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*Book Review:  
Indigenous Worldview  
and the Dehypnosis of the West*

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**Abstract:**

R. Michael Fisher's *Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows: The True Story of an Indigenous-Based Social Transformer* recounts the life stories and praxis of Indigenous elder and scholar Four Arrows in order to elucidate how fear management can help us to achieve personal and planetary balance. To this end, the process of subliminal "normalized" fear induction is likened to mass hypnosis, and fear management is understood as a process of dehypnosis whereby we are able to use our entrancement by fear to access intuitive and primal knowledge, thus turning fear into a bridge to personal and planetary transformation. Four Arrows' systematic approach to fear management is framed in terms of a fear vaccine that he calls *CAT-FAWN*, which refers to making constructive use of fear-induced "concentration activated transformation" (CAT) by consciously orienting ourselves to the holistic interdependence of "fear, authority, words and nature" (FAWN).

**Keywords:** Indigenous studies; philosophy of fear; metacognition; Four Arrows

**Note:** Rafiq is the writer and filmmaker Robert Sean Lewis.

## **Recension :** *La vision du monde indigène et le déhypnose de l'Ouest*

### **Résumé :**

*Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows: The True Story of an Indigenous-Based Social Transformer* de R. Michael Fisher raconte les histoires de vie et pratique d'ancien et savant indigène Four Arrows (Quatre Flèches) afin d'élucider comment la gestion de la peur peut nous aider à réaliser l'équilibre personnel et planétaire. Dans ce but, le processus de l'induction de la peur subliminale et "normalisée" est comparé à l'hypnose de masse, et la gestion de peur est comprise comme un processus de la déhypnose selon lequel nous pouvons utiliser notre enchantement par la peur à accéder à la connaissance intuitive et primitive, ainsi transformant la peur en pont à la transformation personnelle et planétaire. L'approche systématique de Four Arrows face à la gestion de la peur est encadrée en termes d'un vaccin de la peur qu'il s'appelle *CAT-FAWN*, qui fait référence à l'usage constructive de "la transformation activée par la concentration" provoqué par la peur, par s'orienter constamment vers l'interdépendance holistique de "la peur, l'autorité, les mots et la nature".

**Mots-clés :** études indigènes; philosophie de la peur; métacognition; Four Arrows

## Book Review

Fisher, R. M. (2018). *Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows: The True Story of an Indigenous-Based Social Transformer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

In R. Michael Fisher's *Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows: The True Story of an Indigenous-Based Social Transformer* (Peter Lang, 2018), we meet two critical thinkers with original and potentially life-changing ideas about fear. Four Arrows is a seasoned holistic educator committed to "Indigenizing" education, and Fisher is a scholar of fear. On the back cover, Fisher tells us that in these "times of extreme cascading global crises", Four Arrows' ideas may help us to reconstruct "a healthy, sane, and sustainable future for all". He promises that, "among other readers, high school teachers and post-secondary teachers across diverse disciplines will find great ideas, eliciting dialogues and study questions for students, who now face a globalizing world".

In my twenties, a time of personal uncertainty and worse, I was aware that fear was a debilitating force in my life, but I could not name exactly what I feared. Of course, I was aware of my *rational* fears, the kind that avert us from walking into traffic, but I could not fully perceive my deeper *irrational* fears. I just knew that regardless of my youthful bluster, on some level, I was afraid. It is this irrational fear and its intertwined worldview, detrimental not only to individuals but also to whole societies, that primarily interests Fisher and Four Arrows. "We are living in a 'culture of fear,'" writes Fisher (p. 77).

Irrational fears can fuel self-doubt, pessimism about life's possibilities, and a worldview that pits us against each other and the earth. Looking back at my younger self, I can see that the irrational fears haunting my life were mostly cultural. They concerned my anxiety about finding my place in a capitalist world order that adheres to a dog-eat-dog mentality and exacts short-term gain at the expense of personal and ecological health and well-being. My role in this world order would determine how I measured my success as an individual, and I was afraid of failing economically and socially because my interests were not aligned with monetary gain. It did not occur to me that this fear of utter failure was not based on my authentic lived experiences and thus was largely irrational. I did not recognize that this culturally embedded fear had bypassed my rational mind and taken root in my subconscious and unconscious very early in life.

