are kin for Rarámuri, and because humans embody within themselves the three layers of the ontology for the Inuktitut, other creatures cannot simply be used as objects.⁵

We can contrast this with western societies whose philosophical plumbing includes the central thought that everything is material (inherited from the scientific worldview). At the same time, within this monistic picture, humans are elevated on a plane above this material reality (inherited from a Christian medieval conception of humanity and its relationship to the world, see White, 1967). This philosophical plumbing with its inherent tensions between materialist monism and humans as elevated beings makes it difficult to maintain mutualistic, harmonious relationships with the rest of the world.

Qitsualik (2013, pp. 27–28) draws a distinction between people with an anthropogenic worldview and those with a non-anthropogenic worldview—this distinction is also termed anthropocentric versus cosmocentric worldview (Swanson, 2009). For the former, the absence of human-made order is chaos. We see this not only in contemporary western cultures, but also in historical large-scale societies such as ancient Near Eastern cultures. By contrast, for the latter, such as the Inuit, the absence of human-made order is the default. The Land is not something to be subdued by humans, it is simply the default state of the world; one must accept that the *Nuna* is uncanny and inscrutable. Humans need to be mindful in their interactions with nature so as not to deplete it or to upset a fragile balance. The boundaries between the human and the nonhuman world are negotiated with an eye toward sustainable engagements.

This philosophical plumbing has eluded some western philosophers. For example, in his discussion of Inuit technologies, Kim Sterelny (2007) comments on their sophistication while criticizing what he interprets as irrational, mistaken, and delusional beliefs:

The Inuit superbly exemplify the power of the processes of cultural adaptation to build effective responses to a harsh world. But ... the Inuit had many (apparently) irrational

and costly beliefs about their environment as well. In particular, they populated it with nonexistent dangers: giant fish and birds, ghosts and spirits. These misconceptions of their environment were not free: the Inuit altered their foraging patterns to avoid these supposed dangers, and invested in expensive ritual protections (Sterelny, 2007, p. 318).

The way Sterelny frames it, Inuit attitudes toward the environment are rather puzzling. If Inuit are so mistaken in their metaphysical beliefs, how could they successfully engage with their environment that—gauging by failed (though well-equipped) polar expeditions—is peculiarly inhospitable, and this without the advantages of motorized vehicles, factory-woven fabrics, and canned foods? The dangers of “giant fish and birds, ghosts and spirits” are part of Inuit philosophical plumbing, part and parcel of the *Nuna* and its inscrutability. We do not need to make a dichotomy between so-called delusional philosophical and mystical views on the one hand and successful technology on the other. As Qitsualik notes,

Far from respecting Inuit for their knowledge of the Land and its trends—with sheer survival over millennia as proof of their capability—the majority of writers (all non-Inuit) tend to dismiss the culture as overly mystical and prone to supernatural hysteria. At best, Inuit are regarded as naïve children of the snow, with a charming tendency toward “animism” (the belief that all natural objects possess a life of their own); always fearful and wary of a spirit or two hiding under their beds (Qitsualik, 2013, p. 25).

Recognizing the importance of philosophical plumbing and the role it plays in Indigenous communities does not commit one to the Panglossian view that this plumbing would always be optimal, any more than philosophical plumbing is optimal in any other culture. Rather, it is useful to consider philosophical plumbing as an integral part of the broader engagement with the world that cannot be divorced from technology, religion, and other cultural elements, just like western philosophical plumbing cannot be divorced from western culture.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have considered the role of genealogy in melioristic philosophy. Genealogy is usually understood as a historical project, but it is also a comparative one. In this paper, we have focused on its latter aspect. By looking at the role of philosophical concepts in cultures that differ from our own, notably Indigenous societies, we get a glimpse of a broader range of philosophical possibilities. Historically, authors such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau have painted life in Indigenous societies as a kind of default state with little philosophical sophistication in their genealogies. Contemporary genealogies still portray the emergence of private property, literacy, and other features of large-scale societies, as defining factors that make philosophical ideas possible. However, such accounts underestimate the fact that being part of a large-scale society also poses limits on philosophical possibilities. For example, political and economic egalitarianism is enforced as a norm in immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies such as the Jul’hoansi and the Hadza; it is not a default state. This enforcement seems impossible or extremely difficult in large-scale societies because of the many factors that countervail it, for example, accumulation and inheritance of wealth, and immaterial goods such as prestige that go against egalitarianism.

