

## Acultural Assumptions of Empiricism: A Native Hawaiian Critique

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E ho mai ka 'ike mai luna mai e  
O na mea huna no'eau o na mele e  
E ho mai, e ho mai, e ho mai e

Grant us the wisdom from above  
Of the things hidden in these words  
Grant us, grant us, grant us ...

This 'oli or chant is an example of how we ask for permission to enter a room, an event, a forest, or an idea. It was developed by a beloved elder, Auntie Edith Kanaka'ole, for her *hula halau* (hula school). Another chant we often do to begin a project speaks of the rain clouds that line up on the horizon. It was the second 'oli I offered during this conference. I live on the northeastern side of our island, a place where the clouds always line up like they're waiting to be called. So we see them as waiting in a line, as people waiting to be called forward, and they're coming to us from an ancient place called Kulanihako'i, which is the "origin of rain." And so these clouds eventually come and they deliver the rain to our lands, and we have room for that idea because it is what has come from antiquity to help us understand our world today. So it's about the rain—and from rain come the buds of new growth, and from the buds come the trees, and from the trees come our foundation. Our very name for teacher is *kumu*, which means "source," or "tree." It is our *kumupa'a*, our firm foundation, and it's connected to rain and flourishing and growth. So chanting that portends goodness and nurturance, and a connection with what is old to what is new.

Another 'oli we often voice before we begin anything educational or spiritual is *Na 'Aumakua*. It's our recognition of all those kupuna, of all those elders who have gone before us. It's such an honor to have my kupuna with all your kupuna here where snow exists. So my 'aumakua recognizes yours and allows them all to be with us today. Also, the last 'oli I have done today tells you of my origins, my genealogy. It speaks about my mom's family and the places they come from on the island of Hawai'i. It is an appropriate way to introduce myself to you. It's such an honor to be here. I am enjoying this place, the energy, this time, this snow, the food! What a wonderful event this has been. All right. Are you ready for the topic—epistemology? That was it. Any questions?

I'm learning so much from the people who have spoken before me, particularly when uncle told us that he spent 40 years trying to understand Lakota in English terms. I found it fascinating that I feel like that now. As if I'm trying to strengthen my Hawaiian self by discussing it in western philosophical terms. I've given myself five more years, and then I'm no longer going to talk about Hawaiian

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epistemology. We believe that if you're *waha*, if you're all mouth, then you will not be respected. So I don't want to be *waha*. I am not *waha*, but it needs to be said, and so the form is Greek but the essence is Hawaiian. And so I have a story to start out with. It's about going to Harvard University and learning to barter in the language and culture of power to get a message across and thus resist erasure. It's about how I came upon this topic of Hawaiian epistemology.

Harvard is its own world. It was so fancy that when I was looking for the gym where I was going to coach the volleyball team, it took me all afternoon. I didn't see the gym at first, not because it's a huge or small place, but because the gym looks like an incredibly beautiful brick building. I mean, it's beautiful! I was riding my bike, trying to find the gym, and then they said, "Oh, that's the gym." And I said, "That's not the gym. That is a beautiful building. It's not a gym." So when I walked into this beautiful building of big iron lanterns and slate floors, there it was—our gym. So that was my introduction to Harvard. It's tremendously opulent from where I come from. No gyms have ever looked like that before. It is not in my world view and life experience.

And so I'm in my philosophy class, first semester, and my philosophy professor starts to discuss René Descartes. He was a 17th-century French philosopher, critic, mathematician, and logician. It was René Descartes who coined the term *cogito ergo sum*. What does that mean? *Cogito ergo sum* translates as: "I think, therefore I am." And he spearheaded a movement in western thought that moved gradually away from the center of religion, connection, and spiritual beliefs toward an empirical-only view of the world. He viewed spirit or any form of "radical-empiricism" as kind of an anti-science. So science eventually became the "god" for western culture, as they progressed, so to speak. Descartes was the point guard for that movement. He was the guy they went to in sticky situations of unexplained phenomena because he developed a system of looking at the world, a way of developing objectivity and distance. Knowledge thus entered into reason with empiricism as its major warrior. The five senses became the only way Europeans and thus Americans experienced and could make sense of their world. Today I want to discuss cultural notions of reason, and what these look like, and how this relates to knowledge production and exchange—the basis for Indigenous epistemology.

