

Reflections on *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions* by Vine Deloria, Jr.¹

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Vine, in a conversation with his son Phil, said the following about Jung: "Like us, he sometimes wondered if he were answering questions posed by his ancestors" (i). Vine had numerous projects he pursued in his life, but one of the main ones seems to have been the question of how can one unify knowledge. What are the insights of the West that are worthwhile, and what are the non-western insights that have the most value. How can these be brought together to create a full, or whole picture, of human knowledge?

As Philip puts it "... my father never truly retreated from the questions of metaphysics and spirituality that his family had bequeathed him..."(ii). Vine was very wrapped up in this study. He spoke for years about this "Jung book". As Phillip points out with regard to these issues: "His explorations of these questions took concrete shape in books such as *God is Red* (1973) and *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (1979). The present work ought properly be seen as a continuation of these explorations..." (ii).

After some conversations with Vine about notions of the divine and spirituality in Bellingham in early July of 2005, he said he wanted to send me his manuscript on Jung. That reading it might help clear up some of my questions (and some of the argument we were having about images of God). He e-mailed me the manuscript on July 28, 2005. Now Vine was not very adept at computer technology. Rather than compiling the chapters of the book (13 in total) into one document, he sent me thirteen separate emails, each one with a chapter attached. Later that day, because he wasn't sure he had done it correctly, he proceeded to send an additional thirteen e-mails; duplicating what I had already received.

Phil has done a wonderful job with the manuscript – making sure all of the citations are correct, editing where he has thought it necessary, and seeing to it that this work saw the light of day. He did combine two chapters into one, changed some of the names of the chapters, and left out a few things from Vine's writing in the chapter that combines the two chapters.

There is one comment that Phil made which I do need to take exception to. He wrote "... my father had not revised the manuscript in almost a decade..."(iv). Vine had been working on this book for years,

¹ Vine Deloria, Jr. 2009. *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive*. Philip J. Deloria and Jerome S. Bernstein, editors. New Orleans: Spring Journal Books.

that is true. It had been destroyed in a fire and he had to rewrite it from scratch. We all know this, and Phil mentions that. But where I do have to take exception, is that the manuscript that Vine sent me was full of ideas we had recently discussed (not only me and Vine, but a number of folks – like Steve Pavlik, Dan Wildcat, and other fellow travelers). Further, there is a reference in the original manuscript to Peat’s *Blackfoot Physics* which is also in the published book. This work was published in 2002, just three years before Vine’s passing. There may be other recent (relative to 2005) works cited, but this is sufficient to show that the manuscript was “fresh”.

Vine saw this book as “a book discussing the possible points of agreement between Jung and the Sioux...” (1). He wrote “My intent here is to establish a balanced dialogue between the two cosmologies and the spiritual and psychological dynamics that derived from them” (2). He raises the question: “Can parallels be drawn and dialogue established between these two bodies of knowledge? This book will argue that they can” (15).

In examining Jungian psychology, Deloria concluded that “...there must be a great kinship between Jungian psychology and the American Indian traditions” (32). He did take exception to Jung’s use of the term “primitive.” He notes that he uses it both in negative and positive manners. “The negative primitive consists of the detrimental, derogatory, or condescending views that Jung expressed about primitives” (34). On the other hand, Vine also notes that Jung had some positive things to say: “Ultimately Jung realized that civilization, for all its virtues, also came with its curses, and that the remedy at hand was an intimate relationship with the natural world – in other words, living in some measure the psychological life of the primitive” (62).

Deloria proceeds to create “...a comparative sketch of the Jungian universe and that of the Sioux. What are the natures of, and relations between time and space? Between causality and the larger patterns that may underpin acausal phenomenon? Between the very small and the very large? Between psyche and spirit?” (65). There are many similarities and differences elaborated on in this book. He does point out that there is “an aspect of the Sioux universe that does not appear in the Jungian scheme of things, but which I shall suggest might have been included – seemingly inanimate material objects, which do not exactly reflect human perceptions of time or the physical dimensions of space, but a rather different category of experience” (92). Deloria is referring to the assistance that holy people received from stones. “These stones were the physical representation of the universe” (93).

Deloria then discusses in two chapters the differences the role that animals play in Jung’s universe and in the Sioux universe. His original chapter titles indicate these differences. “Jung and the Animals” and “The Friendly Animals”. Jung deals with animals in three formats: a cosmic creation, an intelligent creature with instinctual archetypal behavior, and symbolic participants in dreams (100). Different than the Sioux “Jung does not imagine that animals could, *in and of themselves*, be helpful to humans” (103). Deloria points out that “The Sioux received new information about the physical world from other creatures in dreams and visions, and also through direct vocal communication” (129).

Chapter Eight, The Individual and Kinship, merges two chapters, one entitled “The Jungian Family” and the other “The Sioux Family.” This chapter compares and contrasts the two types of families. He speaks at length of the roles held by the various members of the Sioux families and the benefits that derived from people fulfilling those roles. “Sioux society was built upon allocation of duties and

responsibilities rather than the recognition of “rights” (146). “In contrast, Western society and the Western family are often built upon the premise that each family member has ‘rights’ in relation to every other member” (147).

