

# Native American and Indigenous Philosophy



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Agnes B. Curry

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

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AGNES B. CURRY, EDITOR

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## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry  
UNIVERSITY OF ST. JOSEPH

We open the newsletter with a poem gifted by Andrea Sullivan-Clarke. It was part of an art collection compiled by the Ontario Native Women's Association and submitted to the Canadian government. This collection highlights the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) characterized by case neglect, underreporting, and other failures of justice in Canada and the United States. "Walk On, Dear Sister, Walk On" mourns the loss of the key roles women play in Indigenous communities and calls for collective activism to demand accountability. Indigenous groups, like the Native Student Alliance at the University of Windsor, place red ribbons in public spaces with the hope of calling attention to a dire problem in Indian Country, which has received little governmental uptake due to the marginalization of these communities as a result of colonialism.

The two articles in this edition are contributions to Indigenous philosophical methodology and to Indigenous ethics.

The first article, by Brian Yazzie Burkhart, addresses the situational hazard facing Indigenous philosophy from its inception. This hazard is inherent in Indigenous philosophy's relationship to the whole philosophical project but is especially pernicious when philosophical inquiry becomes enmeshed with what Burkhart terms settler-colonialist epistemic guardianship. The framework of epistemic guardianship is not only delusional from the outset, its delusions are specifically structured so as to render Indigenous philosophy impossible from the start. Thus any attempts to be conversational, although deeply rooted in the broader philosophical ethos, can never surmount the barriers of epistemic guardianship in the colonial context. And so, according to Burkhart's "trickster methodology," Indigenous philosophy must proceed from a stance of epistemic resistance and sovereignty that rejects any ethnographic containment of Indigenous ideas. Burkhart grounds this stance of epistemic resistance and sovereignty in a concept of Indigenous relatedness to land.

The second article, by James Maffie, explains in careful detail a key feature of Mexica ethics that distinguishes it from Western perspectives, namely, its differing framework for evaluating the pain and hardship that life inevitably brings. In contrast to Western ethics that generally see pain and hardship as something to diminish or circumvent, Mexica ethics sees pain and hardship as ontologically necessary accompaniments of our existing in a framework of dynamic, ongoing relations of reciprocity. Essentially, maintaining these reciprocal relations demand work and the expenditure of vital energy. The resulting enervation must be relieved by others in ongoing exchange. Thus we are always mutually interdependent, at every level of being—human and divine. At the level of the human, "humanity" is not a given but is instead predicated upon taking up these relations and reciprocating; thus becoming human is a moral task and one that always entails hardship. As Maffie characterizes, "living a genuinely human life has to hurt," and the moral value of particular pains and hardships must be judged contextually.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the *Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy*. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats.

In all cases, however, references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the [APA website](#). **Please submit material electronically to Agnes Curry by June 15, 2019.**

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## POEM

### *Walk On, Dear Sister, Walk On*

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Baby cryin' 'cause their momma's gone,  
 Can't ya hear my warrior? Can't ya hear, can't ya hear?  
 Hold those sweeties, hold them near.  
 Walk on, dear sister, walk on.

They take you, they beat you, leave you to die.  
 Don't you care, police? Don't you care, don't you care?  
 Postings and stories make folks aware.  
 Still they close their eyes, yes they close their eyes.

Momma, sister, auntie gone.  
 Who'll teach the children? Who'll keep the lore?  
 The numbers increase, but who's keeping score?  
 Walk on, dear sister, walk on.

Brutal, vicious, crisis—just words, they say.  
 They erase you, they erase us—will we disappear?  
 They darken our doorstep, they shroud us in fear.  
 They chip at our numbers, they wish us away.

Stand up, my sisters, be strong, be strong.  
 Become warriors and fear not, fear not.  
 Link arm in arm, defend our lot,  
 and walk on, dear sister, walk on.

## ARTICLES

### *Countering Epistemic Guardianship with Epistemic Sovereignty through the Land*

Brian Yazzie Burkhart

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

In my forthcoming work, *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures*, I try to clarify some of the ways that Indigenous people conceive of philosophical concepts like knowing, being, and valuing as embedded in land, where land is a living, breathing relative and the continual creative source of life, thinking, knowing, feeling, and being. Speaking of a human intertwining with land, where land is a being and a relative, triggers the operations of epistemic guardianship within the settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. The racial contract, according to Charles Mills, or the settler contract, according to Pateman and Roberts, shapes “an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance” as “a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions. . . producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”<sup>1</sup> Under the racial and settler contract, whites and settlers “live in an invented delusional world,” “a fantasyland,” “a

consensual hallucination.”<sup>2</sup> Where “misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deceptions” are not “accidental” but rather “prescribed by the terms” of these contracts.<sup>3</sup> The racial and settler contracts and corresponding epistemologies of ignorance hold up and justify the false worlds of white supremacy and Euro-supremacy. In the context of settler colonialism, these epistemologies of ignorance not only serve to create the false world of settler colonialism but also to maintain the delusional epistemic world that is necessary for its ongoing survival. This delusional epistemic world serves settler colonial power because it presents the imaginary world of Euro-supremacy as the entire world. Settler colonialism, then, is not any particular historical event or set of historical events but rather a structure, as articulated in Patrick Wolfe’s work—a structure of power that produces subjugating effects in a myriad of ways, including the subjugation of the production and recognition of Indigenous knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Settler colonialism as a structure of power targets the land, the being of the land, and the intertwining of Indigenous being with Indigenous land within the broader framework of coloniality that, according to Anabel Quijano, arises and is sustained through the creations of the dual arms of colonial power: the concept of race and racial hierarchy; and the commodification of labor.<sup>5</sup> It is my contention that settler colonialism is a form of power that is conceptualized around the obscuring of the being of land and of the intertwining of human being with the being of land. From this, it is not a stretch to imagine that land and conceptions of land are at the root of the concept of race and racial hierarchies as well, and it is the intertwining of the concepts of race and land that forms the foundational conceptual nexus of coloniality itself as the framework of “the modern world-system,” as Wallerstein puts it.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I want to clarify one of the ways—through epistemic guardianship—that settler colonial power operates to erase or obscure Indigenous knowledge as a part of the attempt to maintain the invented and delusional epistemic world of Euro-supremacy. In contrasting epistemic guardianship, I want to position epistemic sovereignty as a form of epistemic resistance that arises out of and in relationship to the land. Here I want to speak to a way in which sovereignty itself can be understood as fundamentally emanating from the land. The primary seat of sovereignty as an Indigenous concept resides in the land, and the human conception of sovereignty and the human capacity for sovereignty—both in relation to land and in relation to ourselves and others—comes out of the land as an originary and continual manifestation of the being of the land and the always already in motion kinship relationship between humans and land. Epistemic sovereignty is deeper than a political framework for Indigenous sovereignty. Epistemic sovereignty is part of the framework of Indigenous epistemologies of locality, or knowledge as an originary and continual manifestation of the being of the land, and of the always already being in motion kinship relationship of humans with land.

#### **EPISTEMIC GUARDIANSHIP**

When Indigenous peoples speak of sovereignty from the land, identity from the land, knowing as an intimate kinship relationship to and from the land, and Indigenous ethics

as grounded in the land as a relative and a teacher, this often triggers epistemic guardianship within the dominant discourse of the settler state and settler-state frameworks of knowledge. Epistemic guardianship functions to assimilate or eradicate forms of knowledge that exist outside or are seen to exist outside of the limits of knowledge set by the dominant discourse of the settler state, and these limits serve to maintain the delusional world of Euro-supremacy; that is, epistemic guardianship functions to maintain settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. Epistemic guardianship often excludes Indigenous ways of knowing in the process of attempting to be inclusive of and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing. Under epistemic guardianship, Indigenous ways of knowing are always under radical suspicion that requires their facing the justificatory tribunal of settler frameworks of knowledge. This tribunal determines whether Indigenous claims to knowledge are justified insofar as they either meet standards appropriate for settler frameworks of knowledge or are assimilable to these frameworks of knowledge and meaning. Some candidates are rejected outright while others are judged as requiring assimilation to settler frameworks of knowledge or meaning. This tribunal also deals with the special requirements for the production of *Indigenous* knowledge through proper ethnographic form and expression. For example, Indigenous knowledge as expressed by Indigenous people must be produced through their bodies or their lives as containers of the truth of Indigenous knowledge as a form of ethnographic containment. For example, Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo examines this containment in the context of the questions surrounding the truth of Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography.<sup>7</sup> Saldaña-Portillo critiques the way in which Menchú is conceived as a mere container of possible Indigenous knowledge, where the validity of Menchú's knowledge is determined by the Western subject and only in relation to its existence as an Indigenous cultural artifact. The tribunal of epistemic guardianship then also judges Indigenous knowledge in terms of the proper form of Indigenous knowledge as set by the settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, which includes judging the validity of Indigenous knowledge in relation to its necessary existence as a particular Indigenous cultural artifact.

