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How Not to Undiscipline Religion and Science: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Epistemic Resistance, and the Settler Imagination

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Abstract: Taking settler-environmental interest in Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (ITEK) as a case study, this paper critically examines some ethico-political pitfalls that can accompany attempts to undiscipline the conceptual and academic boundaries between religion and science. Although settler interest in ITEK appears to heed calls to center Indigenous perspectives in response to ecological crises, I argue that in practice such turns repeatedly enact neocolonial maneuvers that risk obfuscating and exacerbating the settler-colonial status quo. Employing the analytic of biocolonialism, I focus in particular on the discursive construction of Indigenous knowledge as a universal good that any interested parties might access and circulate. I criticize this conception on anti-colonial grounds and propose that it depends on a picture of knowledge as such as an apolitical commodity. By way of parochializing that conception and loosening its grip on the settler-environmental imagination, I examine expressions of Indigenous epistemic resistance which generate a competing picture of knowledge as anti-public or secret. I conclude by suggesting that this second picture invites settler environmentalists to cultivate capacities of going without ITEK and claiming that analysts should continue to pursue the sort of critical and constructive work performed here if experiments in undisciplining are to cohere with anti-colonialism.

Keywords: religion and science; Indigenous knowledge; traditional ecological knowledge; environmentalism; colonialism; biocolonialism; epistemic resistance; moral imagination; negative capability

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1. Introduction[1]

Western analysts and governments are increasingly interested in the potential value of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (ITEK) for managing ecological crises such as climate change and correcting non-Indigenous worldviews and cultures (see, e.g., Alexander et al. 2011; Gratani et al. 2016; Huntington 2004; Huntington et al. 2004, 2005; Lander and Mallory 2021; Liedloff et al. 2013; Nunn et al. 2024; Prabhakar and Mallory 2022; Wilson et al. 2015). This interest seemingly affirms the claims of Indigenous activists, leaders, and scholars who argue that Indigenous perspectives and practices should be central to humanity's response to environmental problems (see, e.g., Daniel 2019; Dongoske et al. 2015; NDN Collective 2023). Nevertheless, multiple neocolonial perils attend uncritical settler-environmental turns to ITEK. In this paper, I examine one such limitation: the construction of Indigenous knowledge as a universal good to which more or less anyone might help themselves. In addition to rehearsing conquest-era discursive moves that tacitly disinherit Indigenous peoples of their material-semiotic goods, I will suggest in Section 2 that this construal of Indigenous knowledge often reposes on a picture of knowledge as an apolitical commodity that, as such, should be accessed and circulated by anyone in the position to do so. In other words, in contexts of relating to others as knowers, settler discourses on ITEK index an imagination constrained by this epistemic picture to the extractive possibilities of accessing and circulating others' knowledge.

In Section 3, I examine activist statements and Indigenous studies scholarship to suggest that this conception of knowledge as a universally available, apolitical good is actively resisted by some Indigenous individuals and institutions. In these counter-discourses, Indigenous knowledge is represented as precisely something to which not everyone can and should help themselves. In Section 4, I argue that this alternative conception of knowledge and these expressions of refusal to trust or collaborate with settler environmentalists push settlers' imaginations beyond an extractive modality of relating to other knowers. Notably, Indigenous resistance and this alternative epistemic conception should spur settlers to cultivate the capacity to live in potential ignorance of that which they may desire to know.[2]

The revaluation of Indigenous perspectives signaled by growing interest in ITEK can be construed as an attempt to undiscipline, or strategically disrupt, the categories of science and religion or culture in the spirit of the present special issue. These categories not only partially organize the conceptual worlds of the analysts and agencies in question, but also help structure the disciplines of contemporary universities, within which those scholars work and upon which political institutions depend. One way to try to challenge those categories and the academic fields they license might be to reclassify under one rubric that which was previously placed under another, in this case, reassigning Indigenous perspectives from the religion/culture side to that of science. A consequence of my analysis will be to make some such strategies more troublesome, to show how even well-intended attempts to challenge misleading classificatory systems can ensnare the analyst or advocate in additional problematics. I will also suggest that attempts to undiscipline such distinctions that wish to have something to do with anti-colonial praxis should continue to excavate and mitigate the sorts of subtle techniques I examine here. The undisciplining of religion and science, in other words, requires phases of reflexivity to complement its explicit aims, moments within which the very effort to undiscipline comes into question and encounters teleological heterogeneity and conflict. Such reckonings, as we will see, can sharpen efforts to undiscipline by drawing attention to fundamental assumptions that persist in those efforts, such as the epistemological assumptions considered below regarding the nature and purposes of knowledge, while developing alternative conceptions and their normative implications so that undisciplining may cohere with resonant movements such as anti-colonialism.

