

## WHY THIS READING ASSIGNMENT?

I want to begin our course with this piece for several reasons.

- 1) I want the course to have the Atlantic as its geographical center, rather than just Europe.
- 2) So we are bookending the European philosophers (Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant) with sections on "Philosophy In and Of the Americas."
- 3) The interview does a nice job of discussing the way many people think that non-Europeans have mythic or religious thought, but not philosophical thought.
- 4) Or that, at best, they might "have" a philosophy, but don't "do" philosophy.
- 5) By contrast, Maffie thinks the Aztecs did philosophy, and provides a sketch of some main lines of thought.

## MAFFIE'S INTELLECTUAL VOYAGE

- 1) Naturalism = philosophical position with two aspects.
  - a. Methodological naturalism means that philosophy is continuous with the sciences, that is, that philosophers are doing the same sort of thing, with the same methods, as scientists.
    - i. So naturalized epistemology should consult psychology as to what and how people know things.
    - ii. But Maffie said, why not anthropology as the science philosophers should consult? If naturalized epistemology consults psychology, there are lots of claims that ALL people think in a particular way. But that empirical claim should be tested.
  - b. Ontological naturalism means that philosophy should only accept into its system those entities that are "natural," that is, empirically verifiable (whether by science, or by other forms of investigation).
- 2) Discovery of work on Aztec philosophy
  - a. Rejected pathways:
    - i. Not just a case study for naturalized epistemology
    - ii. Or an instance of "ethnophilosophy"
      1. This is a colonialist move
      2. That encases that philosophy as exotic
  - b. Rather, Maffie studied the Aztecs as philosophers

## UNDERSTANDING VS EXPLAINING AWAY

- 1) It's not really philosophy, it's mythology or religion.
- 2) It's unconscious philosophy; something that a people "has" rather than "does"
- 3) It can thus be explained by some kind of psychological or social science
  - a. "They have to think that way bcs that's how brains work"
  - b. "They have to think that way to make their society work"
- 4) Okay, it's philosophy, but it's primitive, exotic, and not "real philosophy"

## CORE CLAIMS OF AZTEC METAPHYSICS

- 1) An ontological and constitutive monism of *teotl* or "energy"
  - a. Ontology = study of being, of ways things are
  - b. Constitutive: what things are made out of
    - i. For a materialist, things are made of matter
    - ii. For a spiritualist, they are made of spirit
    - iii. For the Aztecs, they are made of *teotl* or energy
  - c. Monism:
    - i. Constitution: one stuff or "substance" of which all things are made
    - ii. Ontological: one basic level of reality
  - d. Contrasted with dualism = two kinds of substance, two levels of reality
  - e. Thus Aztec monism is an "immanent" not "transcendent" philosophy
- 2) A process philosophy:
  - a. Processes, not things, are fundamental
  - b. What appears as a thing to an organism is simply a process that is too slow for an organism to notice
- 3) Immanent engendering:
  - a. *Teotl* does not "create" the world from outside
  - b. The world is the self-unfolding of *teotl*
- 4) Agonistic iamic unity
  - a. "Things" are composed of temporary dominance of one pair over its opposite
  - b. So all reality is ambiguous, composed of two aspects
- 5) Three basic patterns
  - a. Olin: cycles
  - b. Malinali: spirals
  - c. Nepantla: weavings and emergence (most fundamental)
- 6) Time-place:
  - a. Time and space are not separate containers
  - b. But patterns of weaving
- 7) Summary: *teotl* is weaver, weaving, and woven product

## THE PLACE OF HUMANS IN AZTEC METAPHYSICS

- 1) The Aztecs had a naturalistic ethics:
  - a. They should behave the way *teotl* / nature works
  - b. This is immanent; there is no transcendent model
  - c. This makes sense because they are natural beings
- 2) Humans had special responsibilities to *contribute* by *promoting balance*
  - a. Life and death are dual aspects of all things
  - b. Humans must feed *teotl*, as they are made of *teotl*
    - i. Song, dance, food
    - ii. Human blood

## BOUNDARY-POLICING BY PHILOSOPHERS

### 1) Gatekeeping and Western self-image vs "the other"

Western	Others
Rational	Irrational / emotional
Self-conscious	Unconscious, dreamy, ritualized
Civilized	Savage or barbarian
Advanced	Primitive
Disciplined	Lazy and / or frenzied
Masculine	Feminine
Adult	Child-like
Freedom	Domination
Philosophy	Dogma, myth, religion

### 2) Two responses by "others"

- a. "Hey, we do philosophy too, just like you do, here are my articles, they look just like what happens at Oxford, please let me join the club."
- b. "The very term 'philosophy' is so hopelessly Western that we refuse to care what you think of what we do."

### 3) Maffie rejects the West vs Others, but doesn't want to reject "philosophy" either

- a. For him, the Aztecs did philosophy
- b. Three definitions
  - i. "a self-consciously reflective and critical endeavor" to see "how things hang together" as Sellars would put it
  - ii. "a stubborn attempt to think clearly" as William James put it
  - iii. "a thoughtful interaction with the world" as Hester and Rabb put it

### 4) For Maffie, Aztecs, along with other "Others," are "alternative philosophical orientations and trajectories rooted in alternative forms of life or ways of being human in the world."

- a. There are no laws of reason or culture requiring one way of thought
- b. The question is as much "what can Western philosophy do for Aztec philosophy" as vice versa