Epistemic guardianship functions in a similar way in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing within settler state frameworks of knowledge and their institutions of academic philosophy that political guardianship functions in relation to Indigenous nations within the political and legal power structure of the settler state. Political and legal guardianship is built into the current framework of federal Indian law in the United States, where Congress has absolute power over Indigenous nations within the settler state without any limits or constitutional checks because Indigenous nations are understood to exist as wards of the settler state. The guardianship principle in settler societies is the legal and political doctrine that settler states have the right and obligation to protect Indigenous people, particularly from themselves. In the United States, the guardianship principle has functioned to justify the outlawing of traditional political, cultural, or religious practices that were seen as retarding the necessary progression of Indigenous people from savagery to civilization, a progress that was

deemed necessary in order to allow Indigenous people the opportunity to participate in civilized settler society. In historical times, the guardianship principle justified the outlawing of the potlach, the sundance, and the gourd dance, as well as the removal of commonly held tribal land in favor of individual allotment as private property. In more recent times the guardianship principles have justified the outlawing of traditional tribal systems of government and land management as well as the removal of tribal jurisdiction over violence against Indigenous women on tribal land when the perpetrator is a settler and not a citizen of any federally recognized tribe within the United States.

In the context of settler philosophy, articulations of Indigenous philosophy often trigger the operations of philosophical guardianship that force Indigenous philosophical articulations into appropriate guardianship forms—forms that are assimilated to the dominant paradigm or are at least translatable to or consistent with views of knowledge, morality, and the like that are generally acceptable within the dominant paradigm. This is often done, as with guardianship in general, with good intentions. The purpose of guardianship in the context of philosophy is to bring Indigenous philosophy into the realm of proper civilized philosophy in contrast to what is seen as mere religious thought or myth-making. The guardianship of Indigenous ways of knowing, the containment of those ways of knowing within the invented worlds of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, and the containment of Indigenous claims to knowledge within a paradigm of cultural artifacts such that Indigenous knowledge-keepers can only be containers of cultural truths rather than producers, have the combined function of nearly extinguishing the possibility of Indigenous knowledge altogether, at least in anything like its own terms.

Chief Luther Standing Bear claims that understanding America requires being connected to "its formative processes," that in order to find "the roots of the tree of [one's] life" or "grasp the rock and the soil. . .[m]en must be born and reborn to belong. Their bodies must be formed of the dust of their forefather's bones."<sup>8</sup> When Indigenous philosophers use these words to reflect on an Indigenous relationship to land, these philosophers are criticized from each of the angles of epistemic guardianship. One critique is that Standing Bear is not authentic as a cultural artifact since his claims to knowledge are the product of what Shepard Krech calls the myth of "the Ecological Indian,"<sup>9</sup> which means that what Standing Bear says is not authentically Indian. A second critique is a critique of using direct reference to Indigenous philosophers, such as Standing Bear, in the oral tradition without proper anthropological distance or settler philosophical interpretation. This is a critique of using Standing Bear's words directly, which means relying on Indigenous forms of knowledge and knowledge transmission that cannot be scientifically or academically confirmed, such as oral knowledge and oral tradition, as well as using Indigenous forms of interpreting that knowledge within the oral tradition rather than relying on the settler frameworks of cultural interpretation. Epistemic guardianship results in a rejection of Indigenous claims, at least on their own terms, of the kind of connection to land that Standing Bear

describes. First, this sort of claim is said to be a function of the ecological Indian myth, and Krech proves that this idea is a myth in his book. From the perspective of epistemic guardianship, it might be suggested that if Indigenous philosophers would just read Krech's book or listen to those who have, they would also reject this claim and reject Standing Bear's words. Second, Standing Bear's words should not be referenced as Indigenous philosophy in the first place, since his words are not an authentic expression of Indigenous culture. His words are not a proper artifact of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous people, the epistemic guardianship perspective suggests, only started using this ecological Indian myth to talk about their connection to land during the pan-Indian movement as a way to push back against the constant settler theft of their lands. Sam Gill's work is often referenced to support this second critique. The attempt to push Indigenous philosophy toward the rejection of Standing Bear's word from either critique is seen as a function of providing epistemic guardianship for Indigenous philosophy.

The problem with these guardianship critiques is that they are contained within and only have traction within the settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. So they are produced by settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, which are themselves designed around the denial of the existence of Indigenous knowledge outside of the delusional bubble of Euro-supremacy and settler frameworks of knowledge. Part of the function of the guardianship critique, then, is to collapse the possibility of Indigenous response before it can be realized that guardianship critique only has traction within its own invented and delusional world of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. As long as the discussion remains sealed within this invented and delusional bubble, the experiences that could disrupt this delusional bubble remain impossible. Thus, it is settler claims to knowledge regarding Indigenous claims to knowledge that are sealed in the container of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, never to be exposed to experiences that do not already conform to the settler epistemologies of ignorance. As is shown below, it is Krech's question and critique that exists and has meaning only in a bubble of thought that has been constructed in isolation from actual Indigenous people, lifeways, languages, and so on, and is, in fact, self-contained in such a way that it cannot reach out to actual Indigenous peoples or be impacted by the reality of Indigenous lifeways, languages, and so on.

Here is a brief sketch of part of how the ecological Indian and Krech's book about it are contained within the invented and delusional world of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance and function in relationship to Indigenous knowledge only through epistemic guardianship. First, let us start with the very particular and peculiar Western ideas about what nature is, what it means to be an animal in nature, for example, or even for particular kinds of primitive, savage humans who are closer to animals, to be in a state of nature. Remember, the term "savage" comes from the Old French through the Latin "silvaticus" (of the wood) from the Latin for wood or forest, "silva." Savage just means forest dwellers (of the wood), but it connotes in the minds of European colonists and later American

settlers a people who are natural or more in nature, as animals are, for example. Now, as people in nature, savages can be noble or monstrous depending on how Western people have viewed nature. Monstrous savages come from monstrous nature, where nature is imagined as like a bear or mountain lion that would tear apart a human as a matter of course. Noble savages come from noble nature, where nature is imagined as, like an innocent deer, without guile and majestically living with the land (think: Bambi). The ecological Indian question for Krech is really just "Are Indians actually noble savages?" Krech's question is just "Are Indians really like Bambi?" Are they like deer who live naturally on the land as animals are thought to within this Western view of animals and nature? Are Indians natural like animals, where animals are not rational and so do not make choices except by instincts and drives? The question Krech is trying to answer, then, is whether Indians really are savages. The answer is no, according to him. The real question is "How is that a relevant question in the first place?" If the question of Indian savagery is relevant at all, it is not relevant to Indigenous people, it should be clear. It seems trivial to note that is it very likely that not a single Indigenous person has ever wondered if he or she were like the Western notion of an innocent animal who lived with nature. If this question is relevant at all, it is only relevant to Western people in terms of trying to deal with their own mythology and delusional beliefs. The framing of the question of the ecological Indian completely within the bubble of the delusional world of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance means that Krech can have no communication, by definition, with actual Indigenous peoples in the answering of his question, because if he were to even to pose his question in such a way as to allow Indigenous voices to participate in the answering of the question, then there could be no question for him to ask. The structuring of Krech's question and answer solely within the delusional bubble of epistemologies of ignorance means that Indigenous people as actual, rational people cannot appear in Krech's book without disrupting the framing of the question and answer as existing solely within the delusional world. It should not be surprising, then, that in 317 pages on the topic of the ecological Indian, there is not a single Indigenous voice. Instead, and not surprisingly from the framing of the question, Krech's work functions like a zoological study of Indian behavior on the basis of Western archeological material and European, often overtly biased and even racist, descriptions of Indigenous behavior. There are no Indigenous voices, and Indigenous people are studied zoologically and without any consideration of their rationality in Krech's book because if Indigenous people were considered rational and given a voice, the entire question of the text would disappear before the text was written, as it would no longer be framed within the delusional world of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. Consider it this way: What if I had just come to the United States from another planet, let's say, and I wanted to investigate recycling and trash in this country. If I looked at the people of this country the way Krech does, I would conclude they have no positive relationship to recycling and mostly produce mountains of smelly trash. If I were to treat the people of the United States as rational in questioning their relationship to trash, then I have to consider their action within a framework

of rational choice and decision-making. In this context, I might discover that the people of this country had a great love for recycling but were just really bad at it. To not ask the people of this country any question regarding how they conceive of their relationship to trash, how they would like to be and desire to be, rather than simply to study them as natural forms of life, would be to maintain a framework of an epistemology of ignorance regarding the possibilities of their existence since, if I were doing so because I assumed that they were natural forms of life, I would have removed the possibility of experiencing anything as it regards these people that did not conform to my preconceived and delusional (at least in the sense that it has no possibility of actual contact with them or the world in that sense) view of them.