On terms: By *settler colonialism*, I will mean processes that function to secure the lands of one society for another or group thereof, effected in large part by occupying those lands and displacing or killing the previous inhabitants (Wolfe 2006). *Indigenous peoples* will refer to those groups and individuals inhabiting land prior to settler occupation. The referent of that term is not a homogeneous group, but rather a variegated, shifting, and sometimes conflictual aggregation of distinct and internally diverse nations and their members, whose identities are likewise multiple and hybrid. My discussion in Section 2 foregrounds Indigenous perspectives from the Americas in particular. *Settlers* will refer to individuals who are solely citizens of states practicing settler colonialism.[3] *Neocolonialism*, in turn, will refer to the various indirect means of control exerted by colonizing powers over those they seek to dominate or displace. By *ITEK* I will mean the observations and information Indigenous groups and individuals sustain regarding nonhuman entities and also distinctive patterns of conceptualization, including but not limited to modes of cognitively, affectively, and ethically relating to nonhuman realities.[4] When scholars, activists, and political agents use the language of ITEK, they often mean both of these categories, and it is common for Indigenous writers to refuse a strict distinction between *what* and *how* their peoples know (Daniel 2019; Coulthard 2014, p. 61; Whyte 2017a, pp. 157–58).[5]

2. Knowledge as Public Good and the Modalities of Access and Disseminate

In their turn to Indigenous ecological knowledge, it is not uncommon for settler environmental scholars and political agents to tacitly construe such knowledge as a publicly available good and invite other settlers to pursue its access and dissemination. Such con-

structions and invitations should be seen as potential moves in a neocolonial rhetoric, that is, a pattern of thought and talk that indirectly sustains settler national power as a complement to explicit governmental control (Whitt 2009, p. 20). Laurelyn Whitt's notion of biocolonialism helps us see how. Biocolonialism, Whitt explains, is a neocolonial process that involves the removal and commodification of a subordinated groups' biological knowledge or material by a dominant group through direct or indirect coercion, resulting in an exacerbation of the first groups' subordination (pp. 20–25). Her examples of this process include the use of the skeletal remains of 146 Smoky Hill River individuals in Kansas for tourism, research, and education despite the objections of their descendants; the patenting and commodification of Guajajara medical knowledge by international pharmaceutical corporations which has rendered traditional medicinal materials inaccessible to the Guajajara people; and the patenting of a Guaymi woman's cell line by two American geneticists at the behest of the federal government (pp. 4–5). These cases start to indicate the stakes of accessing and applying Indigenous biological knowledge, for there are consequences to how such knowledge is accessed, who controls it, and who benefits from its circulation.

Whitt's examination reveals a reiterated rationale that helps enable and justify (to settlers) the extraction of Indigenous knowledge and material, namely, the declaration of human knowledge as a public good, ownable by no one and so in principle accessible to anyone (p. 15). This declaration, Whitt notes, vaguely resembles the Lockean, conquest-era claims that Native lands belonged to no one and so were available to anyone for acquisition (p. 27). In a similar fashion, other forms of Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, stories, and material culture have repeatedly been declared to belong to no one since supposedly such things cannot be owned. Following Ward Churchill, Whitt cites, for example, the bioregionalist Gary Snyder's response to Indigenous critics: "Spirituality is not something that can be 'owned' like a car or a house". Rather it "belongs to all humanity equally" (quoted in Whitt 2009, p. 10). Likewise, in his article "Equal Rights to Stories", Argentine-Canadian writer Alberto Manguel responded to criticisms from Anishinaabe scholar Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, contending that, "No one can 'steal' a story because stories don't belong to anyone. Stories belong to everyone . . . No one . . . has the right to instruct a writer as to what stories to tell" (Manguel 1990, quoted in Whitt 2009, p. 10). In practice, of course, such declarations set the stage for someone else to own the objects in question. As Whitt observes, those who transcribe, copyright, and sell Indigenous stories or poetry or trade in Indigenous rituals or sacred objects profit as individuals and/or collectives "on what 'no one' (allegedly) owns" (ibid.). Likewise, with those who patent, publish, and/or sell procured Indigenous biological knowledge and materials.