This process of subliminal "normalized" fear induction is akin to mass hypnosis. In fact, when we are in a state of fear, our brainwave frequency is the same as that of a person in a hypnotic trance, making us susceptible to subconscious suggestion, note Fisher and Four Arrows (pp. 218, 280–281).<sup>1</sup> So, living in a capitalist culture had first made me fearful, and then this fearful state had made me susceptible to capitalism's story about how our individual success should be measured by our capacity for consumption, regardless of the resulting destruction of the planet. The "dominant"

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<sup>1</sup> See also Four Arrows (2016). *Point of Departure: Returning to Our More Authentic Worldview for Education and Survival*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age, pp. 27, 30, 34, 53.

worldview supporting predatory capitalism is “one that is promoting and maintaining insanity”, says Four Arrows (p. 44). Nonetheless, when we are in a state of fear, note Fisher and Four Arrows, we may simultaneously be able to use our entrancement to access intuitive/primal knowledge, but only if we can learn how to manage our fear well. For this reason, Four Arrows regards fear as an opportunity for personal and community transformation through intuitive, or trance-based, learning.

If our dominant worldview teaches us to avoid what we fear, the Indigenous worldview that guides Four Arrows teaches us to see fear as an opportunity to practise a virtue, the most obvious being courage. Indeed, without fear as a catalyst, we would never know authentic courage. Adopting the false courage of overly masculine and capitalist “no fear” bravado, we would miss out on the true insights that can come from facing fear in order to pass into courage and from there into fearlessness. In the Indigenous worldview, courage and fearlessness are core virtues, but they cannot be practised in the absence of fear—making fear *necessary* in the process of positive transformation.

So fearful and fearless are not opposed in the Indigenous worldview but are complementary parts of a whole that can move us toward deeper self-knowledge both as individuals and as cohabitants of the earth. The trick is to manage fear in such a way that we are able to arrive at fearlessness. In Four Arrows’ theory and practice, this fearlessness is not an empty concept but is the result of lived experience guided by Indigenous precepts. More than that, the fearlessness discussed and modelled by Four Arrows over the course of his life has been gained through a process that has revealed these precepts to be self-reinforcing. Four Arrows arrives at fearlessness in the face of life’s existential questions not by a “leap of faith” (p. 25) but by dint of trial and error.

Nonetheless, Four Arrows’ fearlessness is not devoid of humility. He may use fear to access the intuitive—what Fisher describes as the “more primal/instinctual, subtle and fine-tuned, capable of picking up extra information from the environment as well as unconscious material and/or psychic energies and communications from the invisible realm” (p. 6)—but Four Arrows does not equate this access with certainty. Instead, the invisible realm is the domain of the Great Mysterious, which can never be fully known, only observed. It is this process of observation that has led Four Arrows to a unique systematic approach to fear management, one that he hopes can help each of us to reach our highest potential and one that would serve the greater good.<sup>2</sup>

He calls this system, referred to as a “dehypnotizing technology” and “metacognitive tool,” *CAT-FAWN* (p. 2). *CAT* stands for “concentration activated transformation” and is associated with the trance state, wherein we are both susceptible to suggestion and have access to intuitive/primal knowledge (p. 6). Fear is not the only thing that can put us into this hypnotic state. Throughout the world, Indigenous peoples have also used psychotropics, physical exertion and song to induce a trance state in ceremonial contexts devised to assist in the transformation of the participants on behalf of the greater good. Four Arrows and Fisher argue that these practices facilitated personal and ecological balance, preventing the insanity we see in the modern Western world, and enabled

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<sup>2</sup> See Four Arrows (2016), p. 129.

Indigenous peoples to live in almost constant harmony with nature for 99 percent of human history (p. 281).

Although fear is not the only instigator of the trance state involved in concentration activated transformation, it is the most powerful. When we are scared, we are subject to hypnotic inductions without knowing it (pp. 218, 280–81). We are easy to lie to. How else explain why the human race is hurling itself into an ecological abyss in the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself? Four Arrows says, “In my mind, this mass hypnosis syndrome, I now call *Trance-based Learning (TBL)* gone awry, is the only explanation that makes sense” (p. 2). Somewhere along the line, we were seduced by a fear-based lie about success that has left us fearful, and this fear is reinforcing the lie’s hold on us despite all evidence that we are being irrational/insane.

