

**KAITIAKITAKA O TE TAIAO**

**Maori Philosophical Approaches to Sustainable Development**

**Reverend Maurice Manawaroa Gray**

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## INTRODUCTION

**"Ko te whenua te wai-u mo ka uri whakatipu"**

"Mother Earth, through her placenta, provides nourishment  
and sustenance for her offspring"

This is a classical proverbial saying which expresses the Maori belief that Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) is the foundation of indigenous people. She is the well of their spirituality, the encyclopedia of their knowledge, the cradle of their history and the source of their sustenance.

In the beginning the land imposed its terms on the people and they had to adapt to it in order to survive. Land was not something that could be owned or traded as a commodity. Maori did not seek to own or possess anything; it was far more important to belong. This sense of belonging was a belief that one was born out of the land and implied that there was a relationship between people and the land. Such relationships were embedded in Maori cosmology and reinforced in the ritualistic ceremonies relative to identity and belonging.

However, the next wave of people to migrate to Aotearoa, the European settlers, adapted the land rather than themselves and land was used as a means of economic survival and prosperity. The sense of identity and belonging to the land that was inherent in the Maori world view was not a consideration; it was not a part of the colonial ideology.

The concept of sustainable development in relation to the natural resources of earth, sea and sky has been offered as a means to solve the environmental problems of both the present and the future. My analysis of recent scientific data has left me bereft of a clear definition of sustainable development; however, what is clear is that it can mean all things to all people.

Given this variance my proposition is that such a concept is values based. It is from that standpoint that a description of sustainable development necessitates an examination of the values, beliefs, attitudes and motivations towards the environment that existed in traditional Maori society, and the application of such values and beliefs through associated institutions.

**\*NB:** Throughout this paper I have used the South Island dialect of Kai Tahu, which substitutes an underlined "k" for the more generally recognised "ng", e.g. "tikāka" for "tikanga".

## VALUES

### "Kia whakatomuri te haere ki mua"

"To walk into the future our eyes must be fixed on the past"

The matrix of wisdom and knowledge is embedded in Maori cosmogony, cosmology, mythology and anthropological accounts of our storied past. Much emphasis is placed on such wisdom as it embraces the Maori belief and value systems and total way of thinking.

Values (ka tikaka) and natural resources (ka taoka) exemplify the interlocking relationship that exists between the two. This section on values will support the proposition that sustainable development is values based and therefore it is imperative that natural resource decision makers take into account the Maori value system. Otherwise litigation becomes the only means for seeking inclusion and justice in the decision making structures of today.

The takata whenua, by and large, have historically been excluded from decision making processes to the detriment of all New Zealanders, especially Maori, and also to the detriment of our environment. Maori wisdom has effectively been shut out, or worse, ignored, and dismissed as second rate and of no consequence. It is interpreted as backward knowledge which will only impede the continuing progress towards achieving goals of self actualization, economic prosperity through individual competition. Such notions, thankfully, are diminishing, and need to be eradicated as an essential step towards achieving an appropriate system of sustainable development for this country.

I now turn momentarily to the amphitheatre of the international arena to adopt the set of Universal Values as described by Harold Lasswell. Lasswell's prescription is relevant to all indigenous cultures of the world. The Maori culture is no exception and so I have endeavoured to provide an authentic

response to Lasswell's proposition by equating and synthesising the concept of mana to his prescriptive list.

## **Universal Values**

The concept of mana encapsulates Lasswell's proposed Universal Values of Power, Enlightenment, Wealth, Well-being, Skill, Affection, Respect and Rectitude. These will be discussed in more detail tomorrow by my esteemed colleague, Dr John Hayward.

Mana is the enduring spiritual power and authority conferred by the atua (gods) on people or objects to carry out their revealed will. In order to facilitate an understanding of mana, it is necessary to examine the context from which it derives its meaning.

Mana atua is the sacred spiritual power of the gods which is conferred upon people and things through sacred rituals. Mana atua, then, is the root cause of Power, Authority and the other universal values proposed by Lasswell.

Mana tipuna is power and authority which has been handed down from generation to generation through chiefly lineage. Those who inherit mana carry the responsibility of enhancing, maintaining and passing it on. Mana tipuna, therefore, is the medium of conveyance of the Universal Values.

Mana takata is the mana of individuals which has been acquired through their own deed, skill and knowledge. Such achievements are recognised and reinforced by the people. Thus, mana takata is the recipient of the Universal Values.

Mana whenua is power associated with the occupation of land. It also refers to the power of the land to produce the fruits of nature. Mana whenua, then, is the tangible source of the Universal Values.

Mana manaaki represents the notion of hospitality in its fullest meaning. It is the total manifestation of the Universal Values.

All of these are aspects of mana which enhance the reality of rakatirataka (chieftainship). Rakatirataka is the enduring and undisturbed right to control and manage the people, land and natural resources in a completely Maori way. It is the process by which decisions affecting the Universal Values are sustained. One of the many principles of rakatirataka, therefore, is the character of the decision making mechanisms inherent in Maori society. Through this, power and authority reside with those who have the mana to make decisions and the ability, through sufficient resources, to execute them.

