



Wounded Knee and the Prospect of Pluralism

SCOTT L. PRATT
University of Oregon

In the 1880s, a new religion called the Ghost Dance emerged in the Northwestern United States among the Native peoples there. What followed was a struggle to understand the meaning of the religion by European Americans, a struggle that led, on December 29, 1890, to the Wounded Knee Massacre. In this paper, I consider the process by which the Ghost Dance came to be understood by non-Native Americans. I argue that contemporary efforts were marked by two philosophical commitments: naturalism and ontological reductionism. These commitments left European America with few choices in how to respond to the practitioners of the Dance. After Wounded Knee, Charles Eastman, a Lakota trained in Western medicine and author of a series of books on Native culture and philosophy, offered an alternative philosophical perspective—pluralism—as a better way to understand Native traditions and as a means to foster coexistence. Along with Eastman, other non-Native thinkers also sought a viable form of pluralism to respond to the burgeoning religious and cultural diversity that marked the turn of the nineteenth century. I conclude by considering the conceptions of pluralism developed by William James and John Dewey in relation to the Ghost Dance and to the pluralism offered by Eastman.

In the spring of 1890, a Cheyenne named Kicking Bear addressed a Lakota council. In his address, Kicking Bear described a journey to the Great Spirit, who entrusted him with a message for all Native American peoples. The journey had begun at the Cheyenne reservation and proceeded at first by railroad. When the tracks ended, Kicking Bear disembarked and met two companions—witnesses, he said—whom he had not met before. After the three men ate, they mounted horses and set off past the point where “white men had cause to go.” As they crossed this border they encountered a black man who offered them wealth as long as they were willing to go no further down the trail. Kicking Bear and his companions turned away from the temptation and traveled two more days. As they reached the limit of their endurance, they encountered a man who seemed both white and Indian. This man fed Kicking Bear and his companions and then led them up a ladder to a place above the clouds that was the camp of the Great Spirit and his wife. From this place, through “an opening in the sky,”

their guide showed them a vision of “all the countries of the earth” repopulated by Native people and great herds of buffalo.

After a proper welcome, the Great Spirit addressed his visitors. “Take this message to my red children,” he began, “and tell it to them as I say it.” The earth, he explained, was getting old and it was time for renewal for the sake of the Great Spirit’s people. “I will cover the earth with new soil to a depth of five times the height of a man and under this new soil will be buried all of the whites, and all the holes and the rotten places filled in.” Indigenous plants and animals would be restored to the land and Native peoples would again “eat and drink, hunt, and rejoice.” As the people await the coming renewal, the Great Spirit directed that they learn to perform certain dances and perform them regularly. When the Great Spirit was finished speaking and the men had eaten, their guide, who they realized was the Messiah, led them back to earth so that Kicking Bear could deliver his message, verified by the witnesses who had accompanied him.¹

By the fall of 1890, the message of Kicking Bear and several other Native prophets had spread throughout much of the Northwest and the northern plains.² As the movement, by then called the “Ghost Dance,” spread, European Americans in the United States began to take notice. On November 16, 1890, the *New York Times* published a long article titled “The New Indian Messiah.” The report tells of the encounters of Sitting Bull (an Arapahoe man) and Porcupine (a member of the Cheyenne) with the Messiah described by Kicking Bear and others. In these encounters, the Messiah pledged to serve as an intermediary between the dying present earth and the Great Spirit who would soon renew it.³ The Messiah reaffirmed the message received by Kicking Bear when he “told Sitting Bull of his previous life on this earth, when he had come to help the white people, of their refusal to accept him, where he had been nailed to the cross, and finally said that before long the whites would all be removed from the country, the buffalo and the game would return in their old-time abundance, and the Indians would settle down to the old life.” The reporter concludes by answering the question on the minds of most of the *New York Times* readers: Does this new belief and practice represent a danger? “Under existing circumstances,” the reporter wrote, “there is little probability of an outbreak. The prophets preach a gospel of peace and say that it will not be necessary to kill any white people. The Christ will attend to them and in his own way remove them” (*New York Times*, 1890b).

A few days earlier, the *Times* reported a statement by General Nelson Miles, Commander of the Missouri Division of the U.S. Army, who had just returned from Utah and Montana where he was investigating the Ghost Dance, which he called “the Indian Craze” (*New York Times*, 1890a). Miles claimed that the Ghost Dance was the product of a Mormon conspiracy to increase that group’s influence among the Native people of the Northwest.⁴ He concluded, “the situation is not alarming in any way, and I do not know whether any action

will be taken by the government regarding the matter until after I have made my report." A month later, *Harper's Weekly* gave another assessment of the Ghost Dance by Lieutenant Marion P. Maus who concluded that, while the Dance may be Mormon inspired, it was nevertheless "a perversion of the Christian religion as taught by missionaries and in its present form suits the wishes and hopes of the Indians."

