

# ***Indigenous Wisdom for Healing Our World: A Book Review of ‘Restoring a Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing on Planet Earth’***

Vicki Zakrzewski

E-mail: [vzakrzewski@berkeley.edu](mailto:vzakrzewski@berkeley.edu)

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## **Abstract**

This is a book review of [Restoring a Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing on Planet Earth](#), by Wahinkpe Topa and Darcia Narvaez (2022).

**Keywords:** *sacred feminine, spiritual perspective, interconnectedness, indigenous voices, climate change*

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The human race needs a reset. When considering the incredibly complex challenges facing us today—climate change, racism, inequality, isolation, among others—at the root of every single one of them is a value-system choice. But to make real change, we need to dig even deeper than our values and get to our beliefs and ensuing assumptions. Because ultimately, it is those beliefs and assumptions—or “worldview”—that drive our actions and choices.

Four Arrows and Darcia Narvaez’s book, *Restoring a Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing on Planet Earth* offers readers the opportunity to deeply examine their own worldview, covering a variety of elemental topics such as community welfare, generosity and gift-giving, economics, nature, death and dying, and time. They argue that only two worldviews exist: one that sees Nature as “intelligent and living” (the Kinship worldview) and one that essentially does not (the Eurocentric worldview). This seemingly simple dichotomy has profound implications for the health and well-being of people and our ecosystem, depending on which worldview dominates.

When humans are centered in a Kinship worldview—one grounded in the “common precepts shared by Indigenous peoples” (Four Arrows and Narvaez 2022, 3) around the world—the focus is on interconnectedness, the innate goodness of humans, and “courage and fearless trust in the universe” (Four Arrows and Narvaez 2022, 33). In contrast, the Eurocentric worldview promotes an anthropocentric view of life, resulting in a society that champions personal gain, materialism, and hierarchy.

To illustrate their argument, the authors include a chart in the “Introduction” that provides a comparative list of how the two worldviews manifest. For instance, the common dominant worldview shows up as “emphasis on rights,” “social laws of society are primary,” and “conflict resolution with revenge, punishment.” In contrast, the Indigenous worldview indicates “emphasis on responsibility,” “laws of Nature are primary,” and “conflict resolution as return to community” (Four Arrows 2020 quoted in Four Arrows and Narvaez 2022, 6). But the authors are quick to point out that each item on the list should be viewed as a continuum,

offering readers who lean towards a Eurocentric worldview a guide for self-examination of their own beliefs and assumptions—and the opportunity to consider another way of being in the world.

The organization of the book is unique: each chapter begins with an excerpt by a member of an Indigenous group, setting the stage for the exploration of a topic that is foundational to how we operate in the world, but that may lie unexamined because it falls beneath the surface of our conscious mind—a notorious minefield of behavior-driven assumptions. The excerpt is then followed by a dialogue between the authors that explains in greater detail the meaning and implications of the selection, supported by the authors' own experiences, research, and personal views.

For instance, a chapter on community welfare opens with a passage from Doña Enriqueta Contreras, a Zapotecan healer, midwife, and teacher, known for her work in applying the “wisdom of curanderismo (folk healing).” She outlines the Zapotecan principles that form the basis of caring for the community: to know that “everything has life,” to hold reverence for Nature and our ancestors, and to recognize our relationship with Mother Nature—a set of beliefs that are in contradistinction to a worldview that believes in the domination of Nature and that is frighteningly out of touch when it comes to caring for others. In the dialogue that follows, the authors offer examples that beautifully illustrate the dire need for the kind of care that recognizes our interdependence with Nature and with each other. In a heart-wrenching example, Narvaez discusses two films that share a message from the Kogi priests (Mamas) of South America who sensed the “weakening of the earth,” urging humans to change their harmful practices. To show viewers the intersection of Indigenous knowledge with science, the filmmakers consulted scientists who confirmed that research does, in fact, support the Kogi knowledge of climate. (In a similar fashion throughout the book, the authors include many examples of science that validate ancient Indigenous wisdom.)

Four Arrows brings care of the community to a more micro-level, focusing on the importance of listening to one another—but listening in such a way that involves “seeking a spiritual perspective.” Indeed, he describes witnessing elders “find a sacred place on the earth or gaze at a star, as if to get help in understanding what is being communicated.” In a delightful story that illustrates this deep form of listening, Four Arrows shares an experience in which children came to the rescue of a group of Indigenous leaders. After watching

their elders angrily disagree on an issue, the children quietly left the room for a while, then returned to ask the elders to join them outside. As each child shared their thoughts, Four Arrows found himself listening “in the old Indigenous ways,” helping him to recall the greater purpose of their work—one that is grounded in humility, respect, and interdependence.

And yet, this kind of care for the community is difficult to achieve if we ourselves do not feel cared for—an argument that Narvaez returns to throughout the book in an effort to urge readers to examine and question the unnatural ways in which Western societies raise their children. In a chapter on respecting the sacred feminine, she points to the research that shows how parenting practices that distress babies result in psychological illnesses such as emotional dysregulation and the inability to foster healthy, egalitarian relationships, ultimately creating a society that is filled with “impaired adults” who continue the cycle of “undercare.” Instead, children need what Narvaez calls the “evolved nest,” or ancient nurturing practices, such as community support in which both the mother and the child feel welcome, continuous carrying or holding of the baby, and quick responses to a child’s needs. Experiencing this kind of care early on helps us to develop a moral compass grounded in compassion rather than self-protection. In other words, we move away from the Eurocentric worldview that fosters selfishness and greed resulting from a deep sense of insecurity and towards the kinship worldview of sharing and abundance, grounded in interdependence.

The richness of the content and depth of wisdom contained in this book cannot be justly captured in a short review that only scratches the surface. But perhaps it can be summed up in a striking quote from Lakota member Martin Brokenleg and co-authors that opens one of the chapters: “The highest expression of courage is generosity” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern 2019 quoted in Four Arrows and Narvaez 2022, 148). Contained within this seed of an idea is perhaps the essence of the Kinship worldview: To be generous towards another human being and towards Nature means that we are grounded in a “fearless trust” of an abundant and benevolent Universe of which we and all others are a significant part, deserving of respect, dignity, compassion, gratitude, love, and healing.

This book offers hope in the face of seemingly intractable problems created by the currently dominant worldview. I recommend that you read this book slowly, savor it, and ponder the new “old” way of being in the world that it offers. Imagine how it might feel to live fearlessly in a

sentient world, connected and cared for, prioritizing a relational rather than a material consciousness. Take up the invitation proffered by Oneida-Mohawk-Cree comedian Charlie Hill: “Come to us now. We can fix this country. All the problems it has. We can fix it because we have the owner’s manual” (Hill 2019 as quoted in Four Arrows and Narvaez 2022, 166).

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## Author Bio

**Dr. Vicki Zakrzewski** is the founding Education Director at the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, where she translates the science of compassion, empathy, gratitude, awe, forgiveness, and other social, emotional, and ethical skills to improve the well-being of students and educators. She has partnered with numerous organizations such as UNESCO, CASEL, the Mind and Life Institute (of which she is a fellow), Harvard’s Making Caring Common and EASEL Lab, the Jim Henson Company, and Pixar/Disney. She is the creative lead for the free online resource for educators Greater Good in Education and the co-associate editor of practice for the journal *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*.