Much of what I just said about Shepard Krech's book can be said about Sam Gill's *Mother Earth, an American Story*, where he suggests that Indigenous people borrowed the idea of Mother Earth from the settler image of what it means to be Indian.<sup>10</sup> In this context, I will not repeat all the moves from the analysis of Krech's question and answer as contained within the settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, but the same pattern follows in that Gill's work is only meaningful within this invented and delusional world. Gill says it himself: his question is about the European's image of Indians and nature, which is self-contained in its own invented and delusional world. He is never able even to formulate the question as to what exists outside of this world because that would already be to question the legitimacy of that world in toto. Gill is also explicit in his operations of epistemic guardianship when he suggests that Native Americans who study Native religion tend to only speak about their being "oppressed minorities within the academy and American culture."<sup>11</sup> This personal and political bent to the writing and research of Native Americans who study Native religion, he claims, diminishes the quality of research.<sup>12</sup> Instead, it is non-Native, objective, and scientific scholars like himself who study from a distance who have the proper view of the questions and how to answer them, which is why he can claim against all Indigenous protestations to the contrary that the concept of Mother Earth was manufactured by Indigenous people as a tool to resist further land encroachment.<sup>13</sup> What Indigenous people have to say on this matter has been precluded by the framing of his work as solely within the delusional bubble of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance.

## EPISTEMIC ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE METHODOLOGIES

If the invented, delusional world of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance can be disrupted and a space of epistemic sovereignty that circumvents the force of the guardianship framework over Indigenous philosophy created, then the voices of Indigenous people and Indigenous philosophers can be heard for the first time, and the settlers and the settler philosophers can hear for the first time something beyond the delusional bubble of their own making, which means breaking the vicious cycle of settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance. When Indigenous philosophers, from Standing Bear to Vine Deloria Jr. and beyond, are listened to on their own

terms—"We talk, you listen," as Deloria says—then settler philosophers liberate themselves, if only temporarily and in part, from settler colonial epistemologies of ignorance, but also Indigenous philosophers and Indigenous philosophy is liberated, if only temporarily and in part, from the settler-colonial framework of epistemic guardianship. In this space of even momentary liberation, on both sides, there is a moment to reveal a deeper level of epistemic sovereignty that arises out of the always already being in motion kinship relationship between people and land, a relationship that coloniality foundationally obscures in order to imagine and act out its fantasies of settling and remolding Indigenous land as a new Europe, a new England, or new Spain.

Epistemic sovereignty, like political sovereignty, disrupts the power structure that supports epistemic guardianship, but epistemic sovereignty is a deeper sense of sovereignty that arises out of and is maintained by the always already being in motion kinship relationship between people and land, and the power of human sovereignty arises out of and is contained within that always already in motion kinship relationship. Epistemic guardianship, from the perspective of epistemic sovereignty, is not corrected by an error theory that will guide those who operate under epistemic guardianship to contexts where knowledge of Indigenous people or even the production of Indigenous knowledge in a settler context can be achieved. In part this is because epistemic sovereignty is part of the process by which Indigenous knowledge is created whether there is epistemic guardianship or not. Epistemic sovereignty is not merely a decolonial tool but an Indigenous understanding of the appropriate context for the production of knowledge in the first place. Epistemic sovereignty exists within a world that is framed by locality and the always already being in motion of kinship. In this world, knowledge is created freely. This kind of sovereignty is expressed in the important Diné phrase, *t'áá hó'ajít'éego t'éiyá* (It's all up to you), which captures "the philosophy of SNBH [Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhon] by which individuals internalize how they want their lives to be and what they must do to achieve SNBH," which is each individual's sustained harmony within the always already in motion kinship relationship that frames the larger philosophy of *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhon*.<sup>14</sup> Under epistemic sovereignty as a broader theory of knowledge, coming to know arises from within, and is contained by, my always already in motion kinship relationship with land. Through my always already in motion kinship relationship with land, the world freely engages with me in negotiating the dynamic interaction of knowledge through kinship. In this sense, epistemic sovereignty is part of the root of knowledge itself within Indigenous ways of knowing and is required for Indigenous knowledge even outside of the framework of epistemic guardianship, but also serves as a form of epistemic resistance to guardianship.

One way of forcing epistemic sovereignty into the settler-philosophical framework of guardianship for Indigenous philosophy is the use of decolonial phenomenology as a resistance methodology. Decolonial phenomenology is described by Nelson Maldonado-Torres as a method that brackets "the assumed validity and general legitimacy of European traditions of thought."<sup>15</sup> This bracketing of European traditions of thought opens a space for

Indigenous philosophy to show up in a way that is not always overdetermined by the assumed validity and legitimacy of European traditions of thought, and the settler-guardianship function of those traditions of thought in relation to Indigenous traditions. In this way, Indigenous concepts are foregrounded and taken as given rather than always under suspicion, as they always are under settler-philosophical guardianship. Decolonial phenomenology removes part of the power of the guardianship function without having to engage in the exercise of trying to reject European traditions of thought on their own terms, where, just like in the political context of the settler state, they have plenary power. Also, engaging European traditions of thought on their own terms means engaging them against an already assumed background of Euro-supremacy, which means the exercise is defeated before it begins. Part of the function of philosophical guardianship in the settler-philosophy context, just as with political or legal guardianship, is to hide or even erase the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous people. Indigenous experiences and perspectives are deemed relevant or even meaningful only insofar as they assimilate to or are translatable to dominant settler-philosophy paradigms. Guardianship hides or even erases Indigenous experiences and perspectives in general in the process of creating an Indigenous DuBoisian double-consciousness and a transparency of Indigenous reality to settler consciousness, or radical lack of consciousness or lived experience for Indigenous people in the context of settler interpretation. This is why Vine Deloria Jr., in his classic *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, begins with the problem of transparency. He opens that book with the line, "Indians are like the weather. Everyone knows all about the weather."<sup>16</sup> The problem that we face as Indigenous people in the context of our struggle is "our transparency," Deloria continues.<sup>17</sup> "People can tell just by looking at us what we want, what should be done to help us, how we feel, and what a 'real' Indian is really like."<sup>18</sup> "Because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology. Experts paint us as they would like us to be."<sup>19</sup> "To be an Indian" in settler America, he concludes, "is in a very real sense to be unreal."<sup>20</sup> Decolonial phenomenology explicitly rejects our transparency to the settler gaze. It begins with the position that we as Indigenous people will tell you (settler philosophy and the settler state) what we are experiencing, and for the first time, perhaps, when we talk, the settler will just have to listen. This methodology takes Indigenous experience of the world in general, as well as Indigenous experience of settler reality in particular, as given. In doing so, it refuses to negotiate or assimilate Indigenous experience to the dominant frameworks or perspectives of settler philosophy or the settler state.