Despite initial deflationary reports about the Dance, General Miles and others quickly changed their assessment and came to the conclusion that the Ghost Dance was in fact a threat.⁵ On November 23, the *New York Times* published a long report under the headline "It Looks Like War." The article led with a statement from Little Wound, a Lakota from the Pine Ridge reservation, explaining that the people would not cease their dancing at the request of the Indian Agent, Daniel F. Royer. Little Wound wrote: "I understand that the soldiers have come on the reservation. What have they come for? We have done nothing. Our dance is a religious dance, and we are going to dance until spring. If we find then that the Christ does not appear, we will stop dancing, but, in the meantime, troops or no troops, we shall start our dance on this creek in the morning." The reporter concludes: "This letter is an open defiance to the troops [now stationed at Pine Ridge]. The ghost dancers have been warned to stop their revolting orgies and this is their answer." Agent Royer is then quoted: "The [Lakota] mean war. They have been ordered to stop their dancing. They have refused to do so. It now remains for the soldiers to enforce their orders" (*New York Times*, 1890g). The article is followed by a second one about the people at the Pine Ridge reservation that proclaims, "The Wounded Knee Fanatics are Ready to Fight" (*New York Times*, 1890d). This article also reports that General Miles had empowered the local commander "to call as many troops to this point as he deemed expedient."⁶ In an editorial published in December in *The Word Carrier*, a missionary newspaper published at the Santee Agency in Nebraska, the writer summarized the conclusion widely held by then: "all of these [dances] alike ... should be prevented as far as possible until utterly eradicated, because they are potentially dangerous. We ought not to touch them as religious ceremonials but, as breeders of riot and rebellion, we must" (quoted in DeMallie 1982, 396).

Within several months, the Ghost Dance had gone from a curiosity and a "craze," to a fanaticism, and finally to a cause of certain war despite Native appeals to the contrary and pleas for peace. In order to preempt what Miles said would be the inevitable attack on white settlements, the U.S. military mobilized troops throughout the West and, in October 1890, responded to Agent Royer's request that the army send six to seven hundred troops to the Pine Ridge Agency.⁷ On December 28, Chief Big Foot's band of Lakota encountered Major Whiteside and elements of the Seventh Cavalry and agreed to be escorted peacefully to an established camp along Wounded Knee Creek on the way to Pine Ridge. There, the Lakota set up camp surrounded by U.S. troops, who, that night, celebrated

the “capture” of Big Foot and his people. The next morning, now under the command of Major Forsyth, the Seventh Cavalry separated the Lakota into two groups of 106 men and approximately 250 women and children and then demanded that the Lakota surrender their weapons.⁸ When nearly all of the weapons were surrendered, someone—probably a deaf mute Lakota man⁹—fired his weapon as some soldiers tried to take it away.¹⁰ The soldiers quickly retreated to the perimeter of the Indian camp and then the Seventh Cavalry, arrayed in a square around the camp, opened fire. Within an hour, as most of the Lakota lay dead or dying, a blizzard moved in. Survivors that could be found by the army were loaded into wagons and taken to the Pine Ridge agency along with thirty-nine wounded soldiers. When the blizzard ended, 146 Lakota men, women, and children were unceremoniously buried in a mass grave. It is likely that many more were killed and their bodies removed by relatives during the blizzard before the burial party arrived from Pine Ridge. Still others were wounded as they fled the carnage and later died of their wounds. Some estimate that as many as three hundred of the 356 members of Big Foot’s group were killed at the creek. Twenty-five soldiers were also killed, most as a result of “friendly fire” from across the square. Newspapers in the weeks that followed declared that a great battle had been fought and the “Sioux Rebellion” stopped. To confirm the valor of the Seventh Cavalry in its action against the Lakota, eighteen Congressional Medals of Honor were granted to soldiers involved in the massacre, more than in any other single U.S. military action before or since. Writing in *Harper’s Weekly* on January 24, 1891, correspondent Charles G. Seymour summarized the justification for action.

General Miles admits that the ghost dance, which eventually inflamed nearly all the young men in the great Sioux nation, was merely a cloak for the plot which was to have burst when the grass got green, and snuffed out the lives of hundreds of unprotected settlers living in isolated places on the frontier. ... Big Foot, who perhaps was the actual leader of the fanatical Northern Sioux after the death of Sitting Bull,¹¹ was slain, with nearly all of his band in an engagement with the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee. This awful slaughter again awed the hostiles and made it easier for General Miles to treat with them. (1891, 106)

While no evidence was found then or since of a plot to attack white settlements, the preemptive strike effectively ended most of the efforts of the Plains Indians to live life free of reservations and the U.S. Indian Service. Although U.S. forces remained ready to fight for some months after, over the next few years the military turned its interests elsewhere—first to suppressing labor actions and then to the Spanish American War.¹²

While the Ghost Dance had offered hope to Native people, it posed deep questions for whites. How were they to understand the claims of renewal by prophets like Kicking Bear? What did the prophecy portend for relations along

the borders in the West? Was it possible to coexist with people who held such beliefs? Most whites, it appears, concluded that the Ghost Dance was a threat that must be ended. While some favored a policy of aggressive assimilation where Native beliefs and culture were set aside in favor of Christianity, property ownership, and farming, others claimed that such a policy was too slow and ineffective. The “awful” action at Wounded Knee was a necessary, even humanitarian, response because it brought a quick end to a “craze” that was good for neither whites nor Indians. The *Word Carrier* concluded in January 1891, “Taking [the slaughter of a whole tribe of Indians] in its bearings on the whole condition of things among the rebellious [Teton] Sioux it was a blessing. It was needful that these people should feel in some sharp terrible way the just consequences of their actions, and be held in wholesome fear from further folly” (quoted in DeMallie 1982, 397). These assessments of the situation, however, did not stand on their own.