My philosophy professor went on about Descartes and how if the world did not have his thoughts, we would still be in the dark ages, and all I said to her was, "I disagree." I disagreed with her saying that he was "our" number one philosopher. She said "our" like he was my *kupuna*—my Elder—which he's not. For me Descartes represents reason and objectivity and science, and these three ideas have also been used as tools of "truth" that have helped heal and helped kill. It was an absolutely, fundamental and clear idea for me that Descartes was not my liberator. And so when I said, "I disagree," she turned and looked at me and said, "Okay, Miss Meyer, how would you teach a class in oceanography?" Yeee-ha! Thank you! I was so relieved. I thought she just leveled off the playing field because I grew up in the ocean. Every day. Swimming, diving, surfing. Every day. I walked to school on the beach. We'd have to be told to wear shoes. So she said, "Tell us how you would teach a course in oceanography." So I said,

All right, I will. I would teach it first via science. The predictable science of litoral currents, of wave refraction, how water is shaped by the beach slope, and how beaches are changed because of the volume and speed of water. I would teach oceanography via science. I can do that. And I would teach it via culture.

Now in my book, science and culture are not separated. But this was to me a necessary separation because I didn't want her to misunderstand me at the start; I continued and said,

Culture. I would teach a class in oceanography also via culture. I would teach the names of the moons and how those moons relate to what fish are running. And when you understand what fish are running, you understand what *limu* is on the splash zones. So the kind of seaweed also tells you about the quality of the ocean currents. Knowing the Hawaiian names of the moons tells you what the seasons and months are. Naming things is both a cultural recognition and an understanding of the science of that area. A Hawaiian naming of phenomena tells us about the seasonal context and what that place has to teach you.

Names from the natural world come to us as names for our people. My twin sister is named *Moana*. *Moana* describes one striation of the ocean; it's not the deepest ocean, but it's the deep ocean. And I am the bird flying above her—Manu. We are like this—night and day, ocean and bird. When we talk about wisdom, we use the term '*ike hohonu*'. It describes the deepest part of the ocean, as if wisdom exists only at such depths. The waves break right before the reef, they break after the reef, you know we have names for all these waves. This would be part of my class on oceanography. My uncle is named *Kepo'ikai*, which is the face of the wave just before it lands. We have names for everything. *Kealaokahiki* is a famous current between the islands of Kaho'olawe and Tahiti. There are eight major currents that run throughout our islands. Each name tells you something of the character of those currents. What does *Kealakahi* mean? The pathway to Tahiti. We're not naming this because we have no relationship to it. We name it because we do.

So I was going on like this, and then she said to me, right in the middle of a sentence: "Well then, *you* Miss Meyer, are an anti-intellectual!" You try being called an anti-intellectual when you're kind of nervous about being where you are anyway. So I thought she was calling me stupid. She called me anti-intellectual. I sat down, and I didn't talk again. I went home and got sick and couldn't get out of bed. An aunty called me and asked an anthropologist friend to call and speak with me. So the next day, this woman from Wellesley called me, and we had a long conversation. She talked to me about the Platonic method of instruction where the teacher challenges you and you're supposed to challenge back. Well, that's not what I do with teachers. I have been taught not to engage like that, but to take it in and think about it, be changed by it, and do what has been asked. But that's evidently not the Platonic method. It's a discourse of receiving and giving feedback. So that was pretty interesting. Wow, so she did that on purpose?! She wanted me to respond? I didn't know that. I thought she just wanted to bully me and that she was just being rude. That was easier. But the anthropologist also said, "Did you look up the word *intellectual*?" Well, I kind of knew what it meant, but no, I never looked it up. So I looked it up. Has anyone looked up the word recently? Anyone? Intellectual? It's fascinating. Really. It has changed my life.