This foregrounding of Indigenous experience and rejecting of settler interpretation removes the possibility of transparency as well as settler guardianship. At the extreme end, decolonial phenomenology rejects the settler interpretation of the meaning of the settler guardianship principle. By refusing to operate in terms of the settler interpretation of the guardianship principle, Indigenous philosophy refuses to be forced to assimilate the meaning of the settler guardianship principle to the intended meaning that settler thinking and settler history have put

upon it or may want to put upon it. This forced assimilation of Indigenous concerns with settler principles to the meanings that settler thinking and settler history want to put these principles to is a classic example of the settler guardianship principle itself. It should be clear how it creates a DuBoisian double-consciousness for Indigenous people who live under settler rule and settler principles. We have our experience and understanding of the world and our experience and understanding of the settler world, but we must either reject those completely and try to act and speak in the ways that the settler world finds acceptable for us or try to translate our experiences and understandings into words and actions that the settler world finds acceptable. To reject the settler interpretation of the guardianship principle is to reject the guardianship principle before it has the power to act upon Indigenous reality, thought, and experience, which removes the possibility for Indigenous philosophy to even accidentally fall back into the trap of transparency and settler guardianship. One of the features of epistemic sovereignty, as a framework of knowledge that arises out of and is contained in the always already in motion kinship relationship with land, is the rejection of assimilation of experience into any kind of abstract or universal framework, and so without explicitly rejecting the assimilation requirement of settler guardianship and the transparency of Indigenous experience from the start, there would be no meaningful way of getting an Indigenous theory of knowledge or epistemic sovereignty off the ground.

Decolonial phenomenology as an expression of epistemic sovereignty and a tool of resistance against epistemic guardianship also rejects the ethnographic containment of Indigenous voices as artifacts of Indigenous culture. By refusing to allow the question of whether Standing Bear is an authentic voice of Indigenous culture, decolonial phenomenology circumvents the ethnographic containment of Indigenous voices and further rejects the power of epistemic guardianship to tell Indigenous people to whom they should listen, and whether certain voices belong to them or not. One might worry that refusing to allow the question of the authenticity of the voices of Standing Bear, Black Elk, Lame Deer, Chief Seattle, and others to even be asked seems to delocalize these voices insofar as one is removing them from their questionable historical context. The opposite is actually the case if the claim is taken seriously that Indigenous knowledge arises out of and is contained by the always already being in motion kinship relationships to land. Knowledge is produced and contained in the locality of each of these individuals, which is to say produced and contained in the always already being in motion kinship relationships of each of these individuals. Their knowledge is a manifestation of the particular locality of their being from the land. To ask if Standing Bear's voice is authentic in terms of the representation or artifact of a particular cultural reality is to trap his voices in the container of cultural authenticity, a container that can only exist through an untethering of his being from the land, his knowing from the land, and his culture from the land—removing his being, knowing, and culture from their existence within an always already being in motion kinship relationship with land. Even to ask if Standing Bear's voice reflects a truth that exists beyond him

is to take up a transcendental position of delocality in order to question the authenticity of his voices in the context of its correspondence to a reality that exists outside him. My refusal, as an extension of Audra Simpson's "ethnographic refusal" as a rhetorical strategy that calculates "what you need to know and what I refuse to write in," rejects both questions of authenticity, and so goes beyond the refusal to "write in" to the refusal to allow the guardianship principle to say what I mean or what Standing Bear means.<sup>21</sup> The question of the authenticity of Standing Bear's voice is nothing other (in the context of his always already being in motion kinship relationship with land out of which his being and voice arise and are contained) than the question of whether Standing Bear meant what he said. To question Standing Bear's words, then, is to question him as a person, his existence. If, instead of questioning Standing Bear's existence, I listen to his words as an expression of his being in locality, of his experience, then I have already moved beyond the position of judging the validity of his words as a correspondence to reality untethered from his always already being in motion kinship relationship with land. If I listen to his words as an expression of his being in locality, then I have already moved beyond the position of judging the validity of his words as artifacts that must correspond to a cultural reality untethered from its always already being in motion kinship relationship with land. If Standing Bear is telling the truth of his experience, then his words are expressions of his experience and so are a manifestation of reality in locality or are a manifestation of his always already being in motion kinship relationship with land. The job of the philosopher of epistemic sovereignty or locality is not to question the truth of Standing Bear's words, unless there is some reason to think that he is telling a lie, but to seek the relevancy, relationality, and meaning of those words for me where I am now, which is in an always already being in motion kinship relationship with land.

NOTES

1. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18. See also Robert Nichols, "Indigeneity and the Settler Contract Today," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 39, no. 2 (2013): 165–86; and Carol Pateman, "Settler Contract," in *Contract and Domination*, ed. Carol Pateman and Charles W. Mills (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 35–78.
2. Ibid., 18.
3. Ibid., 19.
4. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.
5. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.
6. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols (San Diego: Academic Press, 1974–1989).
7. Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
8. Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 248.
9. Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company), 1999.
10. Sam Gill, *Mother Earth: An American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

11. Sam Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, LXII/4:9 (1994), 972.
12. Ibid.
13. Gill, *Mother Earth*.
14. Vincent Werito, "Understanding Hózhó' to Achieve Critical Consciousness: A Contemporary Diné Interpretation of the Philosophical Principles of Hózhó'," *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Native Thought*, ed. Lloyd Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 27.
15. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Post-continental Philosophy: Its Definition, Contours, and Fundamental Sources," *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* 1, no. 3 (2006): 27.
16. Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 1.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 2.
20. Ibid.
21. Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice,' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (December 2007): 73.

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## *The Role of Hardship in Mexica Ethics: Or, Why Being Good Has to Hurt*

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### INTRODUCTION

Philosophers in the Western tradition commonly build their theories of morality and of the good life upon the assumption that pain and suffering—or hardship for short—are intrinsically bad. The good life, the life worth living, the well-lived life for human beings, contains as little hardship as possible. Mexica ethics, however, denies hardship has intrinsic value. Its badness and goodness are determined contextually. Mexica ethics maintains that hardship plays an essential and so indispensable role as well as a creative and positive role in morally upright human behavior and in the well-lived, good human life. In short: doing the right thing and being good have to hurt.<sup>1</sup>

1. Conquest-era Mexica ethics (*tlamaniliztli*) set out to configure how humans live with the aim of balancing the continual processing and thus continual becoming of the Fifth Age (the cosmic age in which human beings currently live).<sup>2</sup> Because the Mexica regarded ethics as ordering an entire human lifeway (*nemiliztli*), Mexica ethics covered the entire gamut of human activity ranging from how to think, eat, drink, feel, talk, walk, dress, bathe, arrange one's hair, love, respect, cook, farm, fish, hunt, wage war, rear children, have sex, bury the dead, and so on. It also covered, for example, what one ought to eat (viz., maize) as well as what language one ought to speak (viz., Nahuatl as opposed to Totonac or Chichimec).<sup>3</sup> Mexica philosophy conceived as a seamless whole what modern Western thought tends to splinter into distinct spheres: viz., religion, ethics, etiquette, politics, economics, cooking, farming, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

2. Reciprocity functions "like a pump at the heart" of the Mexica cosmos and lifeworld by circulating vital energy throughout the cosmos and between its various inhabitants. Reciprocity also functions "like a pump at the heart" of morally appropriate as well as genuinely human behavior according to Mexica ethics.<sup>5</sup> The moral obligation to reciprocate—i.e., to respond to and maintain social relationships defined by *nepantla* or well-balanced mutuality with other agents (human or other-than-human)—figures centrally in Mexica ethics. *Nepantla* designates a dynamic, dialectical, and diachronic condition of being in the middle or middled. *Nepantla* conveys a sense of abundant reciprocity or mutuality: a back-and-forth process that consists of being abundantly middled, well-balanced, and centered.<sup>6</sup> *Nepantla* processes join, interlace, interlock, or unite two things together. They mix, fuse, shake, or weave things together. And they do so in a way that is middling, betwixting-and-betweening, and abundant with mutuality and reciprocity. Finally, they do so in a way that is creatively destructive, destructively creative, and, therefore, transformative.

