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1989

Review of Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality.

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Callicott, J. Baird, "Review of Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality." (1989). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 466.

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Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality. By Howard L. Harrod. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, name index, subject index. xiv + 213 pp. \$22.50.

Although at midcentury the distinguished anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell suggested a new field, "ethnometaphysics," at the interface of philosophy and anthropology, there was no stampede to explore it. Philosophers for the most part remain Western cultural narcissists and chauvinists, while anthropologists labor to become scientifically "respectable."

Howard L. Harrod is neither philosopher nor anthropologist. Working in the genuinely synthetic discipline of religious studies, he has

produced one of a bare handful of ethnometa-physical essays. He himself describes what he is doing in *Renewing the World* simply as "interpretation" of "meanings."

His book focuses on four northwestern Plains cultures: the Algonkian speaking Blackfeet, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, and the Siouan speaking Crow. Harrod submits the self-consciously "objective" and meticulous ethnographic accounts of early descriptive ethnographers to a more abstract, cognitive analysis to provide us a point of view more nearly internal to the culture in question and more aware that a plurality of cultural worlds, each perfect in its own terms, exists.

Harrod discusses the epistemic function of dreams and visions in these four Plains world views then analyzes their cosmogonical and cosmological ideas. His detailed discussion of their ethical precepts emphasizes the negative (and often comic) moral instruction afforded by the various Trickster figures. The book concludes with an account of a northwestern Plains environmental ethic.

Plains peoples, Harrod suggests, refracted nature and conceived an environmental ethic through a metaphor of kinship. He is particularly skillful in characterizing the ambiguity Plains peoples expressed at the necessity of killing and eating their animal kin.

Renewing the World also contributes to another new and undercultivated science that we might call "ecology of mind." A world view is an adaptation to an environment that underpins the visible and concrete aspects of a culture. The sun dance *and its meaning* is as much an adaptation to the Great Plains environment as the tipi. Harrod expresses the way the semi-arid, windswept land of thermal extremes, grass, buffalo, and newcomers (like the horse and gun) helped shape the outlook of the four peoples.

Particularly interesting were his occasional and all too brief suggestions that ideas among the Plains-dwelling Algonkians might be fruitfully compared with older Algonkian cultures. The Cheyenne may have lacked the intellectual reckoning with the moral ambiguities of hunting developed among the Montagnais-Naskapi,

perhaps because the latter had not readapted to a hunting life after a horticultural sojourn.

Although Harrod points out that the peoples whose ideas he studies have no word for religion and therefore no concept of religion as a special domain of life bounded by the secular, he, like other religious studies scholars, insists on writing about American Indian "religion." My greatest disappointment with this book is the unwillingness of the author to listen as attentively to what the peoples he studies do *not* say as to what they do. And among the things they do not say is "religion." Scholars seem to insist on the term to get on with their talk about "religious" symbols, "sacred" bundles, "rituals," and "prayers." We must ultimately interpret the world view of other cultures through the categories provided by our own, but I think that we can do better if we go beyond the tendentious categories of religious studies.

Harrod's prose is admirably plain, unadorned, and unobtrusive, but neither lively nor finely crafted, though the writing becomes more fluid and supple as the book progresses. *Renewing the World* is, however, readable and I recommend it highly.

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