*Intellectual*. Intellectual in philosophy means someone who believes that all our knowledge comes from empirical sources. What is empiricism? It is the idea that knowledge comes from experience as detailed by our five senses. Okay, what are

our five senses? Touching, seeing, tasting, smelling, hearing. Intellectual people believe that all knowledge comes from only those five sources—do you believe that? Come on. I was stunned to read such a definition; stunned to know that people believe that all of the world's knowledge comes only from our five bodily senses. To me it was like a revelation. Oh, my! I don't think that for a second—that all my knowledge comes from only five sensation sources. So I got out of bed, and I was angry. You know what I mean? She called all my people stupid, or actually she called them anti-intellectual. And I felt the weight of that responsibility, and the thought came: How was I going to respond to her? So the final paper for the semester was "Native Hawaiian Culture and Philosophy: A Case Study in Anti-intellectualism." And then the anthropology professor made me realize that I didn't need to take on the whole establishment. So I called it "Native Hawaiian Culture and Philosophy: A Case Study in Other Intellectualism." Other-intellectual because it's what I believe. I'm not writing to privilege a western norm, as if talking about Hawaiian philosophy is only understood via western comparisons. So it's an *other*. It still has the positionality of other, but it's not an antagonistic one. So it's what I believe. It is how I became, in a second, an epistemologist. I know, epistemology is a 10-dollar word, and I apologize for it, but let me just break it down so we all understand it. I used to read the word *epistemology* often, and I can truly say that I didn't really understand it. It's in every philosophy book.

*Epistemology*. Well, I've read about it, and I kind of understood it. But every pore of my body understands it now. Every blood vessel, sweaty palm, and nighttime thought. *It's all about epistemology*. Every little thing. I mean, I can see a dead frog on the road, and it relates to epistemology. As they say, "Every road leads to your thesis." *Episteme*: it's Greek for "knowledge." Now it literally means "the philosophy of knowledge." But what does it *really* mean? How is it *really* misunderstood? How is it every day dismissed in every one of our institutions as something other than a white norm? How does this happen?

So overnight I became an epistemologist. I felt pretty good about the passion that was growing because now I had a tool. So I never say—and I apologize to those of you who don't agree, that's totally wonderful—but in certain settings, I never say "Hawaiian ways of knowing." I never do that. Not right now. Because I've seen the dismissal of such a discussion, as if that discussion is a nice, quaint little anthropomorphic museum piece. No, I use "Hawaiian epistemology." Hawaiian ways of knowing is the boat on the ocean of Hawaiian epistemology. It is important to be clear about what we're talking about here. One of my students said to me once, "Manu, I would understand your work, but every time I read 'cosmology,' I see 'cosmotology.'" So you know, this is really funny, because language does direct how we think and saying *epistemology* has some heavy baggage. Language is the vehicle for an idea, and the idea for the moment is epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge, but I do not want us to think and stay in a structure that has been created to oppress. I understand that tenuous line I walk between 10-dollar words and my Hawaiian people who say in exasperation, "Don't throw that word at us." So it depends on the context. In a university setting, I use *epistemology* because it is part of the discourse of power that I wish to deconstruct. Do you use the master's tools to disassemble the master's house? That

is the question. I don't know. I'm just doing what I think I'm supposed to do. I don't know. But I use *epistemology* because of the political time I am finding myself in where everything is up for questioning, and meaning is no longer defined by test scores and amount of income. We are going into the study of knowledge. Are you ready?

