

Takarangi, yin and yang, mauri and qi

Kepa Morgan

Abstract: The target article by Williams and Henare (2009) provides a valuable opportunity to discuss epistemologies further and to encourage seeking convergence in the sense of finding unity in diversity. In this context, the present commentary briefly notes further comparisons of knowledge systems.

Keywords: double spiral; epistemology; takarangi

In choosing the takarangi (double spiral) as their basis for the discussion of epistemologies, Williams and Henāre (2009) have created a valuable opportunity. Alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing, especially indigenous epistemologies, have for a long time been maligned and ignored. Yet these epistemologies offer immeasurable potential owing to their fundamentally different approach to knowledge when compared with Western scientific thought.

The diametrically opposed philosophies of scientific reductionism on one hand and indigenous wisdom on the other make this point. Mātauranga Māori adopts a holistic approach: Kimihia katoa nga putake o te kaupapa, ingia I kitea, kimihia te rongoa. (In seeking out all facets of the challenge faced, therein lies the understanding that will suggest the solution.) Williams and Henāre reiterate this point in their conclusion.

Marsden & Henāre (1992) observed that in rational Western thinking there is rather a disconnection of the physical and spiritual, the secular and the sacred. This separation of knowledge and its compartmentalisation into silos creates tensions between the two systems of knowledge and has been the basis for devaluing Indigenous Knowledge and the Māori worldview. The holistic approach of mātauranga Māori avoids the disjunction between the secular and spiritual, the inherent compartmentalisation and isolation of one institution from another, and a piecemeal approach to problem and conflict resolution (Marsden, 2003).

The interaction of these knowledge systems within our society is of interest as it leads to the co-opting of some concepts from one into the other. An example is that biblical and scientific mantra are evident in some aspects of contemporary Māori thinking. Several of these concepts are shared to illustrate this point:

1. The Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation is that the earth and all its domains were created for the benefit of humankind (Attfield, 1983 in Ducker, 1994), and includes associated ideas of stewardship. Note that prior to the 16th century, the Western world also had a holistic view of nature as God's plan. The epistemology here is the method of authority.
2. The contemporary worldview started to replace the medieval worldview when Bacon introduced the *inductive methodology* for scientific inquiry in 1597 and *scientific rationality* in 1626; and Descartes introduced *objectivity* in 1641, separating humankind from nature and thereby increasing the perceived relevance of scientific thought.

In 1642 these concepts culminated with Galileo's proof of Copernicus's theory of a *heliocentric universe*, showing that the Earth did indeed revolve around the Sun. Galileo's proof outwardly challenged the established authority of religion, and while ill-regarded by the Aristotelian and religious academies, successfully discredited the Ptolemaic ideal of the Earth as the centre of the

universe, solely from a scientific standpoint, and liberated scientific knowledge from religious and cultural constraint. As the power shift from religion to science occurred, the separation of knowledge into specialised branches enabled scientific knowledge to develop rapidly, unencumbered by religious, legal or political concerns.

The wiriwiri movement chosen by Williams and Henare as an example of the takarangi is particularly apt because in kapa haka (performance art) an interpretation of the movement pattern is that it reflects shimmering effects produced by the deity Wiri who remains hovering between Rangi and Papa. That is, the spiritual essence between the spirals of the takarangi, as we too continue to occupy this world. This example demonstrates that indigenous wisdom has endured and ensures the integration and acknowledgement of “spirituality” in all human activities continues to occur today.

The takarangi also represents the male and female descent lines beginning from Rangi and Papa, a parallel genesis through to today (University of Auckland, 1988). These opposites attract, contrast, and combine in a way that appears to parallel the Chinese philosophical concept of *yin and yang*. In relation to the spatio-temporal analysis provided by Williams and Henare (2009) it is noted that such an approach is also part of another Chinese concept-- that is *Feng Shui*, which is the art of organising spatial and temporal relationships of things to enhance qi (life force).

The Māori term ‘mauri’ also means the life force and it incorporates the principle of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) which maintains or modifies aspects of the ecosystem so as to enhance its collective life force. It is noted too, that the concept of stagnant chi is the similar to the notion of mauri noho. Mauri is also understood as the binding force between the physical and spiritual aspects of entities within the ecosystem. We may ask therefore, to what degree are Asian life force concepts such as qi, gi and ki (Chinese, Korean and Japanese, respectively) similar to mauri.

In concluding, it is suggested that the epistemological method of intuition is possibly that of all indigenous peoples, as is suggested by the following whakataukī:

*Kia aho matuahia te taketake
Kia tūwaerea te tau*

When intellect turns to intuition
Knowledge become wisdom

References

- Ducker, R. (1994). Deciding on customary use? An analysis of conflicting values in customary use decision making. Canterbury: Lincoln University Press.
- Galileo, G. (2005). *Dialogues concerning two new sciences*. Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers.
- Marsden, M. (2003) *God, man and universe: A Maori view. The woven universe*. Masterton: The Estate of Rev. Maori Marsden.
- Marsden, M., & Henare, T. A. (1992). *Kaitiakitanga: A definitive introduction to the holistic world view of the Maori*. Unpublished manuscript.
- University of Auckland. (1988). *Tane-nui-a-Rangi*. Auckland: University of Auckland Press.
- Williams, L.R.T., & Henare, M. (2009). The double spiral and ways of knowing. *MAI Review*, 3, Target Article 3, 9 pages.

Author Notes

Dr Kapa Morgan (Ngāti Pikiao, Te Arawa, Ngāti Kahungunu, Kāi Tahu) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Auckland.

E-mail: k.morgan@auckland.ac.nz