
REVIEW

Manulani Aluli Meyer. *Ho'oulu: Our Time of Becoming: Hawaiian Epistemology and Early Writings*. 1st ed. Honolulu: 'Ai Pohaku Press; Native Books, 2003. Pp. 236. ISBN 1883528240. US\$18.95 paper.

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Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and accordingly tries to answer questions such as: What is knowledge? Where does knowledge come from? What are the limits of knowledge? What is belief and what is truth? How is knowledge different from opinion? Western epistemology is said to have been founded by Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and other early Greek scholars.

In recent decades, a perspective called indigenous epistemology is gaining popularity not only among Third World or indigenous academics but also among Western academics. However, as yet it is not clear where exactly indigenous epistemology sits in academic disciplines. Should it sit in philosophy? If so, which philosophy? Should it sit in anthropology? If so, which anthropology? Or should it sit in multicultural education? If so, whose cultural concerns are the focus of such education? All things considered, it is perhaps healthier that, as a perspective concerned with articulating the lived-experience of the world's most stigmatized people, indigenous epistemology does not sit in any other scholarly niche but indigenous studies and from there makes its contributions to human knowledge.

Because there are uncertainties about its proper epistemic niche, there are also questions about what indigenous epistemology is or means. Fundamentally, it is concerned with the social construction of knowledge,

just like western or any other epistemologies, but from the standpoint of the lived experience of indigenous peoples. Thus, it is concerned, for instance, with questions such as how do indigenous peoples define knowledge; how do they construct knowledge; or what is epistemic belief and truth in indigenous ways of knowing? Perhaps more than Western epistemology, indigenous epistemology employs a great variety of methods in constructing knowledge. This is because any body of knowledge is created in a specific context, in a specific time period and for a specific reason or reasons. Therefore, it follows that the greater cultural diversity is the greater is methodological diversity. And there is greater cultural diversity among indigenous populations in the world.

Because of its relative newness as an academic field of scientific inquiry, scholarly publications on indigenous epistemology have been mostly journal articles (see Royal 2005; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001, 2002; Meyer 2001). There are very few books published on it. *Ho'oulu: Our Time of Becoming, Hawaiian Epistemology and Early Writings* by Manulani Aluli Meyer is one of the very few books published on indigenous epistemology recently. As can be seen from the title, Meyer's book is on Hawaiian indigenous epistemology. It is based on her doctoral dissertation, which she completed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. It is one of the most valuable books I have seen on Hawaiian and indigenous epistemologies. Meyer writes with great clarity, which, needless to say, is thankfully welcomed given that, by virtue of its theoretical nature, indigenous epistemology (like all epistemologies) tends to elude full comprehension even with the best of articulations.

Meyer studied at Harvard, which is one of the leading universities in the western world. Despite this, she remains a true native Hawaiian and Pacific philosopher, historian, educator, and social activist. This comes out clearly both in her depth of insights and the audacity with which she articulates the struggles of native Hawaiian people with colonization and, hence, the struggles of all indigenous peoples as well.

Meyer's epistemic audacity in using Hawaiian indigenous epistemology to counter Western conventional wisdom and hierarchy is seen and felt even in the organization of the book. For instance, instead of "chapters," the first seventy-five pages of the book are organized into parts. The "Introduction" and "chapters" appear much later on page 76. This might have been the publisher's decision rather than Meyer's; still it resonates with her political and epistemic activism. The same can be said of her choice of a local publisher. Readers more used to the conventional organization of a book, of course, might find this book not well organized. However, I would strongly advise that the reader should judge this book

not by its organization but by its contents. The knowledge contained in it is profound making this a wonderful introductory text on Hawaiian/Pasifika/indigenous epistemology. Adding to the book's value is Meyer's use of excellent examples from Hawaiian language to illustrate the depth and indigeneity of Hawaiian epistemology. For example, on page 96, she lists with English definitions twenty-eight types of *'ike*, "knowledge" in Hawaiian epistemology. There are, for instance, *'ike hana* (knowledge gained by experience), *'ike lau* (knowledge flowering), and *'ike 'uhane* (soul knowledge). Although on Hawaiian epistemology, hence indigenous epistemology, in terms of merit, this book ranks with introductory texts on Western epistemology such as *A Guide through the Theory of Knowledge* (1997) by Adam Morton and *Knowledge Puzzles: An Introduction to Epistemology* (1996) by Stephen Hetherington.

Meyer, indubitably, is among the few leading native scholars of Hawaiian as well as indigenous epistemologies. I highly recommend her book as an excellent starting point for anyone journeying to know about both native Hawaiian and indigenous epistemologies.

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