Now what is knowledge? What are the priorities of knowledge? How is knowledge exchanged? Unique, because when that teacher called me anti-intellectual, was she really calling me stupid? The whole notion of epistemology is about knowledge. We understand it on intellectual terms. But when you experience it as a tool of oppression, it becomes real and a place of battle. South American scholar and martyred priest Ignacio Martin-Barro said, "If you do not define your epistemology, someone else will do it for you." Has this happened for us as Native people? Has this happened for Hawaiians in Hawai'i? Even as I gave my philosophy professor a draft of my final paper she asked: "Do Hawaiians have an epistemology?" And I thought for a second, well, I think we do. Why did I pause? Why did she even ask the question? *Of course we do!* But no one talks like that. Who talks like that? "Do Hawaiians have an epistemology?" Suddenly, when she asked that question, I felt as if I had misplaced something. At that moment I felt that I had to go home. It seemed like the only real thing in me. It dawned on me that I had never really realized that philosophy was acultural. When we discuss Plato, Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Kant, we assume that it is an acultural discussion. *Acultural* means "without culture." I had to learn that one. All these new words—*pedagogy, epistemology, ontology*. I know them now with my eyes closed because I see them now as the main source for how people misunderstand each other. But using such words is a sensitive issue back home because it is assumed that you are separating yourself from others if you speak like this. So I always make fun of myself because one of my favorite 'olelo no'au, Hawaiian proverbs, is: "*Ke noho nei opu weuweu, mai ho'oki'eki'e.*" "Stay among the weuweu grass and do not elevate yourself." Never raise yourself above the weuweu grass, because you would be leaving us. And I used to think as a kid that meant "don't excel." Then I learned that it doesn't mean "don't excel," it means "don't act and don't leave those who you grew up with." This is because humility is a paramount trait for Hawaiians, and being boastful and haughty is a terrible way to be. The notion of humility is fundamental and is linked with excellence, but not boastful excellence, and humility, but not flaccid humbleness. Let us get back to the idea that philosophy is an acultural assumption. That fascinates me! Why would we believe that the discussions of Plato and Kierkegaard and Aristotle are acultural? And even worse than that, we believe without even thinking that what they had to say actually applied to us! I had just assumed that there was a universal ideal of love and beauty. I thought that way because that is how I was educated. I have been colonized. My mind is colonized. I'm just beginning to unravel the complexities of what it means to unhitch myself from mainstream white culture. But culture in relation to power structures—that's where I'm most colonized. So we're just entering that discussion. This is why today, when we "do" culture in Hawai'i, we are also doing something political because it will inevitably go against mainstream norms. It is that simple. So this discussion of a Hawaiian epistemology then becomes political the moment I dis-

cuss it as a point of culture. This is so because of the nature of our time and the needs of our people. So the fact that my philosophy professor believed that philosophy is acultural is no longer fascinating, but a point of unconscious hegemonic practice, because thoughts are all about culture, interpretation, and distinct views. Plato lived in Greece and wrote 2,000 years ago. He has culture. He has gender. He writes from that focal point. The fact that nowadays they believe that philosophy is still apolitical is even more stunning to me. Philosophy, any philosophy, is a statement of culture! You know how I know this? It's because the people talking have culture. The people that listen have culture. This is what my farmer friend Jimmy Naniolo reminds me: "Manu, epistemology is good, but you know what the key is? Hermeneutics." Now hermeneutics is another Greek work that stands for the philosophy of interpretation. It asks us to think about who is talking and how this relates to what they are saying. Are they male, female, democrat, dog lover, and so forth? We will understand epistemology better if we understand who is talking. In what time are they talking? Who is their audience? It's a fascinating discussion of where the movement of philosophy is going and it unearths hidden systems of power. So I critique the idea that philosophy—and therefore the notion of empiricism—is acultural.

This is how I critique it. I have seven categories in which to think it through. The first is *Spirituality and knowing: the cultural context of knowledge*. This is the idea that there is a context to knowledge. Of course there is! But the idea that spirituality is the definitive mediator of what this is to me is fundamentally different from knowledge in the Descartian view. I mean if you are going to have to say the words *spirit* and *knowledge*, you're being repetitious. I say it now because I have to be totally obvious to people who don't understand this.