Beneath the proclamations of those who favored assimilation and those who favored war, there operated a certain strategy of understanding—an epistemology and an ontology—in terms of which the prophets and their message acquired meaning for non-Native people. In retrospect, the Ghost Dance and the action at Wounded Knee can be seen not only as a historical event, but also as a signal moment in the development of a set of philosophical commitments that gave meaning and direction to those who took up arms against the Lakota. Such commitments—arguably still active in American society—can here be considered in their outcome and in contrast to alternative philosophical commitments that emerged in the years following Wounded Knee. In the remainder of this paper, I will suggest that the philosophical framework that dominated the interpretation of the Ghost Dance for European-descended Americans provided few alternatives other than the destruction of Native people. After Wounded Knee, however, thinkers, Native and non-Native, came forward to offer a philosophical pluralism that could lead to a wider range of responses to the radical differences embodied in the Ghost Dancers and even to the possibility of coexistence. This pluralism emerged in a variety of forms during the three decades after Wounded Knee and can be found in the work of Charles Eastman, William James, John Dewey, and Jane Addams, among others. I will discuss Eastman’s response to Wounded Knee and his conception of pluralism and then briefly suggest its relation to the pluralisms of James and Dewey in hope that taking up the issue in this way will renew a conversation about pluralism grounded in the American philosophical tradition.

The name for the Ghost Dance in Eastern newspapers, “The Messiah Craze,” accurately suggests the philosophical frameworks that European Americans used to make sense of the movement. Given the apparently central role played by the racially ambiguous Messiah in the prophecies of Kicking Bear and others, the movement was viewed as framed by the Western notion of a

Messiah and not, for example, as a renewal movement framed primarily by ecological relations, as one might read Kicking Bear's vision. That the dance was also viewed as a "craze" (as opposed, for example, to a religious revival like the Great Awakening) suggests that the commitment to the so-called messiah and the prophecies of renewal was a kind of insanity. Such an approach to understanding the Ghost Dance also led to the conclusion that its claims and practices were meaningless except as symptoms of some mental disorder. Should one reject the conclusion that the Dance was simply a mania, the alternative appeared to have been the view that the movement was fundamentally instrumental, serving some end independent of the one it claimed.¹³

General Miles, for example, favored the instrumental approach. Apparently not the sort to explain things in terms of pathologies, Miles saw the Dance as part of a larger non-Indian conspiracy. Accordingly, Native people believed the stories of the Messiah, not because they had standing as claims about the world, but because they were duped by others. William H. Hare, an Episcopal bishop at Pine Ridge, took a similar approach, attributing "the present delusion" to the work of a "Heathen Party" within the Native community who steadfastly refused to accept the "civilization" brought by missionaries and the U.S. Indian Service (*New York Times*, 1890j). Such "Heathens" convinced naive Indians that the prophecy of renewal was credible in order to prevent such people from becoming Christian. The Indian Rights Association (or IRA) shared Hare's conclusion and claimed that the Ghost Dance was a kind of delusional response to circumstances.¹⁴ From their perspective, however, the "delusion" was a byproduct of incompetent management of the agencies as a result of the policy that made Indian agents political appointees (*New York Times*, 1890i).¹⁵ Had the agents at Pine Ridge and elsewhere managed the reservations better, no prophetic movement would have emerged. In each case, it is clear that the prophecies were viewed as having no standing as claims about the world and the accompanying dances were viewed as no more than empty ceremonies. At worst, the Ghost Dance was a kind of involuntary insanity brought about by bad circumstances and at best was a simple case of manipulation.

The popular press and the statements by Miles, Royer, and others represent a roughly defined philosophical perspective in which the Ghost Dance could only be understood as meaningful in terms of a "craze" or as a product of manipulation by people who did not share the beliefs they promoted. A more elaborate—though not radically different—philosophical perspective can be found among scholars in the emerging field of anthropology who met together at the second annual meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society in November 1890. The *New York Times* (1890k) published a lengthy report on the meeting focusing on how the society interpreted the Ghost Dance. Alice C. Fletcher, an ethnographer who had recently returned from the Nez Perce Agency in Idaho, was asked to report on the Ghost Dance and its origins.¹⁶ Fletcher identifies many ways in which the Ghost Dance was continuous with longstanding Plains Indian

beliefs and practices and so rejected the idea that non-Natives invented the Ghost Dance.¹⁷ At the same time, the centrality of the Messiah and the hope for renewal proved that the movement was best seen as a response to the oppressive circumstances brought by white settlement of the West. Fletcher concludes: “In a rudely dramatic but pathetic manner this ‘Messiah Craze’ presents a picture of folk suffering, and their appeal for the preservation of their race, to the God of their oppressors” (Fletcher 1891, 60).¹⁸

Franz Boas, who had immigrated to the United States in 1886 and worked as an ethnographer based in Worcester, Massachusetts, replied to Fletcher’s remarks.¹⁹ “These crazes have occurred before,” he said. “There was a widespread craze among the natives of the west of Greenland at about the opening of the present century. ... I do not attribute these crazes to a great extent to politics. They are a disease” (quoted in the *New York Times*, 1890k). Other participants in the conference concurred with Boas’s diagnosis.²⁰ The prophecies and practices of the Ghost Dance should be understood as a natural human response to oppressive circumstances, whose particular character was in turn the result of the particular character of both the indigenous and oppressor cultures. In short, properly understood, the Ghost Dance was reduced from a prophecy about the world of the Plains peoples and transformative practices in it to symptoms of what Boas called a “nervous disease” (quoted in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 1891, 6).²¹