Similarly, we have seen several different ways in which members of Indigenous societies in North America solve the problem of how to engage sustainably with the environment: Rarámuri and Inuktitut

have different conceptualizations and philosophical ideas that underlie and enforce respect for the environments they live in. Learning about Indigenous philosophies can make us more aware of the preconceptions that underlie western cultures, specifically the philosophical plumbing that seems to prevent us from addressing the impending environmental collapse our societies face. A more in-depth consideration of philosophical concepts of Indigenous societies can help us realize that members of these communities are our philosophical peers.

While this point of philosophical peerhood has been made nearly a century ago by the anthropologist Paul Radin (1927), and more recently by the late anthropologist David Graeber and the archeologist David Wengrow (2021), it has poor uptake within the philosophical community. Western philosophy departments rarely teach Indigenous philosophy at any level, and there is still a paucity of Indigenous philosophy in philosophy journals. (Anecdotally, Indigenous philosophy papers are desk-rejected because they are not deemed sufficiently philosophical.) Acknowledging philosophical peerhood can help us in the genealogical project of looking critically at the philosophical plumbing that underlies western societies, and to gauge in which way it may be deficient, given the challenges our societies currently face. As Midgley (1992) pointed out, this is what philosophers do: they look at philosophical plumbing, see if it is still fit for purpose, and suggest ways to improve it.

It should be clear that one cannot simply cut and paste the philosophical plumbing of Indigenous societies and let it do the work of directly improving our present ills. Aside from worries about cultural appropriation or cherry picking just those elements one deems useful, it would not work because philosophical plumbing is inextricably linked to other societal structures, including economy and politics. As a more ambitious alternative, Sioui proposes that fellow Wendat intellectuals and other Indigenous philosophers should become “leaders in the domains of philosophy, spirituality, and education” on the American continent. He argues that they should do so, because “a properly American social ethic” should not be “founded on European ethics, because the Indigenous civilization of our earth is much too ancient to simply cede its place ... to another civilization that is uprooted, which has never proven itself or shown its viability”⁶ (Sioui, 2008, p. 236).

A more modest alternative is to engage in melioristic genealogy, as outlined in this paper. As we have shown, melioristic genealogy helps us to identify where the philosophical plumbing went wrong or is no longer fit for purpose. One way of doing this is to open up our sense of possibility—to see different ways of philosophically engaging with enduring problems humans face such as living together and relating to their environment. We have argued that comparative philosophy is a crucial part of this genealogical project. Even a cursory investigation of Indigenous philosophies allows us glimpses of philosophical possibilities we did not see before, due to our own philosophical baggage. These glimpses are invaluable tools for conceptual engineers who can better evaluate existing plumbing and be more informed about how to graft new structures onto the old plumbing, if they can gather some philosophical alternatives that were previously unconsidered. The comparative project outlined here can be a useful start. It shows how things westerners take for granted, such as seeing land in the light of property rights, or making a deep ontological distinction between humans and the rest of nature, and seeing the latter as resources to be tapped, are not immutable truths. This allows us to expand the range of possible philosophical ideas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on our paper. In addition, we thank John Protevi for his commentaries on an earlier version of this manuscript, as well as the organizers and audiences of the Arché Conceptual Engineering seminars at University of Saint Andrews. This paper also benefited from conversations with Jérôme Melançon and Cathryn Townsend.

ORCID

Helen De Cruz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0139-3769>

Johan De Smedt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6732-5406>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For a polemical discussion of this expectation in the context of defunding the humanities, and a perceived societal need for welders rather than philosophers, see Van Norden (2017).
- ² Using the concept of conceptual engineering does not commit us to give an exhaustive overview of this burgeoning field, as the foci of our paper are philosophical plumbing and genealogy.
- ³ Some authors also apply this term to historical societies such as Attic Greece or medieval Europe, but we will look at philosophical plumbing from early modern and modern societies.
- ⁴ See also Swanson, 2009, for an analogous ontology in Amazonian Indigenous peoples.
- ⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing us on this point.
- ⁶ Authors' translation.