According to contemporary Nahuatl and Nahuatl-speakers in Mexico, the reciprocal exchanging of gifts is one, if not *the*, principal way one expresses love, honor, and respect for others; and the principal way of expressing love, honor, and respect for others is by feeding, caring for, and nurturing others. They thus conceive the moral obligation to reciprocate as entailing love, respect, nurturing, and feeding.<sup>7</sup> The Mexica (and other contact-era Mesoamericans) embraced this view as well. It is a component of what Alfredo López Austin calls the enduring and "unifying" "hard nucleus" ("*nucleo duro*") of Mesoamerican philosophy-religion,<sup>8</sup> and of what Catherine Good Eshelman calls the "conceptual axes" ("*ejes conceptuales*") of Nahua (and Mexica) philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

3. According to Mexica *tlamachiliztlatolzanilli* ("wisdom discourses or tellings"<sup>10</sup>), the moral obligation to reciprocate is rooted in the originary actions of creator beings who merited or deserved (*macehua*) the existence of the Fifth Age and all its inhabitants, including the sun, earth, sky, humans, water, and maize.<sup>11</sup> They tell us that the history of the cosmos consists of a series of five Ages. The succession of the first four Ages consists of the creator beings, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca*, taking turns creating their own and destroying the other's Age. Each of the four Ages was populated by its own particular kind of human who was also destroyed. Upon the destruction of the Fourth Age, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca* decide to work together in creating a final Fifth Age and fifth kind of human being. Present-day humans are this fifth kind and inhabit this Fifth Age.<sup>12</sup> Mexica "wisdom tellings" also relate that *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca* created humans in order to honor, respect, nurture, nourish, and in so doing regenerate creator beings. They assigned to humankind a unique task (*tequitl*) or load (*tlamamalli*)<sup>13</sup> to bear, and a unique responsibility among inhabitants of the Fifth Age: viz. to nourish and sustain creator beings and, ultimately, the entire Fifth Age.

The "wisdom telling," *Legend of the Suns*, adds that as a consequence of the monumental effort (*tequitl*) and expenditure of life-energy involved in fashioning sky, earth, and moving sun of the Fifth Age, *Tezcatlipoca*, *Quetzalcoatl*, and the other creator beings become enervated, overheated with hunger, imbalanced, and in life-threatening need of nourishment. In order to remedy their condition, *Quetzalcoatl* decided to undertake a series of further hardships (*tequitl*). He undertakes the perilous journey to *Mictlan* (time-place of the dead below the earth's surface) where he successfully locates and retrieves the bones of Fourth Age humans—despite the many obstacles placed in his way by *Mictlantecuhtli* (lord of the time-place of the dead). *Quetzalcoatl* brings the bones to *Cihuacoatl* who grinds them into meal and places the meal into a jade bowl. *Quetzalcoatl* then proceeds to fashion Fifth Age human beings from the bone meal of Fourth Age humans by mixing into the meal the life-energy contained in blood drawn from his virile member. The other creator beings join in as well.<sup>14</sup>

Creator beings give Fifth Age humans life so that humans will cool, refresh, and rebalance creator beings by nourishing, nurturing, and feeding them. (Hunger

consists of an imbalance consisting of excessive heat, and consuming food restores balance through cooling.) Creator beings regard feeding and nurturing as ways of respecting, worshipping, loving, and honoring them. Preeminent among this nourishment are energy-rich food-gifts such as well-spoken words, song, dance, music, ceremony, incense, prepared foodstuffs (e.g., maize tamales), and human and animal blood, hearts, and lives.

The continuous processing of the Fifth Age also requires the continuing contribution of creator beings' vital energies. Because sustaining the world continuously enervates them, creator beings are continuously in need of nourishment from humans. In short, although the initial and continuing existence of Fifth Age (and all its inhabitants) are wholly dependent upon creator beings, creator beings are themselves wholly dependent upon human beings. The continuing existence of creator beings depends essentially upon human nourishing.<sup>15</sup> Creators depend continually upon being nourished by human life-energy.

Humans and creator beings are therefore mutually dependent, their relationship aptly characterized as "mutualist symbiotic" or "obligate mutualism" (meaning one or both symbionts depend entirely on the other for survival in the terminology of contemporary biological science). Fifth Age creator beings and humans depend equally upon one another's life-energies. Creator beings are accordingly said to be "mothers and fathers" to humans, while humans are said to be "mothers and fathers" to the gods. And yet this mutual dependency is not gainsaid by the obvious disparity in their respective amounts of power.<sup>16</sup> As insignificant as it appears in comparison to the world-creating life energies of creator beings, human life-energy nevertheless suffices to sustain the creator beings. Each depends completely upon the other for their continuing existence.

According to a different "wisdom telling," *Histoyre du mechique*, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca initiate the creation of the Fifth Age by capturing *Tlaltecuhltli* (the great earth caiman, earth lady) and splitting her into two to form the sky and earth's surface. Human foodstuffs such as maize and amaranth grow from her body. Water flows from her eyes. As a consequence of her hardship (*tequitl*) and generosity in gifting humans with water and foodstuffs, *Tlaltecuhltli* demands reciprocity from humans. She demands to be fed; she demands human life-energy.<sup>17</sup>

Human beings are always already born into a complex, all-inclusive, interwoven fabric of moral relationships with other agents that obligate them to reciprocate for gifts they have received. As a species (phylogenetically), humans are born with an obligation to reciprocate or gift-back to creator beings. They are born with what we might cautiously call "original debt" or "original obligatedness." (This must not be confused with the Christian notion of "original sin," a moral wrongdoing for which human must spend their lives atoning.) As individual beings (ontogenetically), humans are also born into a complex and all-inclusive interwoven fabric of moral relationships obligating them to reciprocate for gifts they have received from ancestors (who although deceased are still active), parents, family, neighbors, and

other-than-humans such as sun, rain, earth, maize, animals, houses, farming tools, and cooking utensils. Winona LaDuke expresses the point eloquently when explicating White Earth Ojibwe philosophy: "Genealogical bonds are normative bonds, generating moral responsibilities to the natural world and the living beings it sustains; they give rise to 'reciprocal relations' which define 'responsibilities . . . between humans and the ecosystem.'"<sup>18</sup> Finally, *contra* a dominant view in modern Western moral and political thought, the fact that humans (both phylogenetically and ontogenetically) incur this obligation is *not* contingent upon their having consciously accepted the original gift(s) upon which the obligation depends. For the Mexica, one may be bound by moral obligations and relationships into which one entered neither willingly nor even consciously.<sup>19</sup>

4. The Fifth Age and all its inhabitants—from earth, sun, rain, and wind to buildings, featherwork, weapons, and musical instruments to plants, animals, humans, and deceased ancestors to stories, songs, dance, music, incense, and ceremonies—are energized, vivified, active, and powerful. The Fifth Age is a social world populated by human as well as other-than-human beings.<sup>20</sup> These beings are *agents*. Mexica metaphysics conceives an agent (*chihuani*<sup>21</sup>) as a vivified and empowered being, one who is sensitive to the surrounding world and who possesses the ability to act upon and respond to the surrounding world. Linda Brown and W. H. Walker write, "this agency is autonomous, purposeful, and deliberate, and arises from sentient qualities possessed by [vivified beings], such as consciousness or a life-force."<sup>22</sup> All agents are ontologically of a kind: all constituted by the single, sacred power or energy-in-motion the Mexica called *teotl*; and all transitory, concentrated stability patterns in the energy-in-motion that is *teotl*. Agents differ from one another in terms of their behavior, degree of power, ability to act upon and respond to the world, histories, the scope and intensity of their social relationships (or active interrelatedness) with other agents, and "personalities" (e.g., their degree of consciousness, purposes, intentions, likes and dislikes, etc.). Agents have the capability of entering into reciprocal relationships with other agents and may be more or less social in this regard.

