Sacred Journey: Humanities, Social Sciences and Indigeneity/Spiritual content and pedagogy, and the Integration

A summary, while referring to *Hackberries* (2012) for greater depth of discussion.

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**Using the Tools of the Disciplines:** While the disciplines and approaches of the humanities, the social sciences and Indigeneity each seek to understand and appreciate the human condition, they rely on contrasting ways of knowing and methodologies to do so. What distinguishes the humanities from the social sciences, for example, is not so much a subject matter, but rather the mode of approach to any given question. The subject matter and approach in Indigeneity is another matter altogether.

The **social sciences paradigm** is embedded in the scientific paradigm, ontologically premised on critical principles tracing back to Aristotelian Materialism (to Aristotle of the 4th Century BC), and to the Cartesian Dualism (René Descartes of the 17th Century). Science uses the tools of empirical deduction and rational induction, based upon objectivity, with formally accepted standardized styles of texts and categories, applying such legitimizing tests as reliability and external/internal validity, with the goal of replicating phenomena, for pure and applied scientific purposes.

As a branch of science, social sciences research emphasizes empirical methods that seek to explain causality of events. This method can be expressed in either a quantitative design, which approaches social phenomena through quantifiable evidence, often relying on statistical analysis to create valid and reliable claims, or in a qualitative design, which emphasizes understanding of social phenomena through direct observation, communication with participants, or analysis of texts, and may stress contextual and subjective accuracy over generality. The disciplines of social sciences often include archaeology and physical anthropology, economics, education, geography, history, Law, linguistics, political science, public administration, psychology and sociology.

The **humanities paradigm** applies an interpretative method to understand meaning and purpose. The humanities can be traced back to the playwriting and poetry of Shakespeare and personal essay and memoir writing of Montaigne, both of the 16th Century. The humanities continue the ontological premise of Cartesian Dualism, but substitutes the role of material reductionism and objectivity with an emphasis on the role of human imagination and reflexivity, resulting in the subject and object tending to become interwoven and indistinguishable. While not a black and white distinction, the interpretative methodologies of the humanities disciplines are thus typically distinguished from the positivist and empirical methodologies of the natural and social science disciplines, and the creative and imaginative endeavors of the arts. Such interpretative methodologies, for example, include hermeneutics, literary criticism, phenomenology, and in the discipline of ethnography, “thick description.” The legitimizing tests in the humanities include such criteria as authenticity and trustworthiness. The humanities disciplines often include cultural anthropology/ethnography, communications studies, cultural studies (such as American Studies, International Studies, American Indian Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies); they include the languages, law, literature, history, philosophy; and they include the reflection
and theory in creative writing, in the performing arts of music, dance and theatre, and the reflection and
theory in the visual arts of painting, sculpting and architecture.

To “interpret” certainly seeks to render something meaningful and understandable, serving to inform,
enlighten, instruct. Likely first expressed in the 14th century Middle English, “interpret” is derived from
the Latin, interpretārī – “someone who serves as an agent, a negotiator.” Hence, to interpret certainly
seeks to (1) generate new knowledge, rendering something meaningful, be it culturally or historically
distant, be it something more immediate but veiled in some fashion. But to interpret also seeks to (2)
render that knowledge accessible, applicable, relevant, that is, linking and integrating. Indeed,
“negotiating” known and knower. Indeed, an element of rendering knowledge empathic, of projecting the
knower into the known! To successfully interpret is to successfully be self reflexive.

The Idaho Humanities Council states that “through [the] study [of the humanities it seeks to] yield
wisdom.” Wisdom is that deep understanding that goes beyond knowing; to thicken and extend our
understandings; to apply; to engage that knowledge in civic life, both locally and globally; to address the
challenges faced by humanity; to take up the “big questions.” The humanities enable us to reflect upon
our lives and ask fundamental questions of value, purpose, and meaning in a rigorous and systematic
way.

The Indigenous/Spiritual paradigm. Can you imagine an experiential world without Aristotelian
Materialism and Cartesian Dualism, fundamentally the antithesis of the scientific paradigm?

The Indigenous paradigm begins with a different cast of great “philosophers and writers,” with Coyote,
Salmon, Chief Child of the Yellow Root, among a host of other First Peoples/Animal Peoples, all from the
perennial time immemorial, who travel the landscape full of monsters and “man-eaters,” transforming
them into rock formations or into those who will help the people yet to come, and embedding that
landscape with “gifts, to be shared with others,” the things the Human Peoples will need, camas to dig,
salmon to dip net, deer to hunt, and the sqi̱g̱w̱ts or “water potato” to nourish. They preparing the
landscape for the coming of the Human Peoples, and then bring those People forth.

Indigeneity replaces the ontological premises of material reductionism and Cartesian Dualism with
spiritual animation and monism, resulting in an Indigenous participatory world in which reality is
“transitory intersection of those participating.” If the goal of the sciences is to replicate phenomenal
reality, while the goal of the humanities is to interpret the meaning of reality, then the goal of the
Indigenous and Spiritual paradigm is to re-creating and perpetuating perennial phenomena of the First
Peoples, of the Spiritual, of the Creator, of Moksha. It is to have “Coyote swirling around with you, and
you in direct dialogue with him.”

Importance and Role of Integration: In this course and in fact throughout your educational pursuits,
you will be presented with an array of multiple and diverse perspectives and worldviews, along with
distinct and differing methodological and epistemological specializations, such as those brought to bear
through the disciplines of the humanities, social sciences and Indigeneity. And in addition, as in any
academic endeavor there can also develop a disconnection and schism between your academic pursuits
and your social and personal life as engaged outside the classroom. It is thus especially important that in a course such as the Abrahamic Religions you also acquire skills in integration and interdisciplinary cohesion. Out of the potential chaos and contradictions of diversity can arise a larger inclusive unity, as well as ability to better think and act critically and creatively, and, in turn, problem solve.

In this course we are using an integration model entitled, “Sailing the Four C’s.” It entails Compartmentalization (acknowledging and distinguishing the epistemological and methodological differentiation of the humanities and social science tools), Context (distinguishing the diverse and differential cultural, historical, intellectual and social environments, as well as the differential levels within an given environment; in other words appreciating and distinguishing the rich diversity in the human condition), Competency (in knowing the distinct epistemological and methodological tools, and when and in what specific contexts to apply those tools), and Connection (applying the multiple tools to differentiated contexts to make connections, see the “bigger picture,” address issues, and problem solve).

We seek to develop and utilize a most adaptive approach to integrating multiple disciplines and diverse perspectives, and in so doing, attempt to address life’s challenges. Critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving all depend on your ability to both think divergently – compartmentalizing and seeing the rich diversity and multiplicity in the human experience – as well as to think convergently – integrating and connecting that rich diversity in new and novel ways. And we just might consider Tom Yellowtail’s Wagon Wheel to help us along the road of integration.