While there is much to be said about these various approaches to understanding the Ghost Dance, they seem to share in two basic commitments. First, the claims of the Ghost Dance and the practices it required should be understood in terms of psychological as well as social and biological processes—that is, the Ghost Dance should be naturalized.²² Second, it is possible to reduce the claims and practices of the Ghost Dance to a naturalized account in a way that leaves no significant remainder. In other words, once one has explained the “craze” in naturalized terms (as, for example, a kind of mental disease), there is nothing left that would constitute claims about the world, nonpathological practices that could be carried out, and so on. The first commitment, naturalism, marks a deflation of claims and practices from an epistemic perspective. What appears to be a knowledge claim is properly something else. The claim that a renewal of the earth is soon to come, for example, is actually a response to white settlement, Native removal, and the near extinction of the buffalo. In this case, the naturalized meaning of the prophecy is social and psychological and so is not properly a meaningful claim about future events. The second commitment makes an ontological deflation, or an “ontological reduction” (to borrow Quine’s term), in which the alleged objects of the Ghost Dancer’s world (the Messiah, the Great Spirit, the region where “no white man has cause to go,” and so on) can be reduced to objects of the world as experienced by the surrounding European-descended peoples. Here the “Messiah” is a figment of wishful thinking,

the Great Spirit is the Christian God, and the region beyond whites is a dreamland that has no concrete existence. The particularities of the prophecies and the dances are reduced by some “proxy function” to equivalent particularities in a world fully accessible to non-Natives. Whether from the perspective of Miles or Boas, it seems, the Ghost Dance admitted of a meaning without reference in a world without difference.

Once the Ghost Dance was understood through the twin commitments of naturalism and ontological reduction, it seemed that European Americans had little choice in their responses to it. At one extreme, there remained those who, like Richard Henry Pratt, superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School, advocated assimilative education under the slogan “Kill the Indian and save the man.” This approach appeared to have the advantage of offering a humanitarian response to the plight of those who might become Ghost Dancers. Rather than killing such rebels, they would be reeducated to become successful members of the surrounding society. This approach also had the unfortunate disadvantage of being both slow and constantly faced with the prospect of a kind of Indian recidivism where those schooled in white civilization would “fall back” into traditional ways when they returned home. In any case, the assimilative approach provided little immediate action against Native leaders bent on destroying white settlements. General Miles and those like Agent Royer who demanded swift preemptive action represented the other extreme. By bringing to bear overwhelming force, the United States could quickly cut out the disease that threatened both Native and white people, and, as Seymour observed, “awe” the remaining dissidents into submission.

Among those who experienced Wounded Knee first hand was Charles Eastman, a young Lakota physician also known as Ohiyesa. Eastman was born in 1858 and until his fifteenth year lived the traditional nomadic life of the Santee Sioux. Eastman’s father, Many Lightnings, was imprisoned in 1862 for his part in the Sioux War in Minnesota and so Eastman was raised by his grandparents and other relatives. After Abraham Lincoln pardoned Many Lightnings, he became a successful farmer and around 1873 was reunited with his son. At the insistence of his father, Eastman enrolled in the Santee Indian School and then the preparatory academy of Beloit College in Wisconsin. Eastman attended college at Knox in Illinois and Dartmouth in New Hampshire and completed his education in 1890 with a degree from Boston University Medical School. He was hired by the U.S. Indian Service and began his assignment as the agency physician at Pine Ridge on November 1, 1890.²³ Less than two months later, on December 29, 1890, Eastman and others living at the agency heard the sounds of gunfire in the distance. Later that day, wounded soldiers and wagons of wounded Lakota were brought to the agency, where Eastman set up a makeshift hospital in the Episcopal church. Two days after the massacre, as the blizzard abated, Eastman led a rescue party to Wounded Knee Creek, where he discov-

ered three survivors buried in the snow. "All this," he wrote in his autobiography, "was a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man" (1997, 114). He concludes by saying that he "passed no hasty judgment" on "white civilization," but he does not deny that a judgment was passed. This judgment, developed in a series of books published between 1902 and 1915, presented an alternative philosophical standpoint aimed, in part, at preventing further slaughter of those who live in different worlds.

Significantly, Eastman begins his own discussion of the Ghost Dance by rejecting the notion of an Indian Messiah. He concluded, "A religious craze such as that of 1890–91 was a thing foreign to the Indian philosophy" (92). Like most intellectuals of the time, Eastman accepted the notion that the Ghost Dance was a response to white settlement that adopted elements from both indigenous and oppressor cultures. He acknowledges that this sort of prophetic response had long been a part of Native culture as well and cites Tenskwatawa, Tecumseh's brother, as presenting a similar prophecy. The "Messiah Craze" was, in this sense, foreign to Native philosophy. Even as he argued against viewing the Ghost Dance as an indigenous tradition, he nevertheless granted credit to its believers. When asked to mediate a dispute between Lakota believers and nonbelievers, Eastman evoked what he called "Indian etiquette" (96). After a lengthy pause following the request, he replied that both sides should have a hearing and seek a way to peacefully coexist in the larger community. "There is one thing for us to do and be just to both sides. We must use every means for a peaceful settlement of this difficulty. Let us be patient; let us continue to reason with the wilder element, even though some hotheads may threaten our lives" (96). He made the same argument to Agent Royer when Royer decided to call for troops to put down the Dance. While Eastman rejected the claims of the prophets, he accepted what he took to be a distinctively Native approach to responding to those claims. Rather than destroying the believers, he argued for engaging them and allowing the Dance to run its course.²⁴

Eastman captured the contrast between the Native approach he recommended for understanding the Ghost Dance and the approach used by whites in the conflict. In his 1911 volume, *The Soul of an Indian*, Eastman writes:

A MISSIONARY once undertook to instruct a group of Indians in the truths of his holy religion. He told them of the creation of the earth in six days, and of the fall of our first parents by eating an apple. The courteous savages listened attentively, and after thanking him, one related in his turn a very ancient tradition concerning the origin of the maize. But the missionary plainly showed his disgust and disbelief, indignantly saying:—"What I delivered to you were sacred truths, but this that you tell me is mere fable and falsehood!" "My brother," gravely replied the offended Indian, "it seems that you have not been well grounded in the rules of civility. You saw that we, who practice these rules, believed your stories; why, then, do you refuse to credit ours?" (Eastman, 2002, 30–31)²⁵

The story points toward an epistemic commitment different from the one I have called naturalism. The Native view proposed by Eastman appears to grant credibility to claims about the world without an effort to give a naturalized account of those beliefs. By “believing” the missionary’s “truths,” the Indians in the story in some way accept the claims as what they seem to be—claims about a world in which there is a single creator God. As such, these new “believers” can engage the missionary’s claims in a variety of ways, including ones that expect experiential implications.²⁶ From this perspective, the claims may turn out to be directive claims about the world or they may turn out to fail. In contrast to naturalism, the Native commitment seems broader in that it does not make meaning strictly relative to the context of human consciousness as embodied and social (though it does not rule out a role for such a context), but starts from an expectation that claims like those of the Native prophets mark the insistent character of a world in which beliefs and practices emerge interactively. If this is so—if beliefs about creators and corn goddesses are products of a world in which creators and corn goddesses demand recognition—then the first commitment calls for a second ontological one in which worlds cannot be reduced to one another without remainder. Though the Christian God can be compared with the “Great Mystery” Eastman describes in the opening chapter of *Soul of an Indian*, that same God cannot be reduced to the Great Mystery or vice versa (Eastman, 2002, 3). The histories and interests of the Christian God and of the Mystery may intersect, but they also diverge. In short, since, in the first place, claims are given credit, such credit cannot simply be ignored when the question shifts from what we know to what there is. The result is ontological pluralism. It is no wonder that after Eastman introduces the story of the missionary, he presents a series of Lakota origin stories without a psychological gloss or an ontological reduction. He simply presents the stories so that the reader must engage the claims and, it appears, be prepared to credit them.

From this perspective, Eastman actually offers a much more subtle response to the Ghost Dance than might first appear. Even as he denies that the Dance is a part of traditional Native culture, he does not deny it credit. Further, if the Ghost Dance itself accepts the commitments reflected in Indian etiquette and ontological pluralism, then to that extent the Ghost Dance is part of the Native tradition in which Eastman places himself. Little Wound’s letter (quoted earlier) is instructive. While Little Wound views himself as a believer and so grants credit to the claims of the prophets, he also sees the test of the belief in the practices it directs and the results it brings. He and his people would try the Dance until spring and see what happened. In this sense, the naturalism that leads to a social psychological account of the Dance is replaced by an experimental disposition that takes the claims as made about the world in the context of unfolding activity. That ontological pluralism is also implied follows from Kicking Bear’s original vision. It is clear throughout the vision that different worlds border each other and though they have shared borders, they are also

distinct regions. When Kicking Bear claims that Native people and Buffalo will be restored to “all the countries of the earth,” it is evidently the earth that once held such beings—that is, regions of a still larger earth will be renewed in a way that neither exhausts the world nor leads to a loss of distinctiveness in it. Eastman seems to deny that the Ghost Dance existed prior to the intersection of Native and European worlds, but he also denies that the intersection expressed in the Ghost Dance required the elimination of epistemic and ontological pluralism.

At the same time Eastman was making a claim for the viability (in fact, for the necessity) of plural worlds, a group of non-Native thinkers was, in a sense, answering the same questions from the perspective of European America. Foremost among these were William James, John Dewey and Jane Addams.²⁷ It is safe to say that none of these thinkers begin their work from the event of Wounded Knee as a motivation to pursue questions of pluralism. At the same time, the 1890s marked a period of great experienced diversity and a demand—at least for these thinkers—to develop a philosophical response. Even as indigenous survival fell from the set of major concerns faced by most European Americans, the massive influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia and the migration of southern blacks to Northern cities, as well as the burgeoning clash of science and religion, placed issues of difference in the forefront of concern and, as such, became part of the landscape from which people like James, Dewey, and Addams took up their reflective work. While some thinkers responded to this developing landscape and the possibility of pluralism with forms of naturalism and reductionism, these pragmatists responded by trying to generate a pluralism that could better capture the character of human experience. None of these thinkers adopted a pluralism of sharp divisions, but rather attempted to theorize both a common ground and an irreducible pluralism. As James summarizes, “the world is ‘one’ in some respects, and ‘many’ in others. But the respects must be distinctly specified, if either statement is to be more than the emptiest abstraction” (1977, 266).

The nature of the common ground, the ways in which things were unified, proved difficult and promising at the same time. James dubbed the common ground “pure experience.” “My thesis,” he writes, “is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff ‘pure experience,’ then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter” (170). The “many” of experience is then understood as product of particular relations that condition what is known or is experienced even as these relations also *are* the particulars encountered. Different worlds can be understood as complex relational structures that, while made of the same “stuff,” are different in virtue of the connections they embody. In some cases, one can conclude, a complex may

share only its “stuff” with other worlds, while in other cases complexes may intersect and share particulars even as they retain their distinctiveness.