5. *Legend of the Suns* tells us creator beings created the Fifth Age and its human beings by means of a process called *macehua*, meaning "to merit, deserve, be worthy of, or acquire that which is deserved," and *tlamacehua*, "to deserve or merit something."<sup>23</sup> Kelly McDonough glosses *macehua* as "obtaining that which is desired through merit, of giving as part of the action of receiving."<sup>24</sup> *Macehua* is a purposeful activity undertaken by an agent who aims to bring about a desired outcome (event, process, activity, or arrangement). *Macehua* involves *tequitl* (work, labor) which, in turn, involves expending vital life-energy. One aims to transmit an effortful expenditure of vital energy as a gift or offering (*tlamanaliztli*) to another agent in order to induce that agent to act in some way. It is by virtue of expending and transmitting this vital energy that one attains merit, becomes worthy, or comes to merit or deserve the outcome one seeks. Indeed, the principal way by which agents interact in the social world of the Fifth Age is by offering gifts to, accepting gifts from, and responding to gifts from other agents. *Macehua* also aims

at coaxing another agent into becoming the sort of agent who cooperates with oneself in achieving some end and so into becoming a socially interrelated agent or “relative.”<sup>25</sup>

*Macehua* should not be confused with making amends, making atonement, or doing penance (as commonly occurs). Atonement, making amends, and doing penance are backward-looking. They are related to past misdeeds or wrongdoings. *Macehua*, by contrast, is not ex hypothesi related to wrongdoing (past or otherwise). Because it functions as a component in a process of cyclical reciprocity, *macehua* is simultaneously backward-and-forward-looking. It is backward-looking because it aims at giving thanks, gifting-back, fulfilling the obligation to gift-back and restoring balance. It is forward-looking since by gifting-back one obligates the recipient to another iteration of the gifting cycle and thus to gift-backing to oneself. *Macehua* consists of undergoing hardship in order to make something happen in the future, not to make amends or atone for some wrongdoing committed in the past.<sup>26</sup>

*Macehua* is an inter-agent process that takes place between two (or more) agents and that initiates a social relationship between agents. An agent initiates this relationship by extending a gift or offering (*tlamanaliztli*) to the intended agent. This process metaphysically conveys vital energy from donor to recipient. *Macehua* requires what we might call social “know-how,” i.e., knowing how to get along with other agents in a social world so as to induce them into *cooperating* by doing as one wishes. In addition to the effortful expenditure and transmission of energy, such social “know how” requires adopting an appropriate attitude of humility and respect towards the intended agent.<sup>27</sup> Being practically effective in realizing one’s ends in the world thus requires being socially effective. Knowing how to get along with other agents is not the same as knowing how to coerce or exploit others.

The concept of *macehua* is a *normative* concept associated with like normative concepts such as desert, earn, deserve, merit, reward, and due. “*Macehua*” refers to a *normative* process—not a descriptive, causal process in the sense of ancient Greek philosophy’s efficient causality or Newtonian-style, mechanical push-and-pull, cause-and-effect. I understand normativity as that which is action-guiding, attitude-molding, choice-guiding, or conduct-related. That which is normative concerns how one ought to act, how one is obliged to behave or conduct oneself, what is appropriate or fitting for one to do, and so on. Normative facts, statements, and relationships possess an *oughtiness* that descriptive ones lack. Facts about agents’ interrelationships, however, are seen as simultaneously descriptive and normative (or prescriptive) by the Mexica. For example, that Elaine is my mother not only tells me of my descriptive genealogical relationship to her; it also tells me of my normative *macehua*-generated relationship (she merited my birth, she nurtured me, fed me) and that I am obligated to behave towards her in certain ways. It prescribes how I ought to act towards her.

*Macehua* is a process by which one agent tries to induce another agent(s) into entering into a *normative* relationship, one that binds, obligates, or indebts the intended agent(s)

into responding by doing something. As Alan Sandstrom and Pamela Sandstrom explain, one does not petition another agent to do something; rather, one extends a gift or offering (*tlamanaliztli*) that *obligates* the other to return the gift in the form one seeks.<sup>28</sup> (*Macehua* should therefore not be confused with supplicating, petitioning, or pleading, as commonly occurs.) The transaction “creates a bond between the two that sets up a flow of power between donor and recipient,” writes Frank Lipp.<sup>29</sup> In this manner agents seek to “bind” the future actions of other agents within a normatively ordered fabric, according to William Hanks.<sup>30</sup> Through acts of meriting-cum-obligating that transmit energy and bind other agents, one attempts to arrange the future behavior of other agents in a desired way.

This activity is commonly characterized as “giving to receive,” “giving so that you will give,” or “giving to have.”<sup>31</sup> The normative principle that orders the relationship between giver and recipient may be expressed as follows: “To give a gift is to obligate the receiver,”<sup>32</sup> “A gift implies an obligation to return,” or “To accept a gift is to assume an obligation to reciprocate.” The recipient, by virtue of accepting the initial gift, obligates herself to reciprocate and give the donor what she seeks.

6. The gifts that create and maintain normative social relationships of reciprocity and that in so doing make things happen in the Fifth Age consist of *chichahualiztli* (vital energy) that is accumulated through *tequitl* (work, struggle, effort). Morally mandated, *nepantla*-defined, reciprocal exchanges involve *tequitl*: the expenditure, accumulation, and subsequent transmission of *chichahualiztli* by means of work, effort, and labor.

Through gifting, then, one literally gives of oneself, i.e., gives one’s own life-energy. This energy-gift may take the form of human foodstuffs (e.g., *tamales*), music, song, incense, spoken words, nurturing, educating, and curing as well as blood, heart, and life (be they one’s own or another’s; be they human or nonhuman). Through their reciprocal gifting of life-energy, human and other-than-human agents (including creator beings) feed one another, eat one another, and sustain one another. Contemporary Nahuas living in San Miguel, Sierra del Pueblo, Mexico, put it this way:

We live HERE on the earth (stamping in the mud floor)  
 We are all fruits of the earth  
 The earth sustains us  
 We grow here, on the earth and lower  
 And when we die we wither in the earth  
 We are ALL FRUITS of the earth (stamping in the mud floor)  
 We eat the earth  
 Then the earth eats us.<sup>33</sup>

Humans spend their entire lives receiving *Tlaltecuhтли*’s gifts of foodstuffs, and one of the principal ways they reciprocate is by feeding her their buried bodies upon death.

*Tequitl* is thus an essential component of active reciprocity relationships, since it is by undertaking and successfully

undergoing the hardship—and in the process expending one’s life-energy or *chicahualiztli*—that one initiates and maintains well-balanced reciprocity relations. It is through the gifting of *chicahualiztli* to another agent that one *merits* what one seeks and obligates the recipient to behave as one wishes. And it is through the gifting of *chicahualiztli* that the recipient of the initial gift reciprocates and fulfills her obligation to the initial donor. In short, what is mutually exchanged is *chicahualiztli*. In sum, by means of *tequitl* one not only fulfills one’s moral obligation to reciprocate, but one also helps maintain the balanced circulation of energy in one’s family, human and other-than-human community (milpas, rivers, Sun, earth), and cosmos at large.

*Tequitl* has a number of closely related meanings, including “work,” “effort,” “charge,” “duty,” “allotment,” “task,” “quota,” “term of office,” “trouble,” and “tribute.”<sup>34</sup> Common to all and essential to *tequitl* is the expenditure of vital life force. *Tequitl* consists of expending vital energy in all manner of activities, including slashing-and-burning, weeding, and irrigating fields (*milpas*); sowing and harvesting maize; constructing irrigation ditches, roads, temples, and houses; tending to the hearth, grinding maize, and preparing food; weaving; preparing for ceremonial activities by sweeping, constructing, and decorating altars and statues, fasting, and preparing ceremonial foodstuffs; participating in ceremonies by offering gifts (*tlamanatiliztli*), speaking sacred words (*machitiliztli*), playing music, singing, dancing, burning incense, and gifting vital energy contained in one’s own blood or the blood of others (e.g., human, quail, butterflies, canines); sexual intercourse; giving birth to, nurturing, and raising children; curing; and sharing knowledge and giving advice. Most dramatically perhaps, the Mexica regarded a Mexica warrior’s capturing energy-rich enemy warriors on the battlefield, returning them to Tenochtitlan, and preparing them as life-energy gifts to creator beings as a form of *tequitl*. The warrior expended his own vital energy in order to acquire vital energy to be gifted to *Tonatiuh* (solar creator being) and *Tlaltecuhli* (earth lady). In sum, “[t]equitl is a broad concept [that refers] to all uses of human energy—physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional—for realizing a specific goal or purpose.”<sup>35</sup>

8. “*Chicahualiztli*” refers to the vital energy that animates, enlivens, and fortifies humans and other-than-humans; the life-force that burgeons within humans, animals, and crops causing them to grow, mature, and ripen; power, strength, firmness, steadfastness, stability, and perseverance; exertion, effort, courage, encouragement, and striving; and the physical and mental or spiritual strength to attain one’s goals and surmount life’s exigencies.<sup>36</sup>