Spirituality is not about religion, of course. It is the fundamental sense of how we relate to the world, how we see the world, how it relates back to us. It is a spiritual context. So one of the ideas that we get out of this is the notion of '*ike*—'*ike* is our word "to see," which is a fascinating metaphor. We have empiricism in our Hawaiian language: '*ike* for seeing or *nana*, "to look," but '*ike* also means "to know." '*Ike* means "to know" and "to see," but it's also information and energy that are given from your '*aumakua* or from any other deity or life force. '*Aumakua* are natural representations of personal family that have gone before you. Also, another synonym for '*aumakua* is *kumu**pa'a*. This is an old word. It is fascinating that the idea of *kumu**pa'a* also means "a foundation of knowledge." *Kumu* is "a foundation," *pa'a* is "to make firm." So *kumu pa'a* is the same word for the ancestor deities as it is for a foundational knowledge pool. This thought comforts and educates me. This was a sign for me that we're on the right path.

One of my most respected and cherished mentors or informants is a woman named Auntie Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahele. She agreed to be interviewed for my thesis on one condition: that my thesis be written in such a way as "to win court cases." I tried to tell her that this piece was philosophical, but she would not let me off the hook. It has to help us win court cases. So I had to think about that. And so the idea that spirituality even links to the utility of court cases was fantastic to me. So to understand knowledge from a Hawaiian viewpoint is to begin with the idea



of spirituality. This idea is used throughout: it really is not a separate category, and I only speak of them in separate terms now so we can have a conversation.

The second category for a Hawaiian epistemology is *Cultural nature of the senses—expanding notions of empiricism*. This is why the talk today was about the acultural assumptions of empiricism. I no longer believe that you and I see the ocean in the same way. I just learned that we're not by the ocean. We're inland! The plane from Vancouver went pretty far in. We're inland; there's no ocean around here! And I bet it would be pretty cold if there was. I grew up on, in, and around the ocean. I have a different relationship to it. My ocean is blue, warm, and powerful. We all have different relationships to our environments. An Ottawa corn farmer has a different relationship to his patch of corn. You have different relationships to snow, to mountains, to corn, and to your own notion of what it means to experience landscape. So when I see an ocean, I will tell you different things about it, just by looking. So my senses—my ability to see—is mediated by history, genealogy, culture, context, experience. The idea that all of you see the ocean in the same way is false, and this is neither bad nor good. It is just a fact. Our senses are culturally mediated, and that's an uncomfortable thought for many people. It's an uncomfortable idea because relativism then comes into play. People often want to explain the world in either universal or relativistic terms. There's nothing in between. But I believe the world is not that way, and these are instead false dichotomies that keep us separated simply because we believe they do. Even the duality that we speak of is constantly moving. The duality in our Hawaiian cultures is obvious. In our environment, in the water, in our rains—even the rains have gender, our storms have gender, our winds have gender. Everything has gender, but that gender shifts. There are male traits that shift into female traits, and strength then becomes flexible, and female traits that become more male, and so receptivity becomes assertive. So the idea that my senses are culturally directed is a given because I grew up on an island. But how does this affect how you see the world? It simply does. What you hear, what you taste, what you see is distinct based on how and where you grew up. So that's a second assumption that we're trying to understand.

What about culture and how it helps me view the world? And how does this shape knowledge experiences, knowledge priorities, and knowledge exchanges? I believe culture shapes our view of the world and thus how knowledge is experienced because how I enter an ocean is totally different from how you would. For example, I have often seen Canadians come to Hawai'i and enter the ocean with jeans on. You don't go into the ocean with jeans normally in Hawai'i. It is dangerous because of how the sand and water fill the jean pockets. It makes your clothing heavy and cumbersome and makes it almost impossible to stay buoyant. Add to this rough waves, and you have a recipe for disaster. Anyway, don't do that when you come to Hawai'i, will you? So the idea that my senses are developed and shaped by place and culture is now a given. What, then, are the specifics of how your senses are shaped? How do they help you understand knowledge? This leads us to our third epistemological category: *relationship*.