## **TE AO MAORI/THE MAORI WORLD**

The source of Maori consciousness and endeavour pertaining to sustainability are ka tikaka Maori (values) and ka taoka Maori (prized treasures and resources). Decisions are primarily made through consensus as all decisions are value based and will impact upon and affect the values pertaining to the people, land or resources. Consensus decision making processes, then, take into account impacts upon such resources, as the relationships (whanaukataka) between the three may be affected, thereby ultimately affecting the sustainability of not only the resources, but everything in this world.

### **Ka Tikaka Maori**

Tikaka are the values, beliefs, ethics, norms, customs, knowledge and rituals that emanate from Maori cosmology, cosmogony, mythology and anthropological thought and action.

Tikaka Maori, in a sense, epitomises the matrix of wisdom and knowledge. It is the womb that gives birth and renewal to the spiritual and physical values inherent in our beliefs, motivations and sense of purpose for the beneficial preservation of all life forms within this world. Ka tikaka therefore, is the combination of whakaaro and matauraka based values and reflect the need to care for and to protect the mauri of all our inherited treasures that emanate from the Universe, the natural and spiritual resources and people.

Whakaaro means thought and equates with the Greek term "gnosis". In essence this is all knowledge pertaining to the celestial realms. It is the seed bed of the creation theorists and instills a belief that a Creator God was responsible for our total reality.

Matauraka means knowledge and equates with the Latin word "scientia". It is all knowledge pertaining to the terrestrial realms, exemplified through logic, pragmatism and rational thought. This is the seed bed of evolutionary theorists.

Whakaaro (thought) and matauraka (logic), therefore, come together in a complementary way as tikaka, thereby forming the information base necessary for qualitative decision making concerning our natural resources.

Sustaining Maori wisdom is the act of preserving Maori realities, values and beliefs. Values are the practice of belief. For example, if you believe that the earth is your mother, then you will treat the earth accordingly. Central to this belief is the notion that the land is the placenta, or afterbirth, of Mother Earth and that people are born out of her placenta. The term "takata whenua" captures this notion and refers specifically to the indigenous people of this land of Aotearoa, the Maori.

In summary, Ka tikaka Maori could be explained as being the lifestyle of the Maori, their own ways, rules and conditions of proper conduct in the preservation and conservation of the natural world and humankind.

## **Ka Taoka Maori**

Taoka encompass all things tangible or intangible which derive their meaning at both the physical and spiritual levels. Taoka comprise all treasures inherited from the ancestors which will be passed on to future generations to act as tohu-mana (preservers) and kaitiaki (guardians). In summary, ka taoka Maori could be described as the prized treasures and possessions of the Maori.

In order to comprehend fully the notion of taoka we must examine the context from which it derives its meaning. The Maori believed that there were three great states of reality. The first of these is Te Kore Kore, which is the matrix, the primordial womb of the spiritual (wairua) and physical (mauri) life principles. It is the source of all creation and symbolises a state of potential being.

The second state of reality is Te Po, literally meaning "the night", or the realms of darkness. Within this physical state of reality existed Rakinui (Sky Father) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother). From these primal parents derived the male and female principles which gave birth, shape and form to all the universal physical forms of the Maori world. Te Po symbolises a state of becoming.

As Te Po inclines towards the light of day, we enter the third state of reality, that of Te Ao Marama (the broad daylight). Te Ao Marama bears witness to the creation of all natural life forms, including humans. They are the natural elements, resources or offspring of sky, earth, sea and people. Te Ao Marama symbolises a state of being.

## **Mauri**

Mauri is the ethos of the Creator, the Supreme Being, Io Matua Kore, and is embedded in the realm of Te Kore Kore. Mauri could be described as the



physical life principle and can also mean latent elemental energy, the vital essence which permeates the whole of the total created reality. It is the sustaining life force of and for all elements, both animate and inanimate. The ordered universe, the environment and humans all possess mauri. Through the mauri, all things were unified and made coherent. Preservation and protection of the mauri was all important and was assigned to the tohu-mana and the kaitiaki.

Belief in the mauri of the natural world and their protection exerted a real influence over economic affairs. It fostered an atmosphere of respect and fear obviating deliberate destruction of essential resources (taoka). Through the concepts of mauri, tapu (restricted use), mana (spiritual power and authority), wehi (fear), ihi (awe) and noa (common use), the conduct of people toward their natural environment was regulated.

Sustainable development pertaining to land management insists on the renewal of the mauri (the ethos, physical life principle, essence) of ecological relationships between the people, the land and their associated environs. This is the Maori concept of whanaukataka. Such a relationship engenders identity and a strong sense of belonging as opposed to exploitation and ownership thereof.