With Whitt's framework in hand, consider now an example of a prominent settler environmental thinker, namely, the American feminist science and technology studies scholar Eileen Crist, who discusses Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in a fashion that the analytic of biocolonialism should have us question. I am particularly interested in how Crist casts Indigenous ecological knowledge as a kind of public good and provides no bulwark against the biocolonialist license that such knowledge belongs to no one, at least not in any concrete, material sense.

In her 2019 book, Abundant Earth: Toward an Ecological Civilization, Crist calls for global humanity to cultivate a worldview closer to the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and to form a confederation of eco-social polities modeled on Indigenous community structures. Global humanity, she argues, needs "a new consciousness—one that blends evidence-based reasoning about the world, the indigenous wisdom of balanced living, compassion for all living beings, and safeguarding the memory of awe for existence itself" (Crist 2019, p. 241). Echoing eco-feminist Val Plumwood's call for Westerners to borrow lessons "from the indigenous model" (Plumwood 2008, p. 148; cited in Crist 2019, p. 232), Crist argues for the cultivation of bioregional cultures "emulating indigenous ways" (Crist 2019, p. 237).

Likewise, in a 2023 online symposium on the idea of human solidarity with nonhuman animals, Crist advocates for conceptions of human–nonhuman relations modelled on Indigenous paradigms. She writes:

> Indigenous societies did not espouse human-animal segregation but dwelt with animals in kinship. To be sure, native people were not above the capacity for cruelty nor beyond cooptation by settler-colonialist impositions. Yet the ways, stories, and animist perspectives they have bequeathed embody a subject-to-subject relationship with animals that is aspirational for all humankind. (Crist 2023, para. 24)

There are multiple problems with this bequeathal representation, such has how it casts Indigenous peoples as bygone. But for now, observe how this rendering and Crist's other calls for non-Indigenous societies to fold Indigenous understandings into their worldviews, bodies of knowledge, and cultural systems cast Indigenous knowledge as a sort of public good, or, more strongly, as a universal human inheritance. Whitt's work on biocolonialism suggests that such moves recurrently set the stage, sometimes functioning as explicit justifications, for non-Indigenous peoples to access and commodify (through patenting or copyrighting) such knowledge. Beyond this rhetorical move, such discussions of Indigenous knowledge fit another feature of Whitt's analytic: these discourses benefit such scholars professionally (i.e., financially) through the publication of these sorts of texts, which (purportedly) circulate Indigenous ideas.

Cases such as Crist's not only ecologically instantiate the biocolonial process, but also unwittingly deploy other neocolonial maneuvers. For instance, in the same works that construe Indigenous modes of knowing as freely available repertoires for settler emulation, Crist simultaneously represents colonialism as a historical rather than ongoing structure, a rhetorical move persistently criticized by activists and scholars (e.g., Tuck and Yang 2012, pp. 5–6; Whyte 2017b, p. 102). Indeed, the only forms of ongoing colonialism that Crist explicitly mentions in the two-hundred and fifty pages of Abundant Earth is humanity's colonization of nature. Contemporary cultural resurgence and decolonization projects are not present in this work at all, likewise with Crist's contributions to the even more recent animal ethics symposium. The same writings, then, that construct Indigenous ecological paradigms as publicly available goods—open for those who might find them inspiring—simultaneously obscure Indigenous resistance to ongoing structures of colonial oppression and exploitation.[6]