Relationship and knowledge in an epistemological sense is the notion of self through other. Hawaiian epistemology is founded in relationship—relationships

with people, relationships with relatives alive and past, relationships with an idea, or relationships with our environment. It is no longer simply a quaint thing to discuss the animism of our natural environment—it is a fact. The living relationships we have with our natural world are a fact that mediates how I see, how I experience, and how I understand. In relationships with people it is not simply I looking at *You* but *I-You* in constant rapport, experience, and dialogue. I do not see myself separate from you, because regardless of who we are, I believe that self is a reflection of other. We're connected. Simple. The autonomous *I* is a new invention. It is not an Indigenous idea to view ourselves separate from all things, nature and each other. We are all parts of a whole. This doesn't mean that collaboration is made easier; it's more a statement of connectability. So the idea of relationship is key in knowledge. This is why the self-esteem movement of the 1970s-1980s did not do well in Hawai'i, I think, because the main premise of the movement was that it doesn't matter so much what other people think of you, it matters most what *you* think of you. Sounds nice, doesn't it? Well, you know what? It turns out that it does matter what my aunty thinks of me. I want her to choose me for a responsibility because then I know that I am valued. Call it negative psychology, but I call it community. It becomes dysfunctional when aunty is strung out on drugs or is troubled in other areas, but in my Hawaiian community, relationships matter and how adults teach me is how I grow up. In fact, if I have a too-high sense of myself, we know these people as haughty and trivial. These are not Hawaiian traits you wish to pass on to the next generation. I do recognize that a healthy self-concept is vital, but my point is that we get it in relationship with other, not simply with ourselves. This is the nature of relationship and it links to knowledge acquisition and priority because of the affective connection to our sense of self that is intimately tied to other. So if you live on an island, it does matter what other people think of you. It does matter that I am challenged by my uncles or by my siblings or by my mother. I grow into my being with these challenges. I am honored with responsibility. We have trouble when that other is fractured or dysfunctional. I always tell my students, because our Hawaiian families are so in need, if the father is abusive there is someone in their family that has not been abusive. Find that, and honor that. Because of the nature and truth of what we know about relationships, you must find function somewhere in a family. It matters, and this is how we evolve. That is how we can acquire a knowing that endures. You give me more responsibility, you trust in me, you honor my capacity, even as a young kid, and I thrive. You can't think of yourself in isolation. The very notion of self is critical. Self is not autonomous self. It never is in Hawai'i. Self is self and other. The same breath. I am not divorced from my family, I am not alone. I am my family. Self is self with other. So even the notion of how we view the idea of self is distinct. Self is connected other, and this is an epistemological point. Based on ontology—ontology is the philosophy of essence—who are you, who are your people, where are you from, what difference does that make for you? That's ontology. It took me 10 years to figure that one out.

The fourth epistemology idea is *Utility and knowledge—the idea of wealth and usefulness*. Utility is fundamental to knowledge. I believe knowledge must be useful or have a function for it to be meaningful or important. What are the