While contemporary Nahuas discuss *tequitl* and the gifting of vital energy to other agents predominantly in terms of *chicahualiztli*, our sources for the Mexica speak more commonly in terms of *tonalli*, *teyolia*, and *ihiyotl*. For present purposes, I do not think this matters. *Tonalli*, *teyolia*, *ihiyotl*, and *chicahualiztli* are all vital energies and aspects of *teotl*.<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of brevity, therefore, I continue discussing Mexica ethics in terms of *chicahualiztli*. What is essential here is that the continued processing and becoming of the Fifth Age depends upon the *nepantla*-defined reciprocal

exchange of vital energies between its various inhabitants. And life-energy, as we’ve seen, is not confined to humans. Rain and spring water contain the vital energy of *Tlaloc* and *Chalchiuhtlicue* (male-female sky and ground water creator beings); maize and maize foodstuffs (and other agricultural foodstuffs such as chia and amaranth) contain the vital energies of *Tonatiuh*, *Tlaltecuhli* (earth lady), and *Cinteotl* and *Chicomecoatl* (male-female paired maize creator beings); sunlight contains the vital energy of *Tonatiuh*, and so on. Humans depend essentially upon the consumption of the vital energy gifts of creator beings, and because of this are continually obligated to reciprocate by gifting-back their own vital energies to creator beings. Creator beings, for their part, depend essentially upon the consumption of the vital energy gift-backs of human beings, and because of this are continually obligated to reciprocate by gifting-back their vital energies.<sup>38</sup>

8. Because it consists of expending one’s *chicahualiztli* (life-force), *tequitl* results in pain (*chichinaquiztli*), suffering (*ihiyohuia*), fatigue (*ciahui*), torment, affliction, weakness, discomfort, and, sooner or later, death. One is drained of vitality, depleted of life-energy, and in a state of imbalance. One is left hungry, thirsty, dried out, and hot. Because *tequitl* leaves one in a state of imbalance and because by being imbalanced one risks becoming sick (i.e., mentally or physically disordered), *tequitl* is dangerous. Undertaking *tequitl* involves renouncing one’s comforts and undergoing danger, risk, burning pain, affliction, difficulty, and hardship.<sup>39</sup> Seizing enemy combatants on the battlefield to serve as life-energy gifts to creator beings would seem to be one of the most dangerous forms of *tequitl*.

9. Doing the right thing (i.e., doing what morality requires, doing what is morally good or obligatory) therefore necessarily involves pain, suffering, fatigue, torment, affliction, imbalance, and death—or *hardship* for short. Succinctly put, doing good has to hurt; being good has to hurt. Why? Because (a) reciprocal gifting requires transmitting vital energy accumulated through *tequitl*; (b) transmitting accumulated vital energy to other agents leaves one fatigued, weak, suffering, and in pain; and, finally, (c) reciprocal gifting of vital energy is morally obligatory and indeed central to Mexica ethics.

10. Mexica ethics maintains that being a morally good human is a function of acting morally, and that being a morally good human and being truly human (*nelli tlatcatl*, *tlatlacatl*, and *tlacanemini*<sup>40</sup>) are isomorphically inter-related so that degrees of moral goodness are being keyed to degrees of true humanness. From this it follows that being truly human (acting humanly and humanely) necessarily involves hardship. Behaving as a genuine human has to hurt. The anti-social human who does not participate in reciprocal relationships by fulfilling her obligations to others, and who does not therefore care for, love, and respect those with whom she is relationally obligated, is not only immoral but also not truly or genuinely (*ahnelli*) human. Being truly human—as opposed to being (a) inhuman or inhumane (*atlatcatl*), (b) an ill-formed, deranged, and imbalanced “bestial human” (*atlacaneci*),<sup>41</sup> (c) a “fat and well rounded lump of flesh with two eyes” (*tlacamimilli*),<sup>42</sup> and (d) “one who preys upon the vital energies of others”

(*tecuaní*, literally “one who eats someone”)<sup>43</sup>—requires that one participate in social relationships of reciprocity that entail hardship. Such ill-formed or *quasi*-humans are said by contemporary Nahuas in Guerrero “to live like a dog” (*ir como un perro*). They behave like dogs who attend *fiestas* preying upon the infirm or drunk, hoping to seize scraps dropped on the ground or steal food from children or elders while contributing nothing to the production of the celebration itself.<sup>44</sup> They take but do not give in return. Contemporary Nahuas living in the Huasteca region of Veracruz characterize such humans as *coyomeh* (“coyotes”).<sup>45</sup> *Coyomeh* are most typically mestizos and gringos, but may also be Nahuas who do not follow the path of reciprocity.

One cultivates morally good (*cualli*) character and genuine humanness by participating in *chicahualiztli*-exchanging social relationships. Only in this manner does one cultivate one’s humanness (humanity) and become truly human. Teaching children how to participate in such relationships was an essential component of Mexica child-rearing and moral education. The Mexica accordingly put their children from an early age to work fulfilling their obligations to family members and creator beings.<sup>46</sup>

11. Mexica ethics thus enjoins humans to undergo the hardship involved in maintaining *tequitl*-grounded, *chicahualiztli*-exchanging reciprocal relations with other agents. It also enjoins humans to actively seek out, initiate, and cultivate new *tequitl*-based reciprocal relations and thus new avenues of hardship. Avoiding hardship is simply not an option for morally upright and genuinely human living. The morally good life requires the active cultivation and participation in reciprocal social relationships with other agents (human and other-than-human), where the medium of exchange of reciprocal gifting is *chicahualiztli*. Hardship is the manner by which one accumulates and transmits *chicahualiztli*.

The positive role of hardship is amply attested in Mexica “wisdom tellings.” The actions of the creator beings—e.g., *Quetzalcoatl’s* and *Tezcatlipoca’s* bringing into existence of the Fifth Age; *Quetzalcoatl’s* and *Tezcatlipoca’s* splaying the great caiman, *Tlaltecuhli*, so as to form the sky and earth’s surface; *Nanahuatzin’s* jumping into the burning jade hearth in order to die and transform himself into the sun of the Fifth Age; *Quetzalcoatl’s* retrieving the bones of Fourth Age humans, *Cihuacoatl’s* grinding the bones, and *Quetzalcoatl’s* adding blood from his virile member to the bone meal in order to form Fifth Age humans; *Quetzalcoatl’s* retrieving maize and amaranth from *Tonacatepetl* (“sustenance mountain”); and all the creator beings’ sacrificing themselves so as to induce the Fifth sun to move—involved hardship and the expenditure of personal vital energy. The same is true of *Tlaltecuhli’s* daily feeding of maize to humans and of maize plants’ and even individual maize kernels’ allowing themselves to be harvested, ground, toasted, and eaten by humans. It is also amply attested in daily human life: e.g., by mothers’ giving birth, feeding and rearing their children, and their weaving, preparing food for their families, and training their daughters in female-gendered labors; and by fathers’ working the milpas to grow maize for their

families and training their sons in male-gendered labors. All involve hardship and the transmission of vital energy. More grandly, humankind’s undergoing hardship plays a creative, productive, and positive role in the Mexica cosmos since it is essential to the continual processing and becoming of the Fifth Age and all its inhabitants. Suffering, pain, exhaustion, and death play a creative, productive, and positive role in maintaining the continual becoming of the Mexica cosmos.

Would it be accurate, then, to say that hardship (pain, suffering) functions as a “necessary evil” (adopting terminology from Western theological and philosophical discourse)? No. Mexica ethics does not conceive hardship, pain, suffering, and even death as intrinsically bad (*ahmo cualli*, literally, “ungood” or “not-good”). While some instances of hardship, pain, and death are certainly bad, others are certainly good (*cualli*): it all depends on the context. Nor does Mexica ethics conceive pleasure, relief, or happiness as intrinsically good. Pleasure (relief, happiness) that is neither merited nor reciprocated, for example, is imbalance-inducing and hence bad. Generally speaking, instances of pleasure and happiness, like instances of pain and suffering, must be placed in context before being evaluated. Mexica ethics does not accordingly define or calculate the moral rightness or wrongness of actions (states of affairs, agricultural practices, social-political arrangements, etc.) in terms of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain or in terms of satisficing strategies that proceed from the assumption that the pain is intrinsically bad and pleasure intrinsically good. Indeed, a way of life governed by hedonic utilitarianism would bring about personal, social, environmental, and, ultimately, cosmic imbalance, resulting in the unraveling and destruction of the Fifth Age and all its inhabitants.<sup>47</sup>

12. Mexica ethics does not therefore seek to eliminate hardship from human existence and the good life. It seeks instead to minimize disordered, disorderly, and disordering hardship. And yet it also seeks to minimize disordered, disorderly, and disordering pleasure, too. (Such are the imbalancing hardships and pleasures that typically result from the misdeeds and ignorance of oneself and others.) The Mexica neither sought nor avoided pleasure and pain per se. Mexica ethics seeks to cultivate and arrange hardship and pleasure by weaving them together into a well-balanced, lifeway-weaving-in-progress. Mexica *tlamatinimeh* (“knowers of things”) acknowledged that pursuing these goals was extremely challenging if not virtually impossible due to the limitations of human understanding of the cosmos, and due too to the ineliminable presence of disorder in the cosmos.