By casting Indigenous knowledge as a good to be accessed by anyone, benefiting from the commodification and circulation of that knowledge (instead of supporting the Indigenous originators of that knowledge to benefit), and obfuscating the settler-colonial status quo, works such as Crist's risk exacerbating the oppressive relationships between Indigenous nations and settler cultures and governments.[7] Crist is hardly alone in how she relates to and represents Indigenous perspectives in her work. We find similar patterns across disciplines, including among some anthropologists (Rose 2005; Warren 1991, 1997), environmental ethicists (see, e.g., Peterson 2001, p. 126; Sison 2020; Vitousek and Beamer 2013), and scholars of religion (e.g., Mickey 2014, p. 17; 2016, pp. 71–73). And it is crucial that, by all appearances, Crist and similar scholars would never explicitly embrace neocolonialism; indeed, such scholars would surely set themselves against it (see, e.g., Gratani et al. 2016, pp. 2, 14; Crist 2019, pp. 54, 58). But such commitments are precisely what makes the recurrence of concerning patterns of thought all the more striking and revealing of their spectrality.

In addition to finding themselves embroiled in the construction of Indigenous knowledge as an extractable resource, the commonsensical status of the move by scholars like Crist to acquire and disseminate Indigenous knowledge suggests to me that they are in the grip of this picture of knowledge (cf., Wittgenstein 2009, §115)—for it is an image which renders such practical modalities not only unproblematic but eminently reasonable. That these analysts might expressly resist their participation in such neocolonial practices only underscores the hold of this picture on their imaginations. To loosen the jaw of this

conception, and simultaneously illumine anti-extractive modalities of other-relation, I want to examine how some Indigenous activists and scholars are actively resisting the notion that knowledge is always for just anyone.

3. Epistemic Resistance and the Conception of Knowledge as Anti-Public

Indigenous peoples are of course keenly familiar with the multiple shapes settler power can take as well as the various, shifting techniques settler institutions and individuals employ to consolidate it, intentionally or not. It is therefore unsurprising to find Indigenous activists, scholars, and institutions resisting precisely the conception of knowledge that organizes Crist's and others' discussions of ITEK. Indeed, some Indigenous individuals and institutions reliably aver the notion that Indigenous knowledge, including ITEK, is not for non-Indigenous peoples or, more strongly, should not be shared with non-Indigenous peoples. I want to examine three recent illustrations of such epistemic resistance, which come from Indigenous individuals and institutions working in the settler territories of Canada and the United States.[8]

Consider, first, an Instagram slideshow posted by Lenape activist @native.mutt.spirit from the summer of 2021.[9] The slideshow, which consists of seven slides of white text on black fields, critiques white settlers who study BIPOC cultures and bodies of knowledge, with a particular focus on those who engage and represent BIPOC art and history, seemingly in museums, galleries, and academic publications. The first slide reads,

NO MORE WHITE CURATORS

Or historians
Or anthropologists
Or art historians
Or academics
Or environmentalists
Etc etc etc

The fourth slide reads, "We are the stewards of our own histories, and authorities in our own knowledges; And it is inappropriate to attempt to weave yallselves into our lifeways. There are plenty of Indigenous people already doing this work, and to assume you have anything to add or can do better is white entitlement". The adjacent slides critique white scholars and curators for maintaining white supremacy in their research; presuming BIPOC, especially Indigenous peoples, require such "mouth pieces" to represent their histories, knowledge, and art; and obfuscating the work done by Indigenous scholars and curators. The series culminates in the assertions, "YOU DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO TELL OUR STORIES/YOUR INTERPRETATION WILL ALWAYS BE INHIBITED BY PRIVILEGE AND UPHOLD WHITE SUPREMACY", on slide 6, and "RELINGUISH CONTROL" on slide 7. Finally, the entire post is captioned,

> And I'm mad about it!
>
> Get off our land and take your shitty articles with you.
>
> 🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪
>
> Any historian or curator or academic that isn't Indigenous but has made a career off of our knowledge needs to step back and find a new career path. You are not obligated to our works and knowledges. Maybe come to the frontlines and actually activate your privilege for transformation.
>
> 🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪

@native.mutt.spirit's criticisms of how white, settler scholars working on BIPOC lives and knowledge erase the labors and even existence of their BIPOC counterparts and otherwise exacerbate the settler colonial status quo resonate with the critiques of Crist I offered above. I want to focus our attention, however, on how they also cast Indigenous knowledge (and the knowledge of other peoples of color), alongside art and narratives, as something to

which white settlers are not entitled. Indeed, they go further: permission to access these materials is denied. Of particular interest, inquiring white environmentalists are listed on slide 1 as among those to whom access is prohibited.