REFERENCES

- Baumard, N., Hyafil, A., Morris, I., & Boyer, P. (2015). Increased affluence explains the emergence of ascetic wisdoms and moralizing religions. *Current Biology*, 25(1), 10–15.
- Bellah, R. N. (2011). *Religion in human evolution. From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Harvard Belknap.
- Bird-David, N. (1990). The giving environment: Another perspective on the economic system of gatherer-hunters. *Current Anthropology*, 31(2), 189–196.
- Borgerhoff Mulder, M., Bowles, S., Hertz, T., Bell, A., Beise, J., et al. (2009). Intergenerational wealth transmission and the dynamics of inequality in small-scale societies. *Science*, 326(5953), 682–688.
- Borrows, J., & Rotman, L. I. (1997). The *sui generis* nature of aboriginal rights: Does it make a difference? *Alberta Law Review*, 36(1), 9–45.
- Bryan, B. (2000). Property as ontology: On aboriginal and English understandings of ownership. *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 13(1), 3–31.
- Cantalamesa, E. A. (2021). Disability studies, conceptual engineering, and conceptual activism. *Inquiry*, 64(1–2), 46–75.
- Cashdan, E. A. (1980). Egalitarianism among hunters and gatherers. *American Anthropologist*, 82, 116–120.
- Chalmers, D. J. (in press). What is conceptual engineering and what should it be? *Inquiry*, 1–18.
- Collings, P. (2001). “If you got everything, it’s good enough”: Perspectives on successful aging in a Canadian Inuit community. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 16(2), 127–155.
- De Cruz, H., & De Smedt, J. (2010). Science as structured imagination. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 44, 29–44.
- de la Cadena, M. (2010). Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual reflections beyond “politics”. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2), 334–370.
- Dutilh Novaes, C. (2020). Carnapian explication and ameliorative analysis: A systematic comparison. *Synthese*, 197(3), 1011–1034.
- Foucault, M. (1975 [1995]). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 139–164). Cornell University Press.
- Fricke, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Gendler, T. S. (2008). Alief and belief. *Journal of Philosophy*, 105(10), 634–663.
- Graeber, D., & Wengrow, D. (2021). *The dawn of everything. A new history of humanity*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Harvard University Press.
- Henrich, J. (2020). *The WEIRDest people in the world*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Ingold, T. (2006). Rethinking the animate, re-animating thought. *Ethnos*, 71(1), 9–20.
- Ingold, T. (2018). From science to art and back again: The pendulum of an anthropologist. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 43(3–4), 213–227.
- Jaspers, K. (1953). *The origin and goal of history* (M. Bullock, Trans.). Yale University Press.

