

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