characteristics of a plant? Does it describe an idea, person, or place? Does it heal, is it food, how does it link us to our history? Do we use it for bowls? Do we use it for canoes? If we did not have a purpose for this plant, it was not named. Thus extends the separation between clashing cosmologies that would negate utility, function, and relationship with regard to what was worth knowing and why. Hawaiians were considered stupid. If we were not able to name everything, then the assumption was that we didn't know what the plant was, or worse, we didn't care. We did and we do. Relationships, as we know, are fundamental, and it was also linked to use. When kids come to us and say, "Oh! This is so boring! Why do we have to know this?" Do you take their inquiry to heart? What are they really saying? Why do we believe that factual overload is equivalent to knowing something? What does it mean to be intelligent? These are the questions to which understanding epistemology directs us. After all, it is not an Indigenous belief to know names without understanding relationship. Knowing fewer names and more function did not make our universe smaller. It made it deeper. Mainstream knowledge advocates that we should know the name of every plant. It didn't make our universe smaller if we did not know every name of every plant. Those plants simply did not have a function or use in our world. It made what we did know relational, spiritual, utilitarian, and thus important. This is why the idea of utility and use is not a discussion of less-than knowledge, because in the current colonial structure knowledge is viewed as a thing we acquire and a thing that can be shared, usually through literacy.

Knowledge has become a *thing* as if enduring knowledge could ever be fully be quantified. This to me is simply information. Knowledge that is practiced is knowledge. So that's the thing about utility and plants. It has to have a relationship, and we have to use it. So that's another aspect of Hawaiian epistemology.

The sixth epistemological category that surfaced during my conversations with Elders and friends was *Words and knowledge—the idea of causality in language*. This category surfaced first during a literature review that kept referring to the nature and quality of what it means to be from an oral culture. Do we truly have any idea what that means in this modern culture of literacy and signed contracts? I believe we do not. The nuance and depth of our Hawaiian language surprises us daily as we continue to uncover the mysteries of sound as part of a message, or words with multiple meanings based on the context in which they are placed. My aunt Florence reminded me of this link when she spoke of food that was sour for a family gathering. "You always knew who was talking stink." A correlation between words and how the long rice tasted helped me see that knowledge was also part of a larger empirical sense that included how molecules were shaped by our dialogue. Thus we have an old saying: "Words heal, words kill."

How does this idea of causality in language relate to epistemology? It affects all that I know and think if what is said has a life and can change the temperature of long rice. Knowledge was a living experience and saying made it so. This is why we spoke in metaphor and imagery. This is why we never asked if uncle was going fishing. The sound of the words scared the fish away and uncle would then put down his gear and do something different, usually with a scolding to the ignorant questioner first.

Words and causality—it's fascinating! We've been lazy about this idea in Hawai'i because our words now are used almost flippantly and without true understanding of their power. When we can "talk-stink" about a person, that stink will return. Words cause something. For Elders and our ancient people we had terms that allowed you to enter a forest or show your good manners beside the ocean. We even had people who could pray you to death. This teaches me that words had a life, a resonance, and a purpose in and out of schools. Even if we do not believe in the impact of this idea, it still exists in the life of language. My belief or my nonbelief of a situation does not negate its existence. It exists, whether you believe it or not, and that is the truth of the wisdom of ancient ways of knowing.

The last epistemological category relates to *The body-mind question: alternatives to the illusion of separation*. In Hawaiian the word for wisdom is *na'auao*, and *na'au* is the root of that word—it literally means "gut." Our stomach region is the site of both intellect and emotion. It is a connected idea that highlights the combining of both heart and cognition for a fuller and richer experience of an idea or thought. *Na'au* also refers to the heart and intellect. In a Hawaiian mind then, head and heart are both located in our stomach region. It means all those things. So the split that they call *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) is a separation between mind and body, and it is not a Hawaiian dilemma. Philosophically we don't have that problem. We physically don't believe that we think with our guts. We know we think with our whole body. But if knowledge is to become wisdom, it percolates from our gut. It's a metaphor for how to behave. If you think you're smart, that idea takes you away from your people because you think you're better than them. That is not wisdom—that's a person with lots of information. So the idea that mind is connected to body and that emotions and feelings play a part in intelligence is not new. When you go fishing and suddenly you have an inkling not to go, you don't go. And if you're tuned in, you're going to realize that there's a Kona breeze, that suddenly something came up and there's an idea in the back of your head that's telling you the conditions have changed and that it might not be safe to proceed. The wind has shifted, and you know that if the breeze changes, deep-water fishing is dangerous. And it just changed, in 30 seconds. So your intuition is part of your ability to understand place. It is deeply tied to reason and understanding relationships. It is a Hawaiian epistemological priority to link heart with mind.