- LaRochelle, S., & Berkes, F. (2003). Traditional ecological knowledge and practice for edible wild plants: Biodiversity use by the Rarámuri, in the sierra Tarahumara, Mexico. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 10(4), 361–375.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1944). The social and psychological aspect of chieftainship in a primitive society: The Nambikwara of northwestern Mato Grosso. *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2(7/1), 16–32.
- Locke, J. (1713). *Two treatises of government* (4th ed.). John Churchill.
- Marshall, J. (2001). *The Lakota way. Stories and lessons for living*. Penguin.
- Medina, J. (2010). James on truth and solidarity: The epistemology of diversity and the politics of specificity. In J. J. Stuhr (Ed.), *100 years of pragmatism: William James's revolutionary philosophy* (pp. 124–143). Indiana University Press.
- Medina, J. (2013). *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and the social imagination*. Oxford University Press.
- Midgley, M. (1992). Philosophical plumbing. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 33, 139–151.
- Midgley, M. (2002). *Beast and man. The roots of human nature*. Routledge.
- Midgley, M. (2018). *What is philosophy for?* Bloomsbury Academic.
- Norlock, K. J. (2019). Perpetual struggle. *Hypatia*, 34(1), 6–19.
- Nussbaum, M. (2001). *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Qitsualik, R. (2013). Inummarik: Self-sovereignty in classic Inuit thought. In S. Nickels, K. Kelley, C. Grable, M. Lougheed, & J. Kuptana (Eds.), *Nilliajut: Inuit perspectives on security, patriotism and sovereignty* (pp. 23–33). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.
- Radin, P. (1927). *Primitive man as philosopher*. D. Appleton & Co.
- Reddekop, J. (2022). Against ontological capture: Drawing lessons from Amazonian Kichwa relationality. *Review of International Studies*, 48(5), 857–874.
- Robertson, S., & Ljubicic, G. (2019). *Nunamii'luni quvianaqtuq* (it is a happy moment to be on the land): Feelings, freedom and the spatial political ontology of well-being in Gjoa haven and Tikiranajuk, Nunavut. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(3), 542–560.
- Robles-Zamora, J. A. (2021). Morality as cognitive scaffolding in the nucleus of the Mesoamerican cosmovision. In J. De Smedt & H. De Cruz (Eds.), *Empirically engaged evolutionary ethics* (pp. 203–220). Springer (Synthese Library).
- Rousseau, J. J. (1755 [1990]). *Discourse on inequality* (F. Philip, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Sahlins, M. (1972). *Stone Age economics*. Aldine Atherton.
- Salmón, E. (2000). Kincentric ecology: Indigenous perceptions of the human–nature relationship. *Ecological Applications*, 10(5), 1327–1332.
- Salmón, E. (2020). *Iwígara. The kinship of plants and people. American Indian ethnobiological traditions and science*. Timber Press.
- Seabright, P., Stieglitz, J., & Van der Straeten, K. (2021). Evaluating social contract theory in the light of evolutionary social science. *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3(e20), 1–22.
- Searles, E. (2010). Placing identity: Town, land, and authenticity in Nunavut, Canada. *Acta Borealia*, 27(2), 151–166.
- Sioui, G. (2008). *Histoires de Kanatha. Vues et contées*. University of Ottawa Press.
- Srinivasan, A. (2019). Genealogy, epistemology and worldmaking. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 119(2), 127–156.
- Sterelny, K. (2007). SNAFUS: An evolutionary perspective. *Biological Theory*, 2, 317–328.
- Street, S. (2006). A Darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value. *Philosophical Studies*, 127, 109–166.
- Swanson, T. D. (2009). Singing to estranged lovers: Runa relations to plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*, 3(1), 35–65.
- Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom* (6th ed.). John Murray.
- Van Norden, B. W. (2017). *Taking back philosophy. A multicultural manifesto*. Columbia University Press.
- Vavova, K. (2018). Irrelevant influences. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 96(1), 134–152.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. (1998). Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4(3), 469–488.

- Viveiros de Castro, E. (2004). Exchanging perspectives: The transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge*, 25(1–3), 21–42.
- White, L. (1967). The historical roots of our ecologic crisis. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203–1207.
- Whyte, K. P. (2018). Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1–2), 224–242.
- Widerquist, K., & McCall, G. S. (2017). *Prehistoric myths in modern political philosophy: Challenging Stone Age stories*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Wiessner, P. (1982). Risk, reciprocity and social influences on !Kung san economics. In E. Leacock & R. Lee (Eds.), *Politics and history in band societies* (pp. 61–84). Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, B. A. O. (2002). *Truth & truthfulness: An essay in genealogy*. Princeton University Press.
- Willox, A. C., Harper, S. L., Edge, V. L., Landman, K., Houle, K., Ford, J. D., & the Rigolet Inuit Community Government. (2013). The land enriches the soul: On climatic and environmental change, affect, and emotional health and well-being in Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Canada. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 6, 14–24.
- Woodburn, J. (1982). Egalitarian societies. *Man, New Series*, 17(3), 431–451.
- Wyndham, F. S. (2009). Spheres of relations, lines of interaction: Subtle ecologies of the Rarámuri landscape in northern Mexico. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 29(2), 271–295.

How to cite this article: De Cruz, H., & De Smedt, J. (2022). Melioristic genealogies and Indigenous philosophies *The Philosophical Forum*, 00, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phil.12327>