### **Whakapapa and Whanaukataka**

Of central importance to the Maori world view are the notions of whakapapa (genealogy) and whanaukataka (relationships). Maori ancestry is genealogically traced back to the primal parents, Te Kore Kore and the Creator Source. From within the total created reality developed relationships, as all offspring emanated from the one source.

The many offspring of Rakinui and Papatuanuku (the primal parents) were archetypes of all human endeavours in the natural world and of elements of the ordered universe and the natural world itself. They were unified and coherent within a continuous process of co-existing life cycles. Whakapapa and whanaukataka were concepts which were institutionalised by tohuka (priestly experts) and rakatira (chiefs) and were the means by which Maori society functioned and regenerated.

The relationship is characterised in how we adapt ourselves rather than repeatedly adapting the land, by utilising our collective wisdom in sustaining the rhythmic patterns of cultural cycles - plant cultures, soil cultures and human cultures - as one dynamic and coherent ecological life cycle. The survival of the cycle becomes an investment in our own culture's long term well being.

## **MAORI APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Traditional Maori approaches to sustainable development insist that management systems would draw on the institutions (riteka) which I am about to describe.

### **Kaitiakitka**

Kaitiaki ensure the balance of relationships. The traditional Maori system of kaitiakitka (guardianship) is an holistic one which ensures balance and harmony between the universe, the environment and people and takes measures to rectify any imbalances which may occur. The emphasis of kaitiakitka is protection; not only for the present but also for future generations.

Kaitiaki are the guardians, protectors and controllers of the ordered universe, nature and humankind. They can be both malevolent and benevolent. Common examples of kaitiaki can be found in the elements of nature itself, such as birdlife (fantails), sealife (whales and eels) and inanimate objects such as logs of wood and stones.

Kaitiaki differ from the other elements of nature in that they are imbued with a spiritual force. For humankind the kaitiaki are the Tohuka Tapu, the appointed spiritual delegates of the atua who act as mediums between the human world and the gods.

The kaitiaki are protectors and controllers of the mauri and are assigned to the separate but interlocking spheres of our total created reality. By design and function they are tapu.

## **Tapu**

Tapu is a covenantal institution. When people or objects are said to be in a state of tapu, they have been set apart for the use of the gods and thereby are restricted from profane activity.

Tapu, then, is the relationship between the atua and their chosen medium. the role of the medium is to carry out the revealed will of their atua through the manifestation of signs emitted through the talisman of the mauri.

People such as Ariki (paramount chiefs) and Rakatira (chiefs) are considered tapu. By virtue of their aristocratic and chiefly lineage they are considered to be closest to the gods.

Certain geographical areas are set aside as wahi tapu and must not be traversed for fear of reprisal from the kaitiaki of that area.

There are two states of tapu; permanent and temporary. Tohuka Tapu (spiritual experts) are considered to be in a permanent state of tapu as they have been consecrated and dedicated at birth to their atua through the ritual of the tohi rite.

Rahui is a temporary state of tapu which is applied for a number of reasons. One common use of rahui is to allow for the replenishment of depleted stocks in a given area. For example, in a lake where fish stocks have dropped below a certain level, rahui is instituted to prevent any further stocks from being taken. In this way, the mauri is given the time to regenerate and stocks will be replenished.

When tapu which is "poke" is that which has been contaminated. If a water body has been degraded and polluted, the kaitiaki is rendered useless because its tapu has been contaminated. Under these circumstances the kaitiaki will leave, and the state of pollution and degradation will remain.

These institutions regulate and codify the behaviour of Maori society, and are applied to ensure the well being of the resource and of the people.

## CONCLUSION

Maori oral tradition expresses the source of all creation - Io Taketake (the first root cause). Io was for some tribes the covenant making God, and the handiwork of Io was clearly visible to the inhabitants of this land. The universe, the natural created world was but a reflection of the creative spiritual essence and physical ethos of Io.

It was at Sinai that the revelation of God was made known to the people through Moses. At that time the terms and obligations of the covenant between God and God's people were made clear. From the perspective of the Maori,

the same applied to the Treaty of Waitangi. It is our Magna Carta and should be viewed by us all as being the covenant between us as people, our respective Creator Gods and our environment.

Maoridom is currently taking part in the renaissance of international indigenous peoples' rights movements such as Maori land, seas, waterways, lakes and resource rights. The Maori of Aotearoa are in the process of restoring the jewel of Maori identity, the plume of Maori dignity and the soul of Maori prestige. For the Maori, economic well being is intrinsically linked to our cultural well being.

There are differences between Maori and Pakeha not only in value and belief systems, but also in the way that policy is formulated, executed and operationalised. Knowledge of such differences should be heralded as a revelation rather than an obstacle.

Policy and decision making frameworks must therefore reflect these beliefs and values. Those who plan, make policies and decisions regarding natural and human resources must begin to take into account the indivisibility of God, nature and humankind, as these factors are fundamental to the Maori world view and will give credence and legitimacy to any established concept of sustainable development.