@native.mutt.spirit moors their refusal to grant white settlers access to BIPOC knowledge and cultural productions to various grounds, but I want to emphasize two rationales in particular: their assertion that Indigenous (and other peoples of color) are the authorities and stewards of their knowledge and histories (slide 4), and their argument that the very fields listed on the first slide as well as the scholars working in them indelibly exacerbate racial oppression and settler colonialism (see slide 2). The first rationale is a kind of recollective assertion about whose knowledge and cultural works we are talking about to begin with. BIPOC individuals and communities are the stewards of these productions, the individuals and groups charged with sustaining and administering access to the works in question, and it is these authorities' prerogative, @native.mutt.spirit suggests, to deny such access. In other words, this initial rationale explicitly construes Indigenous knowledge as anything but publicly available. It achieves this construal in part by contesting how white settlers tend to treat this knowledge, namely, as something for which they do not need permission to access. The second rationale offers specific grounds for asserting this authority and denying further access: historically, the result of academic engagement with such cultural products has been oppression, and even after asserting that these objects are not open-access, @native.mutt.spirit claims that further access will entail further oppression (again, settler engagement "will always be inhibited by privilege and uphold white supremacy").

I will return to @native.mutt.spirit's suggestion that non-Indigenous peoples "activate [their] privilege for transformation", which sits alongside their assertion that Indigenous "works and knowledge" are not things to which settlers are entitled. First, I want to consider another case of epistemic resistance, found this time in Audra Simpson's practice of ethnographic refusal in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Simpson 2014). Indigenous studies scholarship increasing registers resistance of the sort that interests me in the idiom of Indigenous refusal, and Simpson's work has been essential to the cultivation of that discourse (see also Coulthard 2014; L. Simpson 2017; Tuck and Yang 2014). In *Mohawk Interruptus*, Simpson not only analyzes how Mohawk citizens historically and contemporarily interrupt settler political expectations and imperatives; she also declines one of the imperatives of professional anthropology, namely, that she narrate a story of Mohawk politics and culture that will indelibly, whatever qualifiers the analyst offers, come to represent *the* story of their lives and, doubtlessly, confirm the categories and fetishes of the discipline. Accordingly, Simpson tells us explicitly that she is not telling us certain things. She shares only the results of "an ethnographic calculus of what you [the reader] need to know and what I refuse to write" (Simpson 2014, p. 105). "My notion of refusal", she explains, "articulates a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data, and so does not present 'everything.' This is for the express purpose of protecting the concerns of the community. It acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics and it does not *presume* that they are on equal footing with anyone" (ibid.). Such methodological refusal might, Simpson surmises, reveal new research practices that avoid the "discursive containment and pathology" of prior efforts to study Iroquois peoples (ibid.). I consider it now for how it generates a conception of knowledge as something other than a free good.

If @native.mutt.spirit and Simpson resist the idea that Indigenous knowledge in general and knowledge of Indigenous people as such are public goods which non-Indigenous peoples might freely access, the next case pertains to ITEK in particular. That Indigenous peoples might decide against sharing ecological knowledge is a possibility recurrently entertained, if sometimes indirectly, by Indigenous philosopher-activist Kyle Powys Whyte (see, e.g., Whyte 2014, 2020a). This stance comes out clearly in Whyte's collaborative analysis of Indigenous American institutions orientated toward the adaptive flourishing of their