James himself gives an example of his pluralism by proposing “the puzzle of how one identical room can be in two places,” which, he concludes, “is at bottom just the puzzle of how one identical point can be on two lines” (173). The room, like the point, amounts to an intersection of two processes, places in one case and lines in the other. In one process (or line of development, to blend the metaphors of process and line), the room is “your ‘field of consciousness’” and so part of your “personal biography.” In the other line of development, the room is “where you sit” and so is part of “the history of the house of which the room is a part” (173). Neither place has priority as the “real” thing, nor does the self-identical room insofar as it *is* as a result of the intersecting lines of development. One might argue that the alleged differences between the places are merely a way of talking about the self-same room. Allowing that the places in this case mark on the one hand a “mental” line of development and on the other a “physical” line of development, the difference between places is extreme. “If, in short, you follow the [mental line of development], taking it along with events of personal biography solely, all sorts of things are true of it which are false, and false of it which are true if you ... follow it in the physical direction, and relate it to associates in the outer world” (174). At the same time, the intersection, the overlapping of places, also has an impact on the diverging lines of development. You imagine a renovated room with a new southern exposure and carry out the renovation, interacting with the physical room and changing its direction. Or you are inspired by the room’s lines and the way it catches the afternoon light and are inspired to write a song or sleep the day away, forever changing your personal history.

Although James does not carry the case to the issues raised by the Ghost Dance, it appears that the same things could be said about, for example, one of the “countries” to have been renewed, the Black Hills of South Dakota. The self-identical terrain is at least two places, the intersection of two lines of development: one a history of white settlement, gold rushes, and treaties; the other, also called *Paha Sapa*, a product of sustaining a people for generations, followed by the disruption of traditional ways of life, their exclusion from the land by treaty and force, the near extinction of the buffalo, and the expectation of a future restoration. Claims about one place will sometimes be true of it and not of the other and vice versa, even as the status of every claim will turn on the ways in which it operates within the lines of development of which it is a part. Neither the Gold Rush Black Hills nor *Paha Sapa* has ontological priority, but each is real and consequential. Which place becomes dominant has to do with what happens. The pluralist Eastman would recognize the process as one that requires engagement and patience and attention to the implications of the place. An experimental disposition also leads to a rejection of certain aspects of con-

trasting worlds. When the prophet Short Bull instructed participants in the Ghost Dance to wear special shirts that would protect them from bullets, the shirts failed the test of experience. The world of the dancers did not vanish but was changed in the course of its interactions. When Miles concluded that the Lakota plotted to attack white settlements, no evidence was ever found. From a pluralist perspective, had Miles given the Ghost Dance credit in the way suggested by Eastman, the European American world would not have vanished but may have been transformed in some way to change its relations with Native people. And still, Eastman might argue, there are two places that intersect again and again and affect each other in considerable ways.

Dewey adopts a significant part of the pluralism James proposes, enough so that Dewey describes his own position as “empirical pluralism” (1917, 64) grounded in what he calls the postulate of immediate empiricism. Just as pure experience bridges epistemology and ontology for James, the postulate operates in a similar way for Dewey without the need to make a general claim about common “stuff.” “Immediate empiricism postulates,” Dewey states, “that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term ‘thing’—are what they are experienced as” (1905, 158). For Dewey, claims made about the world arise in experience and so have a kind of *prima facie* standing grounded in the things of experience. Dewey illustrates his position with the example of a horse experienced by a horse-trader, a jockey, and a “timid family man who wants a ‘safe driver.’” Each person (to borrow James’s way of speaking) intersects with the common thing—in this case, the horse. The result is, in effect, three horses, differing in the ways they are understood and the futures they promise even as they all have the present thing in common. “If these accounts turn out to be different in some respects and congruous in others,” where each “account” stands for a horse, “this is no reason for assuming the context of one to be exclusively ‘real,’ and that of others to be ‘phenomenal’” (159). At issue in the divergent experiences of the horse is “a contrast, not between a Reality, and various approximations to, or phenomenal representation of Reality, but between different reals of experience” (159).

If Dewey took the postulate of immediate empiricism as a starting point, he, like Eastman, would conclude that the claims of the Ghost Dance are claims about the experienced world. If Kicking Bear experienced the Messiah, the thing he experienced is *prima facie* the Messiah. If his conclusions interpreting the Great Spirit’s message called for transforming dances, then they are reasonably carried out. At the same time, should these objects fail the test of further experience, they would be revised or replaced as the line of development proceeds. As Little Wound concluded, the dance would be tried until spring. When Eastman concluded that the Ghost Dance would “die out,” he was not claiming that people would simply get tired of the belief or of the dancing, but rather he predicted that it would fail in experience and be revised or rejected. Eastman gave credit

to the Ghost Dance in a pluralistic universe in which worlds intersect and diverge, but are never static.

In one of his assessments of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee, Vine Deloria Jr. concludes, “The famous Ghost Dance of the last decade of the 1800’s was based upon an eschatology, but its theme was the moral worth of the Indian as opposed to the white” (1999, 39). Some might argue that such a conclusion illustrates the weakness of pluralism, particularly one that grants no ontological priority to any particular world. Without a “real” world to consult, valuation appears to become a matter of preference or chance. From this critical perspective, it would seem that the so-called triumph of General Miles over the Lakota had as much value as an outcome that led to coexistence. In fact, James and Dewey would agree with Eastman that the acceptance of pluralism incorporates a particular kind of valuation based on a process of interaction in light of present circumstances, as well as the recognition that pluralism is not merely an option, but the necessary framework for any valuation at all. On this view, pluralism gives a notion of “right and justice,” that is, it gives a process of valuation that provides both a common ground and the possibility of flourishing differences. Eastman concludes his autobiography by placing himself back into the context of those who embraced the Ghost Dance as a way of restoring pluralism to the land. Just as Kicking Bear began with the resources of white civilization as he took the railroad to its limits, and just as the prophet returned to his land with a message of renewal, Eastman learned from the whites and brought his own message of renewal. “I am an Indian,” he writes, “and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency. Nevertheless, so long as I live, I am American” (1977, 195).