In the original manuscript, Vine brings in the notion of reincarnation in each of the chapters on family (both Jung’s and the Sioux’s). Vine had a way of jerking our chains, so to speak, to make us consider ideas that would stretch our minds, some might say. Although these comments did not make it into the published version, it is appropriate to share this from the original manuscript.

From “The Jungian Family”:

“The idea of psychic heredity led Jung to the brink of confirming a new understanding of reincarnation. Such a belief has usually been discouraged in western civilization because of the popular foolishness it has involved. We always seem to encounter people with claims to have been famous people in previous lives - it seems as though everyone has taken their turn at being a priest or temple maiden in a highly spiritual life in ancient Egypt. Jung gave his interpretation an unusual twist. “I also think of the possibility that through the achievement of an individual a question enters the world, to which he must provide some kind of answer.” In his case, since some of his ancestors were clergymen, the question involved solving some spiritual problem. But what if his answer was not satisfactory? “That being so, someone who has my karma - or I myself - would have to be reborn in order to give a more complete answer.” Presumably, since the Jungian family had raised the question, it would be a future relative who would answer it. “It might happen that I would not be reborn again so long as the world needed no such answer, and that I would be entitled to several hundred years of peace until someone was once more needed who took an interest in these matters and could profitably tackle the task anew.”² This view of reincarnation at least provides a flexible path along which each of us travels without making it necessary to cast the idea in terms of a rigid mechanical process.”

From “The Sioux Family”:

“Not much is known of the Sioux belief in reincarnation and, like many other tribes, much of the information has been lost. However, the Sioux had a belief that they were souls temporarily using a body rather than bodies producing a soul. Specific souls could return by incarnating in a new body but the possible identification of who had been reincarnated was not a subject for speculation as a rule. Twins were believed to be compatible souls who had enjoyed close attachments in a previous life

² *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 318-319

and now had great affinity for one another. The Sioux could remember the psychological traits of the people in each generation so that their beliefs fell directly into line with Jung's speculations about psychic heredity."

This notion of answering questions from previous generations fits into how he saw a parallel between his family and Jung's (that Philip mentioned at the beginning of the book.)

Vine sees a similarity between Jung and the Sioux in the notion of vocation. Jung points out that the original meaning of vocation is "to be addressed by a voice" (153). "For both Jung and the Sioux people, "the voice" stands as that mysterious call we hear that urges us toward greater spiritual depth" (153). However, the Sioux are also distinct from Jung in this regard: "Testimony from tribal people, however, offers a different world, one in which Spirits are not mental images projected outwards but have real power in the physical world as entities in themselves" (164).

Dreams are very important to both Jung and to the Sioux. "In both of the systems of thought under consideration here, dreams are critical to understanding cosmology, space and time, family structure, and relations with animals and the non-human world" (167). An important difference is that Jungian approaches to dreams focus primarily on the interior ("intrapsychic" 181). "Dreams, I would suggest, following Sioux tradition, are also tangible intersections with a reality that looms in front of us" (181).

At the close of the book, Deloria posits that this book demonstrates that something new could be developed, that there is a "possibility of a transcendent framework that would incorporate the best insights of each body of knowledge in a new psychology" (183). This psychology needs to be treated "as a philosophy" (184). He concludes:

The best course for the future, in my opinion, would be to explore the philosophical context that Jung proposed, in order to make his discoveries of the psyche even more comprehensible. If, within that context, we can see that the experiences of the Sioux fit reasonably well – and I believe that we have come some distance down this road – then I would feel that we have established a framework within which continued communication can take place. In short, though Jung was a man of his time when it came to developmentalist science, social relations, and colonial histories, new perspectives from contemporary science and psychology allow us to see a number of ways in which his psychology greatly resembles the Sioux traditions. It is worth pursuing this overlap and resemblance, for with almost every topic we have discussed, the Sioux had a broader vision that opens up new questions of both science and psychology (199).

Original:

JUNGAN PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SIOUX TRADITIONS

Edited:

C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive

Original³

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Edited

CH 1 - Psychology and the Psyche
Introduction: Psychology and the Psyche
CH - 2 - Jung and the Indians
Chapter One: Jung and the Indians
CH – 3 – The Negative Primitive
Chapter Two: The Negative Primitive
CH –4 – The Positive Primitive
Chapter Three: The Positive Primitive
CH – 5 – The Jungian Universe
Chapter Four: The Jungian Universe
CH – 6 – The Sioux Universe
Chapter Five: The Sioux Universe
CH – 7 – The Jungian Family
Chapter Eight: The Individual and Kinship
CH – 8 – The Sioux Family
CH – 9 – Jung and the Animals
Chapter Six: Jung and the Animals
CH – 10 – The Friendly Animals
Chapter Seven: Animals and the Sioux
CH – 11 – The Voice and the Vision
Chapter Nine: The Voice and the Vision
CH – 12 – Dreams and Prophecies
Chapter Ten: Dreams and Prophecies
CH – 13 – Coming Together
Conclusion: Coming Together

³ “Original” refers to the manuscript provided to the author by Vine Deloria, Jr. via e-mail on July 28, 2005. Edited (in bold) refers to the published work, edited by Philip J. Deloria and Jerome S. Bernstein, published 2009, Spring Journal, Inc.