peoples, undertaken with Chris Caldwell and Marie Schaefer (Whyte et al. 2018). Taking the Sustainable Development Institute housed at the College of the Menominee Nation as illustrative, Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer argue that the practices of such institutions represent an important dimension of "collective self-determination", namely, the capacity to envision and strategize toward actualizing and avoiding various possible futures for the collective (Whyte et al. 2018, p. 155). Importantly, such strategizing strives to cultivate distinctly Indigenous responses to such problematics as the intertwined pressures of settler colonialism and climate change. Thus, the authors see the Sustainable Development Institute as developing notions of, practices seeking, and knowledge supporting collective and ecological sustainability that are indexed to these twin problematics and distinct to the Nation, if also potentially resonant with other Indigenous perspectives (p. 174). The authors make explicit that these efforts are "not so much centered on Indigenous lessons on sustainability for all humanity" (ibid.). Indeed, they explicitly differentiate the aims of such institutions from "how some non-Indigenous communities seek to understand our lessons of sustainability for the purpose of saving themselves or humankind" (ibid.). Such organizations aim instead at the particular meaning of "continuance" for their peoples (p. 175). The authors conclude by expressing their indifference over whether "settler and other privileged populations" can ecologically reform themselves, but convey the spirit of their analysis most directly in the title of their paper: "Indigenous Lessons about Sustainability Are Not Just for 'All Humanity'".

We might further multiply examples of Indigenous voices expressing that their knowledge or knowledge of them is *not for*, does not exist *for the taking by* settlers, and even that it should not be shared with settlers. But these cases start to illustrate the modes of resistance that interest me. The resistance in question is often tied to two justifications: Indigenous skepticism toward non-Indigenous inquiry and the nature of the knowledge in question itself. In the first case, skepticism and mistrust rooted in the repeated experience of colonial exploitation—even by those settlers who claim good intent—warns against sharing such knowledge. In Whyte's words, a "relational tipping point" has already been crossed between Indigenous and settler societies, and meaningful efforts at repair, which might enable coordination on crises such as climate change, are not forthcoming (Whyte 2020b, p. 4). Violations of Indigenous rights are ongoing, Whyte observes, and implicate not only familiar contemporary colonialist villains such as multi-national fossil fuel corporations, but also environmental agencies and organizations themselves (ibid., p. 2). With the cunning elasticity of historical and contemporary settler-colonialism as a backdrop, epistemic resistance aims at curbing oppression and protecting individuals and collectives in circumstances within which sharing knowledge can prove lethal.

Inextricable and yet distinct from such skepticism, such resistance may also be tied to how Indigenous knowledge producers conceptualize their knowledge, such as how it aims at supporting Indigenous cultural resurgence, sovereignty, and survival.[10] There are two aspects to this second logic of resistance. The first grounds epistemic refusal in the nature of the knowledge in question: Indigenous knowledge should not be shared with settlers because *it is not for* them, but rather for Indigenous cultural resurgence, or innately anti-public, etc. The second aspect grounds epistemic refusal in the literal scarcity of time and energy that constrains resurgence and sovereignty efforts (again, to say nothing of questions of skepticism and justice).[11]

However one wishes to make sense of such resistance, one of its results is the cultivation of ignorance among inquiring settlers, what with philosopher Alison Bailey we might call "strategic ignorance" (Bailey 2007, p. 77). "Ignorance can be wielded strategically", Bailey suggests, "by groups living under oppression as a way of gaining information, sabotaging work, avoiding or delaying harm, and preserving a sense of self" (ibid.). Again, I am interested in how the cultivation of such ignorance suggests a conception of knowledge precisely opposed to that construal of ITEK in many settler environmentalist writings, namely, as a publicly-available resource that should be accessed and disseminated by whomever is in a position to do so. In opposing the idea that Indigenous knowledge

and knowledge of Indigenous people should be shared with non-Indigenous peoples, @native.mutt.spirit, Simpson, and Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer simultaneously displace the idea that knowledge as such is something to which all are entitled with the model of knowledge as something that can and sometimes, perhaps often, *should* be carefully protected and tended—knowledge not as universal possession of humanity, but leery, strategic, and even intrinsic *secret*.