Truly, this discussion will become political shortly in Hawai'i, because we are always subjected to standardized tests that will continually keep us at a certain level. Not that we're stupid. We're not stupid. But literacy is not the number one indicator of intelligence. It is an important aspect of living in a modern, capitalistic world, but it's not intelligence. Please do not mistake that for intelligence. So be patient with the people that you deal with. Be clear with your arguments, pro and con, about what you are saying. Cultivate a flexible mind that seeks to understand others. Epistemology is not separate from a culture's essence, from our ontology.

So when people try to divorce epistemology from ontology, the philosophy of essence, it cannot be done. When I say epistemology, I am also saying cosmology because it is linked to the very origin of a people. Surely what we know, what we value about knowledge, how we exchange what that knowledge is, and how it endures through time are some of the most vital aspects of who we are as In-

digenous people. We can no longer afford to misunderstand the interconnection between knowledge, essence, and origin. It is kin to separating creation, experience, and ideas from the notion of what culture is and who we are as evolving human beings. They're all related, and because each person is unique, each culture, then, holds a distinct way of viewing knowledge. And even the seven epistemological categories that I separated share fluid boundaries. Our *utility* is synonymous with *relationship*, which refers to *spirit*, which is the animism for the *causation of words*. It's all linked. Understand that the separation of categories was simply a way of discussing it. The whole in which Hawaiian epistemology exists is always greater than the sum of its parts. We are more than the average of a test score. We are more when we heal ourselves from the point of reference of an *other* we cannot possibly become. We are older. We came here for a purpose.

Find your purpose and be clear about it. Live it out and share it when appropriate. It has been an honor to address you here today. I am warmed and grateful and filled with peace. There is much, as always, to do—there is much more to undo. *Mahalo*.

## Teaching Story

### Spirit, Knowledge, and Vision From our First Nations' Sages

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley  
University of Alaska, Fairbanks

I am from the little village of Mamterilleq, which is called Bethel, the House of God—and it's anything but the House of God. My Yupiaq name is Angayuqaq, which in once instance could mean "parent" and in another instance can mean "chief." Of course, I prefer the latter.

My perception of myself is somewhat confused. As you can see, I'm Euro-traditionally dressed, and I expect you to abide by the Roberts' Rules of Order. I keep hearing about the protocol that the various tribes have, and I really respect that a lot. But I grew up with Roberts' Rules of Order. It's just now that I'm trying to get out of that mode.

In Alaska they are field testing an exit test for high school students. When they complete 12 years or however long it takes, they have to take an exit exam. If they pass it they get a high school diploma. If they don't pass certain segments, they can take the exam again. But if they fail again, then they get a Certificate of Participation—and I don't know exactly what that means.

Because I have the podium, I'm going to tell you a story. It seems that Forest Gump passed away, and he was on his way to the spiritual world. He was met at the pearly gates by St. Peter.

St. Peter said to him, "Well, Forest, you're going to have to take an exit exam. You're going to be exiting from the physical world to the spiritual world, and so I'm going to give you some questions to answer. Forest, are you ready?"

"Yeah, I'm ready."

"Okay, first question. How many days of the week have the letter 't'?"

"That's going to make me think."

"Well, how many days in the week have the letter 't'?"

"Two!"

"Well, how did you get two, Forest?"

"Well, there's today and tomorrow."

"Okay. The second question is a mathematical question. Forest, how many seconds are there in a year?"

"Boy, that's a tough one. I'm going to have to really think about it."

"Well, how many seconds are there in a year, Forest?"

"Twelve!"

"Well, how did you get twelve?"

"Well, there's January second ..."

"Third and final question. Forest, what is the first name of God?"