Notes

1. All quotations are from Kicking Bear (1971).
2. The Ghost Dance movement of 1890, called “waniji wacipi,” or “spirit dance” by the Lakota (see DeMallie, 1982), originated with the visions of Wovoka, a Piute Indian. As presented by James Mooney, “The great underlying principle of the Ghost Dance doctrine is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery” (1973, 777.)
3. Porcupine’s vision was also reported in *Harper’s Weekly*. See Maus (1890).
4. Also see Miles (1891), written early in December 1890.
5. See Ostler (1996). Ostler observes that the standard interpretation of the military’s role in the Wounded Knee Massacre was the “army’s own representation of itself as dutifully responding to demands made by others—the Lakotas posed a serious threat, settlers and agents became alarmed and appealed for protection, the President called upon the Secretary of War, and the army responded” (220). Ostler concludes, however, that Miles and the U.S. Army in the West saw the Ghost Dance as an opportunity to expand its control over Indian affairs and increase its resources (243). General Miles was particularly interested in gaining a visible role in the West. He had been considered as a possible Republican presidential candidate in 1888 and may have had further political aspirations.

6. These articles are preceded on November 21 with one headlined “The Indians Dangerous” and on November 22 with one headlined “Indians Ready to Fight: The Pine Ridge Agency Place in Immediate Peril” (see *New York Times* 1890c, 1890d) Also on November 22, a second article explicitly linked the Ghost Dance to the threat of war. Summarizing a description of the dance, the reporter concludes “This is an accurate description of one of the famous ghost dances, to see one of which in this country at the present time is attended by the greatest peril.” (*New York Times*, 1890e). This article is followed by a third in which Mrs. James A. Finley, reporting on her recent visit to Pine Ridge, concludes “If the Government lets them alone there will be no need of troops: they will kill themselves dancing.” (*New York Times* 1890f)

7. See Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn (1999, 294). On November 23, 1890, the *New York Times* reported that the two cavalry regiments were dispatched to Pine Ridge at the request of Secretary of War Redfield Proctor and Secretary of State John W. Noble in consultation with President Benjamin Harrison. The report also mentions that the army was to recruit a thousand Indian scouts from among the Native people to serve as police for the various agencies in the region.

8. See Robertson (1996).

9. See Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn (1999, 295).

10. Also see Standing Bear (1975, 231–32).

11. Sitting Bull had been murdered by Agency police earlier in the month.

12. General Miles was involved in both of these military actions. He commanded the U.S. troops mobilized to suppress the Pullman Strike in 1894. He also led the invasion of Puerto Rico (1898) during the Spanish American War and helped to suppress the Philippine Insurrection (1899–1902) and the Boxer Rebellion (1900). See <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/MM/fmi77.html>.

13. Raymond DeMallie offers an assessment of twentieth-century treatments of the Ghost Dance in which he makes a similar point. Interpretations of the movement take one of two forms: “the Lakotas ... were either uncomprehending children or were motivated by precisely the same political and economic drives as white men. Both attitudes are as demeaning as they are misleading, and they fail to treat Indian culture with the same serious consideration afforded other cultures” (1982, 388–89).

14. The IRA was founded in 1883 by a group of Eastern whites who helped to pass the Dawes Act (also called the Allotment Act) in 1887 and actively advocated for Indian citizenship (granted by the Citizenship Act of 1924).

15. Agent Royer, for example, was appointed by the Republican Harrison administration in October to replace Agent Gallagher, a Democrat selected by the Cleveland administration to replace the well-regarded Republican agent V.T. McGillicuddy. Royer was described by Herbert Welsh, president of the IRA, as “destitute of any of those qualities by which he could justly lay claim to the position—experience, force of character, courage and sound judgment” (quoted in Mooney 1973, 848).

16. Fletcher (1838–1923) was born in Cuba and educated in the United States and Europe. She supported herself as a public lecturer. In 1879, while researching a speech on indigenous Americans at the Peabody Museum, she met Francis LaFlesche, the son of an Omaha chief. In 1881, Fletcher visited the Omaha reservation in Nebraska. After her visit she became an advocate for Omaha tribal issues in Washington, D.C. She became well known as an Indian advocate and, in the 1890s, as an ethnographer who, with La Flesche, “collected” and published numerous Native stories and songs. See Fletcher and La Flesche (1994) for an example of her work.

17. DeMallie comes to a similar conclusion (1982, 399–400).

18. The *New York Times* story and the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* give different versions of Fletcher’s talk. I use the version given in the *Journal*.

19. See the membership list of the American Folk-Lore Society (1891, 362). Boas became a lecturer at Columbia University in 1899. His work, especially *The Mind of Primitive Man*, was highly influential in the United States.

20. The *Journal* notes that many participants offered other evidence that the “craze” was an involuntary response to circumstances. One participant, D.S. Martin, argued that a similar “craze” emerged among Kentucky slaves in the years before the Civil War. The slaves believed that General Fremont (then in charge of the army stationed in Missouri) would cross the Mississippi and free the slaves on Christmas night (*Journal of American Folk-Lore* 1891, 6).