The Western worldview teaches us that fear produces one of three responses: fleeing, fighting, or freezing. Four Arrows’ practice has shown him that beyond these responses lies a fourth response: cooperating. Fisher quotes from Four Arrows’ book *Primal Awareness*: “This is the purpose of Fear, to stimulate cooperative efforts. Even bacteria begin to cooperate during times of stress” (p. 143).<sup>3</sup> When in a trance state, our ability to respond to fear with cooperation, rather than avoiding it (fleeing), lashing out (fighting), or becoming paralyzed (freezing), depends on our orientation toward *FAWN*, the second part of Four Arrows’ model for hypnosis and dehypnosis, which stands for “Fear, Authority, Words (including music), and Nature” (p. 7).

To cooperate with the invisible realm when afraid, and to thereby co-create a positive outcome when undergoing concentration activated transformation, we must respond to *Fear* by reflecting on lived experience, which is the highest *Authority* on the path to the truth about what we fear. Our search for this truth is influenced by the *Words* (including lyrics) that we use to describe what we fear because words carry their own vibration, whether positive or negative, and thus play an important role in the hypnotic/transformational effect. A connection with *Nature*, the *Great Mysterious*, the invisible realm, is the aim of this movement into fearlessness because nature is the ultimate teacher and source of experiential learning. It is the ground of Four Arrows’ fearlessness. It is spiritual.

These observations encompass just a few of the things I have learned about fear and fear management from reading *Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows*. Four Arrows’ and Fisher’s prescription for a “fear vaccine” (p. 219) could enable us to dehypnotize ourselves. Four Arrows calls this vaccine *CAT-FAWN*.<sup>4</sup> If properly understood and applied, it could help us to “wake up” from the lies that have entranced our society into irrational, self-destructive beliefs. Our authentic self is at stake. We must be self-critical of Western culture’s fear-inducing agenda. A bumper sticker in the town where I live puts it this way: “Don’t believe everything you think!” That’s as good a place to start as any. But Fisher’s collaborative “intellectual biography” offers much more than an account of Four

<sup>3</sup> Four Arrows. (1998). *Primal Awareness: A True Story of Awakening and Transformation with the Raramuri Shamans of Mexico*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.

<sup>4</sup> For more on *CAT-FAWN*, see Rafiq. (2019). Book Review: Indigenous Worldview and the Art of Transformation. *International Journal of Fear Studies*, 1(2), 71–75. Available at <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/111133>.

## *Book Review*

Arrows' theory/model as sifted through the critical lens of Fisher's meticulous scholarship on fear. It is also a portrait of both men's fearlessness in practice.

In the case of Four Arrows, this fearlessness is demonstrated in the book's numerous stories about his firsthand encounters with fearful circumstances over the course of a life that has seen him escape near death while kayaking in Mexico's Copper Canyon, learn to communicate telepathically with a Rarámuri shaman and with the many wild mustangs he trained, fly as a pilot with the US Marine Corps, administer trauma care as a paramedic, hypnotize himself so that he would not need to take an anaesthetic during appendix surgery, and confront the destructive hegemonic forces in the academy, as a professor bent on revitalizing the Indigenous worldview for a new generation of thinkers, educators and leaders.

In the case of R. Michael Fisher, his very approach to writing this book about fearless engagement is utterly fearless and thus mirrors the book's subject matter. It is fearless because, rather than adopt the stance of a know-it-all academic, he is clear that fear is a complicated idea whose nuances are contextual and multifaceted. He unpacks Four Arrows' stories not to say anything definitive about how fear operates in Four Arrows' life and how he manages it, but to excavate fear by means of interpretive and triangulating repetition and elaboration. Fisher is like the artist who, when asked to draw a square, fearlessly shades and smudges a page with colours until an imperfect, yet uniquely beautiful, square appears. Fisher fills this book with scholarship, narrative, personal communications and a fictional academic conference in 2027, among many other things, to paint a picture of the fearless engagement of Four Arrows until some fundamental truths about fear emerge.

Reading *Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows* was itself hypnotic. If you read the book fearlessly, guided by its insights and wisdom, and don't worry about knowing what exactly is surfacing from the text as you go, you may end up knowing far more about fear, courage and fearlessness than you expected. You will also end up knowing a lot more about a remarkable man and potential mentor named Four Arrows. At least that was my experience, and I feel better for it.