4. Conclusions: Negative Relational Modalities and Anti-Colonial Praxis

The same activists and scholars discussed above not only reject the idea that Indigenous knowledge is something to which non-Indigenous people might be entitled, but also often recommend alternative practices besides accessing this knowledge. @native.mutt.spirit, for instance, enjoins white academics and curators to "come to the frontlines and actually activate [their] privilege for transformation". Similarly, in the paper in which Whyte discusses relational-tipping points, he calls for settler environmentalists to turn their attention to long term projects of cultivating trusting and accountable relations with Indigenous peoples so to mitigate the unjust distribution of environmental harms (Whyte 2020b, pp. 4–5). In other cases, alternative recommendations to extractive and otherwise neocolonial relations to Indigenous peoples are less forthcoming, such as in Simpson's book or Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer's paper, and likewise in the works of other advocates for Indigenous refusal and resistance. In these cases, settlers are left with far less determinacy, with little more than the bare void of the Indigenous other's refusal (cf. Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 35). With respect to many settlers' interest in Indigenous knowledge specifically, this void remains in the former cases as well, for access to *that* is denied and disparate actions recommended instead.

In addition to reckoning with the sorts of practical recommendations just described, it is incumbent upon those of us who wish to resist the relentless permutations of colonialism to dwell on what it might mean to receive this epistemic void well.[12] I propose that the alternative model of knowledge as anti-public or secret conjured by cases of Indigenous epistemic refusal aids that task. For how one intelligibly engages a secret keeper differs markedly from how one engages someone who knows something to which one is entitled, and those differences correspond to different conceptions of the knowledge in question. If the picture of knowledge as a universal inheritance, an open-access good invites the modalities, vis-à-vis that knowledge and its sustainers, of *access* and *disseminate*, then the picture of knowledge as anti-public or secret summons such modalities as *forgoing* and *restraint*. These relational modes belong to a class that we might call, with John Keats, negative capabilities (Keats 2005, p. 60). Such capacities are themselves active powers, precisely the inversion of the incapacity "of remaining content with half knowledge" (ibid.), and hardly rule-out other forms of anti-colonial praxis nor particular Indigenous-settler collaborations. However, insofar as settler environmentalists find themselves preoccupied with the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into non-Indigenous ecological protocols and worldviews, and insofar as that preoccupation finds its warrant in a particular conception of knowledge as free good, then an alternative conception of knowledge as anti-public and the negative capacities that picture brings into view may be part and parcel of setting settler environmentalism in opposition to colonialism.[13]

As scholars and political actors continue to scrutinize inherited distinctions between religion and science as well as their institutional expressions, illustrated in the discourse of ITEK discussed above and in the papers of this issue of *Religions*, it behooves us to attend to how such endeavors can inadvertently sustain pernicious habits of thought. If undisciplining is to align with other specific critical projects, such as anti-colonialism, then it requires self-examination and moral imaginative augmentation of the sort I have tried to illustrate here. Such reflexivity, as I have shown, hardly leaves us with a regress of critique, unravelling undisciplining projects at their inception, but rather asks after the aims and assumptions of particular undisciplining efforts, sets the stage for challenging

encounters with disparate endeavors, and ultimately augments the liberatory possibilities of the critique of "religion and science".

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Notes

1 Parts of Section 2 were presented at the 2023 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in the paper "Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Climate Justice, and the Risks of Eco-colonialism" (Weaver 2023).

2 I inherit my methodology from the deflationary tactics of philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Cora Diamond who aim to (1) reveal the metaphysical pictures that underwrite particular problem spaces, holding inhabitants of those spaces in their grips, and (2) multiply alternatives to those pictures thereby opening additional approaches to—or escape from—those spaces (see, e.g., Diamond 1991, 2018, 2020, 2021; Wittgenstein 2009, §§1–12, 23–24, 109, 115–16, 122–23, 127–33). This paper develops such techniques in explicitly anti-colonial directions by not only attending to the pictures that underwrite neocolonialism, but also by following other analysts of coloniality in foregrounding Indigenous criticisms (see Young 2015, pp. 150–53). This general approach has diverse kin, from the counter-induction of Paul Feyerabend (2010, pp. 5, 13–16, 48, 56–59) to the strategic ethnography of Saba Mahmood (2001), from whom I take my use of "parochializing" to describe some of the effects of my discussion (ibid., 224).

