



**All My Relatives: Exploring Lakota Ontology, Belief, and Ritual.** By David C. Posthumus. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. 294 pages. \$55.00 cloth and electronic.

In *All My Relatives*, one of the first texts specifically about Lakota culture in almost a generation, David C. Posthumus offers a revisionist history of Lakota ontology that engages with an animist framework and other key insights from the “ontological turn.” Building on the work of A. Irving Hallowell and Philippe Descola, this book could be seen as a major shift from previous ones describing the Lakota or Western (Teton) “Sioux” culture. Hallowell and Descola describe ontology through extended notions of both human and nonhuman personhood as they are experienced through concepts of interiority and physicality that operate simultaneously. Accordingly, as an anthropologist trained in the ontological turn, Posthumus presents basic cultural signifiers that demonstrate a straightforward look at Lakota ontology. He explores, for example, how animist beliefs permeate the understanding of Lakota relationality to phenomena, such as the personhood of rocks; meteorological events; what Lakota people describe as spirits or ghosts of deceased humans and animals, also seen as spirit helpers; and cultural items such as medicine bundles.

Chapters 1 and 2 establish the animist framework Posthumus engages to describe ontological relationality from a Lakota perspective. After explaining how Hallowell’s and Descola’s ontological frameworks accommodate how the shifting realities of Lakota culture reflect the relational understandings of alterity depending on specific engagement with different cultural aspects, Posthumus then quickly introduces the Lakota concept of “all my relations” and its cultural grounding in language and worldview. Scholars wishing to further engage and deepen their understanding of Lakota culture will appreciate these beginning chapters for Posthumus’s solid description of these concepts. From an ontological lens, “all my relations” enables those individuals who understand Lakota worldviews to become conscious of specific relationships between human and nonhumans.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 capture the Lakota understanding of animacy as perceived through rocks, deceased loved ones, and the imaginary space of nonhuman spirits used in ritual. The book highlights concepts like interiority, relationships of exchange/dependence, perspectivism, and actuality. The author uses Hallowell’s theories as a basis for describing how a situated experience prefaces animacy through the use of rocks in ceremonies. Even as a basic setup of Lakota cultural understandings, however, Posthumus often does not delve deeply into multivocal understandings of how certain behaviors are described. For example, he uses the protocol of mourning to describe how actions during this time reflect a Lakota animist ontological perspective (116), but he does little to further unpack how these protocols are deeply tied to

psychological practices of processing emotions. Although the author's investigation is limited to land and animals, these chapters give excellent surface examples of animacy and offer the potential for further scholarly work.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explore aspects of nonhuman relations through mythology, dreams, and ritual. Outlining how the 1800s cultural components of Lakota communities were grounded in animist frameworks and impacted how rituals were conducted, the author describes the way imagined space in ritual is understood and experienced as "mythical virtuality." Myths are key to how knowledge is passed down and reproduced; chapter 6 is especially useful to scholars interested in further studying the ways myth and ontology engage with Lakota futurities, while chapters 7 and 8 achieve a balanced dialogue concerning the self and its relationships to the animate and inanimate alike.

In Lakota country, multiple language orthographies are in use. Posthumus references the ethnographic work of Ella Deloria and the orthography she developed during the early 1900s, citing its influence on other language scholars such as Father Buechel and the Lakota Language Consortium, which has produced the newest Lakota Language dictionary. As one who is currently reclaiming Lakota language, it would have been helpful to find this information on Ella Deloria in the introduction, rather than buried in the footnotes.

The book briefly touches on the myths of how the Lakota ceremonial pipe was brought to the community. Posthumus sweepingly states that "the pipe is the basis of kinship, belief, and ceremony," yet quickly moves on from the story (134). The narrative/myth has carried many ways of knowing for the Lakota. Although it has been studied elsewhere, as a Lakota scholar I wonder where an ontological view of the pipe myth might lead; indeed, it would have been excellent to see the pipe myth used as an anchor for the book.

Working diligently to have his field experiences frame his research, Posthumus successfully avoids the tendency of many non-Lakota researchers and authors of contemporary ontology books to ground his findings in his own worldview. Likewise, the author avoids structuring the book around his journey toward understanding Lakota culture, foregrounding the knowledge instead. The many Dakota references he provides, especially from the Ella Deloria archives, will aid future Lakota/Dakota scholarship. If *All My Relatives* perhaps develops a basic understanding of Lakota and Dakota culture from an introductory perspective for readers who have little knowledge of the western "sioux," nonetheless this reevaluated concept of animism for a twenty-first-century sensibility provides a compelling lens through which traditional Lakota mythology, dreams and visions, and ceremony may be productively analyzed and more fully understood.

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