Innu Tshishennu ethics and the need for respect

Worldviews in collision

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Different worldviews

- The world is not divided into the social versus the natural, nature versus culture.
- Cannot speak of different realms of knowledge such as religion, politics, environment, economics.
- No words in Innu-aimun for these concepts.
- Innu do classify animate and inanimate entities, processes, activities – but differently.
• Western thought drives an absolute division between humanity and animality.
• aligned with other divisions such as persons and things, reason and instinct, society and nature.
• personhood as a state of being is not open to non-human animal kinds.
• human existence is conducted at two levels: social level of interpersonal relations & the natural ecological level or organism-environment interactions.
• animal existence is confined within the natural domain.
• humans are both persons and organisms, while animals are all organism.

• Innu, Cree and other Indigenous peoples categorically reject this view.
• Personhood is open equally to non-human animal kinds as well as non-animal kinds.

Western versus Indigenous worlds
Social relations

- the world is populated with human & many other-than-human beings
- Innu have social relations with these beings
- the other-than-human beings must be respected
- relations of sharing with these beings
- e.g. proper treatment of animal remains, offerings, etc.
- people are given animals in return
Other-than-human beings

- Kanipinikassikueu (Katipenimitak, Papakashtshihkũ)
- Missinakũ
- Uhuapeu
- Kakuapeu
- Uapishtan-napeu
- Anik-napeu
- Matshishkapeu
- Mishtapeu
- Tshietinishu
- Katshimaitsheshu
- Memekueshu
- Utshakanue
- Atshen
- Meminiteu
- Uenitshikumishiteu
- Kuekuatsheu, Tshakapesh, Kaianuet, Mishtapush, Meish, Mishta-amishkũ...
Communication

- dreams (*puamuna*)
- scapulimancy (*mitinikanishavueu*)
- oracles (*kukumess* jaw-bone, beaver pelvis)
- drum (*teueikan*)
- burning offering (*matushtueimatsheun*)
- ceremonial robe (*mishtikuai*)
shaking tent (*kushapatshikan*)
Ushkan-shipiss
Ethics

- moral principles relating to how to behave in the right way, how to treat other beings properly, what is right and wrong
- wrong to disrespect all beings, whether they are human or not
- wrong to waste animals, to needlessly kill animals when they have not been given to you
- breaks the proper cycle of sharing
disrespecting or threatening other-than-human beings has serious consequences

- cut-off – no more animals provided – starvation
- death, disease, suicides, catastrophic events
- therefore, a hydro project that floods many animals = assault on the moral universe

significance? high, adverse
First appears in print as "Manito Watchee" - Henry Connelly’s manuscript, July 1844
Memekueshu-nípi
Kameshtashtan
Is it possible to make the animal masters and other beings less angry about the flooding and disturbance?

- communication is possible
- responsibility lies with Nalcor
Innu are not unique

- Mishta-shipu
- Eastmain/Opinaca
- Grassy Narrows
- Ninaistakis (‘Chief Mountain’)
- Kluane
- Ts’yl-os
- Klamath Falls
- Six Rivers
- Black Mesa
- Sinakara / Ausangate
Some useful references re. Indigenous worldviews