3 The author is a white U.S. citizen.

4 I employ the terminology of traditional ecological knowledge with reservations. I doubt that this idiom can avoid assimilating the dynamic heterogeneity of Indigenous modes of being-with more-than-human reality, both pre- and post-conquest, to a conceptual framework of distinctly European lineage, one constituted by such distinctions as the traditional versus the modern, Indigenous versus settler, scientific versus religious, and knowledge versus wisdom or sentiment. My use of ITEK should therefore be taken to indicate its practical utility for achieving specific purposes rather than as a tacit endorsement of its adequacy.

5 Occasionally, scholars and officials make this distinction explicit, such as when the Biden–Harris administration defines ITEK as not only "a body of observations, oral and written knowledge", but also "practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems" (Prabhakar and Mallory 2022, p. 4). Such knowledge is "based in ethical foundations often grounded in social, spiritual, cultural, and natural systems that are frequently intertwined and inseparable, offering a holistic perspective" (ibid.).

6 Such works also perform the neocolonial maneuvers that Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang famously named "settler moves of innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012); that is, the various ways settlers putatively ally themselves with colonized peoples—putatively rendering themselves innocent of the sins of colonialism—while obscuring efforts to reach non-metaphorical decolonization.

7 This example prioritizes Indigenous forms of conceptualization in its rendering of ITEK (over empirical knowledge), but empirical examples are also readily available (see, e.g., Alexander et al. 2011).

8 For historical cases of such resistance, see Churchill (1998, p. 103) and Thomas (2021).

9 I restrict my analysis to a public-facing, activist account that addresses itself to a wide audience, including settlers; at this writing, @native.mutt.spirit has 20.8k followers. The nascency of norms around qualitative digital research leads me to anonymize these public writings. Verification of this post is available upon request.

10 On the entanglement of Indigenous resistance and resurgence, see Coulthard (2014, pp. 154–59).

11 This rationale seems obvious when we appreciate the demandingness of not only consolidating Indigenous sovereignty but sustaining particular Indigenous traditions (see, e.g., Coulthard 2014, pp. 165–79; Whyte 2017a, 2020a).

12 Some U.S. government papers acknowledge that there may be limits to what settler agencies can and should access of Indigenous knowledge and that those limits should be respected (see, e.g., Prabhakar and Mallory 2022, p. 11). Nevertheless, in their general thrust, these documents invite settlers to covet and pursue ITEK. Such publications cultivate the expectation that by and large such knowledge will be accessible by figuring Indigenous epistemic refusal as exceptional (see ibid., pp. 3, 5–10).

13 The significance of these last points may be missed, so I shall underscore it: attuning settler environmentalism and anti-colonialism, as well as undisciplining projects, in the fashion gestured to here does not entail the exclusion of various sorts of Indigenous/settler collaborations, epistemic or otherwise. It does not follow from my claims nor examples that, for instance,

settlers must always go without Indigenous knowledge nor that it will or should never be shared. Rather, I have examined some ways of imagining such collaborations and their objects, such as knowledge and knowledge exchange, and suggested that (1) some such imaginings are perilous and (2) alternatives are available and valuable if one has anti-colonial commitments. It also will not count against my arguments, nor negate my cases of Indigenous epistemic resistance, to cite examples of Indigenous voices seeking to share ITEK or other goods. For one thing, nothing a priori prohibits Indigenous peoples from participating in the construal of Indigenous knowledge as a free good. For another, my interest in this paper resides in the picture of knowledge that can underwrite the neocolonial thinking and practices of some settler scholars and agents, who might be seen as in some sense undisciplining "religion" and "science"; my invocation of examples of epistemic resistance corresponds to that problematic and seeks to deflate it (see note 2). That is, I do not cite those examples as if they authoritatively decide the question of epistemic exchange. I do not think there is a final settling of that matter in the abstract, but rather a range of possible concrete circumstances of potential exchange with particular demands. Within some of those, some settlers may have to reckon with epistemic resistance; they will be better prepared, this paper wagers, if they are negatively capable.

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