21. The notion of the Ghost Dance as an instance of a particular kind of reaction to the decline of a culture was developed by Anthony F.C. Wallace as the idea of a revitalization movement. See Wallace (1956). Wallace’s concept differs from Boas’s “disease” model of prophetic movements in that the leaders, according to Wallace, choose to begin the movement in order to revitalize their society. At the same time, I would argue that the notion of a revitalization shares the same naturalist and ontological reductionist commitments (discussed below) as these contemporary interpreters of the Ghost Dance.

22. See Kitcher (1992, especially 74–76) and Quine (1969, especially 82–83).

23. See Wilson (1983).

24. Luther Standing Bear presents a similar approach in his autobiography, *My People The Sioux*. Standing Bear also lived near the Pine Ridge Agency and though he rejected the claims of the prophets, he describes the debates between believers and nonbelievers that led to both critical engagement by both sides, but also to the continuation of the dance (1975, 217–21).

25. This story is an interesting selection for Eastman. It is taken from Benjamin Franklin’s “Remarks on the Savages of North America.” Franklin cites Conrad Weiser, a white interpreter, as the source of the story and tells the story about the Susquehanna Indians. Eastman quotes several phrases directly from Franklin, but most of the passage is a “free rendering.” See Franklin (1987, 971–72). In 1973, Vine Deloria Jr. quotes Eastman’s version of the story, attributing it to Eastman as an excellent example of one way in which Native and European cultures differ. See Deloria (1994, 85–87).

26. Arguably, the presence of a messiah and monotheism in the Ghost Dance could be seen as an acceptance of “truths” in this way.

27. I will not discuss Addams in here, but I will argue elsewhere that Addams’s work presents a theory for understanding the intersection between worlds. See especially Addams (1916).

Works Cited

- Addams, Jane. 1916. *The Long Road of Woman’s Memory*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. 1994. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.
- . 1999. *For This Land: Writings of Religion in America*. New York: Routledge.
- DeMallie, Raymond. 1982. “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account.” *Pacific Historical Review* 51: 385–406.
- Dewey, John. 1905. “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.” In *The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, Vol. 3. Ed. J. Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1976–1983.
- . 1917. “Duality and Dualism.” In *The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, Vol. 10. Ed. J. Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1976–1983.
- Eastman, Charles. 1997. *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P.
- . 2002. *Light on the Indian World: The Essential Writings of Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa)*. Ed. Michael O. Fitzgerald. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom.
- Fletcher, Alice C. 1891. “The Indian Messiah.” *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 4 (12): 57–60.
- Fletcher, Alice C., and Francis La Flesche. 1994. *A Study of Omaha Indian Music*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P. Originally published in 1893.
- Franklin, Benjamin. 1987. *Writings*. New York: Library of America.
- Gonzalez, Mario, and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. 1999. *The Politics of Hallowed Ground: Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty*. Urbana: U of Illinois P.
- James, William. 1977. *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*. Ed. John J. McDermott. Chicago: U of Chicago P.

- Journal of American Folk-Lore*. 1891. Second Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society. 4 (12) (January-March).
- Kicking Bear. 1971. "Address." In *Indian Oratory*, compiled by W.C. Vanderwerth, 197–201. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Kitcher, Philip. 1992. "The Naturalists Return." *Philosophical Review* 101 (1): 53–114.
- Maus, Marion P. 1890. "The New Indian Messiah." *Harper's Weekly*, December 6, 1890.
- Miles, Nelson A. 1891. "The Future of the Indian Question." *North American Review*, 410 (January): 1–10.
- Mooney, James. 1973. *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Wounded Knee*. Mineola, NY: Dover. Originally published in 1896.
- New York Times*. 1890a. "Probably a Mormon Trick." November 8, 1890.
- . 1890b. "The New Indian Messiah." November 16, 1890.
- . 1890c. "The Indians Dangerous." November 21, 1890.
- . 1890d. "Indians Ready to Fight: The Pine Ridge Agency Place in Immediate Peril." November 22, 1890.
- . 1890e. "The Ghost Dance: How the Indians Work Themselves up to Fighting Pitch." November 22, 1890.
- . 1890f. "To See Their Messiah: The Indians Strive in Their Dances to Produce Unconsciousness." November 22, 1890.
- . 1890g. "It Looks Like War." November 23, 1890.
- . 1890h. "The Messiah Craze." November 24, 1890.
- . 1890i. "The Politicians to Blame." November 26, 1890.
- . 1890j. "Interference Dangerous." November 26, 1890.
- . 1890k. "Weird Things in Dreams." November 29, 1890.
- Ostler, Jeffrey. 1996. "Conquest and the State: Why the United States Employed Massive Military Force to Suppress the Lakota Ghost Dance." *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (2): 217–48.
- Quine, W. V. 1969. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Robertson, Paul M. 1996. "Wounded Knee Massacre, 1890." *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*. Ed. F.E. Hoxie. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Seymour, Charles G. 1891. "The Sioux Rebellion: The Final Review." *Harper's Weekly*, January 31, 1891.
- Standing Bear, Luther. 1975. *My People The Sioux*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P.
- Wallace, Anthony F.C. 1956. "Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for Their Comparative Study." *American Anthropologist* 58: 264–81.
- Wilson, Raymond. 1983. *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*. Urbana: U of Illinois P.

Copyright of Journal of Speculative Philosophy is the property of Pennsylvania State University Press. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.