

COLOURISE FESTIVAL 2017 – eARTh'S END

FOOD for THOUGHT/ACTION

I understand Deloria's idea of personality as the substantive embodiment, the unique realization, of all the relations and power we embody. Because each of us is someplace and, but for a few exceptions, never in exactly the same place as anybody else, our personalities are unique. ...

... Self-determination cannot be an individual question, for the reflective sense in which our selves are grounded in life among our relations and in the relationships surrounding us requires engagement with the community of persons, both human and other-than-human, when we determine what we ought to do, what choices we should make, and how we should be self-determining.

Such a notion is indeed complex if left entirely to rational calculation, but experience gives us a source for estimation that goes beyond rational calculation. Self-determination in the dominant Western Society is essentially about calculation, and appropriately so, for it has emerged in a legal culture of abstractions, of abstract persons, with abstract rights or freedoms. In such a model of politics – law, rights, responsibilities (of which there are few, for the most part), and power – solving political questions is like solving a problem in mathematics, given the right terms and operations. Legal constructionists, sympathetic to the points made above, get quickly frustrated, for in acknowledging the complexity of political environments as experienced, they quickly give up on rational elaboration of such complex models. To use an analogy from the quantitative social sciences, once one factor is more than a couple of independent variables in a computer-generated regression model of causal variables, the interaction effects are such that it grows increasingly difficult to say precisely what the effects of any single variable is. Rational calculation gets interminable difficult and hence, so the argument goes, impractical. I could not agree more.

However, the problem is solved once one gives up on calculation and abstraction and instead redirects attention to experience through custom, habit, ceremony, and what I choose to call the development of a synthetic attentiveness. By synthetic attentiveness I mean a heightened sense of awareness that operates without thinking about it or paying attention to it. Synthetic attentiveness is the "I experience, therefore I am" indigenous response to Descartes's famous "I think, therefore I am". I have seen this keen awareness or synthetic attentiveness operate numerous times with traditional elders who demonstrate the amazing ability to be aware of events, processes, and activities surrounding them that most of us miss. Whether visiting a classroom, having a meeting with governmental officials, or being in wetlands or on a grassland prairie, I have often been surprised in discussions afterward by what these elders "noticed" without seeming to notice at all. This ability to what I will call process processes is not magical, and it only seems mysterious to those insistent on a rational schematic or mechanistic model to explain what happens. I can offer neither. I see no need to; rather, this processing of processes seems acquired by paying attention – by learning to be attentive to the world we live in.

Daniel Wildcat

from a Chapter on The Question of Self-Determination
in the publication (book) detailed below

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