

Indigenous people, or so argues co-editor Jerry Mander, pose “the frontier issues of our times.” They offer new values and worldviews that might be able to sustain the planet, as their worldview is vastly different from that of the dominant West. He urges communities of activists preoccupied with other pressing matters to include indigenous struggles as prime among their own, a hard-to-achieve development this volume should do much to advance.

While the 27 stories have many dark moments, they also raise hope, for “indigenous people are now everywhere resistant, well-organized, and optimistic about eventual success . . . . The word is out. Collective action is possible. This is not the sixteenth century anymore” (223–24). At the heart of the fight is rejection of the “deification of private property or the expansion of short-term growth as an ideal development model” (224).

A demanding read, the book covers very diverse struggles; e.g., “High-Tech Invasion: Bio-colonialism,” “Climate Change in the Arctic,” “Mixed Promises of Ecotourism,” “Bolivia’s Indigenous Revolution,” and “Ogoni People of Nigeria versus Big Oil.” Appendixes include lists of active groups and resources, the UN Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, and other such documents.

Skeptics may be tempted to devalue the entire struggle as romantic utopianism. Cynics, as a retrograde non-starter. But both types of critics miss the point: the struggle of native peoples offers a model of alternatives to runaway capitalism, and there is a great hunger world-wide for such options. Accordingly, the volume merits careful attention from readers open to considering pro-Green blueprints from people whose very survival over eons attests to their sagacity and sanity: they have much to teach us, and this valuable book demonstrates that.

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**Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture.** By Alan Sokal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxii + 465 pp. £20.00 cloth.

Alan Sokal, professor of physics at New York University, has embarked on a crusade to defend the “scientific worldview” (xi) against the onslaught of “sloppy thinking” (153), which is propagated by two major social sectors: (1) the post-modernist/social-constructivist/relativist cultural critics of science, who have lost sight of scientific evidence and objectivity and equate science with socially constructed “myths” and “narrations” (151); and (2) by the fundamentalists (religious, nationalist or pseudo-scientific), assured of the absolute truth of their beliefs, however contradictory or non-evidential these may be.

Let us remind ourselves of the background: in 1996, after “a few months of library research” (xiii), Sokal felt sufficiently proficient in the “verbiage” of post-modernist studies of science to publish an article in *Social Text* entitled: “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity.” This article was a hoax. It parodied the radical post-modernist critiques of science, with their overstated metaphorical links between science and society, epistemological relativism (denying our ability to discover “truths” about Nature), and downright scientific incompetence. The publication detonated a passionate controversy, spreading beyond academia. Since then Sokal has published various articles advocating “a respect for evidence” (xi), which have now been collected into a single volume, *Beyond the Hoax*.

The book discusses a broad range of topics, clearly and eruditely. Part 1, “The *Social Text* Affair,” includes the original hoax article, richly annotated, exposing frequent confusions in science studies and providing Sokal’s professional overview as a physicist. It is followed by several papers expounding how relativization and subjectification, that is, putting evidence-based knowledge on a par with socially-produced “narrations” (basically saying that any theory is as “valid” as any other), can have crippling consequences for scientific and social progress (two very unpopular terms for post-modernists).

Part 2, “Science and Philosophy,” reviews the dominant tendencies of cognitive relativism in the contemporary (post-modern) philosophy of science: from solipsism and radical skepticism, to radical relativist interpretations of the Duhem–Quine under-determination thesis, Kuhn’s incommensurability of paradigms,

Feyerabend's "Anything goes" principle, Barnes, Bloor, and Collins' "Strong Programme" in the sociology of science, Latour's "Rules of Method," and more.

Sokal finds the epistemological and methodological relativism deficient, both in the natural and the social sciences, and offers a defense of "modest scientific realism," where "knowing how things really are is the goal of science; this goal is difficult to reach, but not impossible (at least for some parts of reality and to some degrees of approximation)" (250). More precisely, our notions of "how things really are" would be best supported by evidence and rational judgment, and not seen as a mere "inter-subjective agreement."

Part 3, "Science and Culture," analyzes the fields in which disrespect for evidence and rational thinking appears most blatant. These include: (1) pseudosciences (such as vitalistic theories in alternative medicine and nursing; "Vedic science"; radical environmentalism; New Age cosmology; or 'mythic' history), where a subjective state of the mind determines reality, and thus everybody is correct; and (2) religions whose claims about the world, based on sacred scriptures, are deemed as the only correct, factual and true claims about reality.

Sokal advocates rationality, objectivity, scientific rigor, and the supremacy of evidence. Yet, his definitions of these concepts are (self-admittedly) weak. He is "using an intuitive notion of truth... that one either grasps intuitively or does not grasp at all" (247). The explanation of "rationality" amounts to a deeply-felt hunch:

Historians, detectives and plumbers – indeed, all human beings – use the same basic methods of induction, deduction, and assessment of evidence as do physicists or biochemists. Modern science tries to carry out these operations in a more careful and systematic way – using controls and statistical tests, insisting on replication, and so forth – but nothing more (161).

This conviction is to be taken as a matter of course, and is repeated constantly ("of course" recurs in the book almost as frequently as "evidence"). Sokal seems to somewhat underplay the ambiguity of evidence and the extent of controversy in science, making the establishing of "truth" appear easier and more certain than it might in fact be. Nonetheless, he

succeeds in valorizing evidence and rationality (however imperfectly defined).

Sokal's work might be superficially perceived as trying to demolish the cultural studies of science—a natural scientist's effort to buttress his field against the encroachment of ignorant humanists—or as denying the vital relationship between science and society. Far from it: Sokal's writing is imbued with social and ethical commitment. As he convincingly demonstrates, a disregard for factual matters—whether, for example, a specific medication actually works beyond the placebo effect or whether a country really has weapons of mass destruction—can have serious negative impacts on our life span and may endanger our very existence. The aim of the "scientific world view" is to serve social justice and survival. The book's ultimate claim is that the political left is ill-served by the relativistic assertion that 'everybody is right in his/her own way'—in fact its cause would be much better served by science.

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**Fear: The History of a Political Idea.** By Corey Robin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), x + 316 pp. £7.99 paper.

*Fear* is structured in two parts which are preceded by a 25-page introduction. Examining writings from Plato to Hobbes, it offers an intellectual history of fear and lays a crucial foundation with clear definitions of political fears. Corey Robin starts with the observation that the United States at present is high on adrenaline induced by fear, drugged and unable to perceive reality. He addresses why "looking to political fear as the ground of our public life, we refuse to see the grievances and controversies that underlie it" and suggests that "since fear seldom yields, over the long term, the unity and energy so many hope to obtain from it, we should probably look for those goods elsewhere, and approach fear for what it is—a symptom of pervasive conflict and political unhappiness" (3).

Robin expresses the hope that understanding our fear "renews us as a collective,"