13. Hardship and respite (along with pain and pleasure, and suffering and enjoyment) are instances of what the Mexica called *inamic* partners. As such, they join life~death, dry~wet, hot~cold, male~female, above~below, and light~darkness.<sup>48</sup> *Inamic* partners are mutually complementary, engendering, interdependent, and antagonistic. They are not substances or essences but aspects of *teotl’s* energy-in-motion. Neither *inamic* partner is ontologically, conceptually, or temporally prior to the other. Neither is morally or metaphysically superior to the

other. Neither can survive without the other. Neither is more valuable than the other. Neither is wholly positive or negative. *Inamic* partners are cyclically alternating, and their cyclical alternating constitutes the continual processing and becoming of the cosmos. Finally, *inamic* partners are correlated with one another: life is to death as respite is to fatigue as hot is to cold. Indeed, their relationship is even closer seeing as they are merely different aspects of the ineliminable *inamic* nature of *teotl* itself, expressed as *Ometeotl* (two-sacred energy) or *Ometecuhtli-Omecihuatl* (two lord~two lady). Life, hot, dry, light, fatigue, and male are constituted by the same aspect of *teotl*'s energy; while death, cold, wet, dark, respite, and female are constituted by the same aspect of *teotl*'s energy.

Consider the *inamic* pair life~death. Life and death have always existed, as has their cyclical alternating. Life arises death, while death arises life. Life contains the seed of death, while death contains the seed of life. One cannot have life without death, and death without life, as life feeds upon death and death feeds upon life. Neither death nor life is wholly positive or negative, as each feeds and completes the other. Correspondingly, respite gives rise to hardship, while hardship gives rise to respite. Life without death is no more possible (conceptually or metaphysically) than is above without below, and, correspondingly, respite without hardship. Mexica philosophy thus deems profoundly ill-conceived the attempt to advance one *inamic* partner at the expense of the other or the attempt to eliminate one *inamic* in favor of its partner: e.g., to seek a state of affairs consisting of life without death, respite without fatigue, or enjoyment without suffering. Both are ineliminable aspects of *teotl*, hence the cosmos, hence human existence.

Mexica ethics accordingly aims at *balancing* and *middling* respite~hardship (pleasure~pain, enjoyment~suffering) along with life~death, hot~dry, and male~female, for example, by weaving them together into a single, well-arranged lifeway fabric (*nemiliztli*). The activity humans are to emulate is the *nepantla*-defined activity of weaving. Just as a weaver arranges warp and weft into a single well-measured fabric, so likewise humans are enjoined to arrange respite and hardship, life and death, and so on into a single lifeway (*nemiliztli*). And just as a whole fabric requires both warp and weft, so likewise a morally upright and genuinely human life requires both respite and hardship. Pursuing a life of respite without hardship would be like to trying to weave fabric without warp threads. The active contribution of both *inamic* partners is essential to the balanced processing and becoming of the Fifth Age.

#### 14. Symbionts and Parasites: Gulf Nahua Narratives of *Sintiopiltsin* and Iguana

The foregoing themes are voiced in contemporary Gulf Nahua narratives of *Sintiopiltsin* ("sacred maize plant boy") and iguana.<sup>49</sup> Gulf Nahuas refer to these in Spanish as *cuentos* ("stories") and in Nahuatl as *sanili, tlapohuili, tlapohuiliztli* ("stories of grandparents"), and *hauhcapatlahotli* ("ancient discourse"). Because they are instructive, they also refer to them as *neixcuitla* or *neixcuitli* ("model" or "example").<sup>50</sup> Nahuatl-speakers of northern Sierra de Puebla call them *neiškwiłtil* ("lesson with moral significance").<sup>51</sup>

In brief, over the course of narrative, *Sintiopiltsin* acquires the skills needed for transforming hardship and death into life. He learns that he will attain the vital energy needed for growing, maturing, regenerating his seed, and hence continuing life *only if* he willingly undergoes the hardship, pain, and suffering needed to attain reproduction and survival. And what are these hardships? They are the hardships of slash-and-burn agriculture: drying up, dying, and being cut by the *campesino*'s machete, burned, ground up, toasted, and fed to the *campesino* and his family. He must offer himself (i.e., his life energies) to humans. He must deserve or merit (*macehua*) renewed life through hardship and death. *Sintiopiltsin* must also learn to embrace the self-discipline required by living in the well-ordered time-place of the cultivated *milpa*. In this way, he earns a good life.

The narrative teaches that humans play an essential part in the life~death cycle of maize, since maize cannot reproduce itself without human intervention. (Maize is what biologists call *non-dehiscent*.) It must be harvested, nurtured, and sown by humans in order to reproduce successfully. And in order for humans to successfully complete this task, humans must eat. Maize must therefore gift itself to humans as food in order to sustain their agricultural labors of burning, sowing, weeding, watering, controlling pests, and harvesting. In short, it must gift itself to humans in order to grow, ripen, reproduce, and so continue living. Maize and humans are mutually dependent, as each depends essentially on the other for its survival and reproduction. Each gifts to the other its own vital energy. Neither is able to live without the intervention and contribution of the other. Maize and humans are *symbionts* or reciprocally *symbiotic*. Through self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and reciprocity, *Sintiopiltsin* secures the good life for himself and for humans. His life serves as a model of morally exemplary behavior for Gulf Nahuas. Humans depend upon maize, and they, too, must willingly undergo the self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and reciprocity required for successful maize agriculture. Humans also depend upon other humans (including deceased ancestors), and therefore they must willingly undergo the hardship required in maintaining well-balanced social relationships of reciprocity with others.

The narrative of *Sintiopiltsin* thus functions both descriptively and prescriptively. It tells Nahuas that (a) they must undergo hardship, suffering, and death in order to live well and flourish. Hardship, suffering, and death are not only descriptive inevitabilities of human existence, they are also normative requirements of existence in the Fifth Age; (b) they must nurture, respect, and care for maize and other agents (human and other-than-human) with whom they exchange vital energy;<sup>52</sup> (c) nurturing, respecting, taking care of, and reciprocating with maize require hardship, suffering, and death; (d) respecting and caring for maize does not preclude humans from eating maize (life, after all, only arises from death); (e) they must inhabit the well-ordered space of the home and village, rather than the wild space of the forest; and (e) pains and pleasures are good if and only if balancing. In short, by instructing them in the "moral ways of *milpa* agriculture,"<sup>53</sup> the narrative of *Sintiopiltsin* instructs humans in the moral ways of living as a human in the world. *Sintiopiltsin* serves as role model for morally upright human living.

Narratives of iguana teach humans how ought not to conduct their lives. Iguana is lazy, vain, self-centered, self-indulgent, undisciplined, promiscuous, and gluttonous. He feasts upon delicious fruit with abandon. Fruit, unlike maize, does not require human intervention in order to reproduce and therefore yields pleasure that does not have to be earned (*macehua*) through hardship (*tequitl*). Fruit, unlike maize, does not participate in a reciprocal relationship with humans. Iguana thus undergoes no hardship or suffering in order to consume fruit and lives a life of uninterrupted ease and pleasure. The rub, however, is that fruit, unlike maize, is not a staple foodstuff and cannot sustain life. Food, the consumption of which does not require hardship, is ultimately non-sustaining. Iguana cannot reproduce and continue existing through his successors by only eating fruit. He must find sustenance somewhere else. The life of fruit consumption does not require and so does not teach self-discipline, self-sacrifice, or reciprocity with others. Lastly, iguana leads a solitary existence in the wild, rejecting the well-arranged, social life of the cultivated *milpa*, and therefore the self-discipline this life demands.

How, then, does iguana survive? Iguana also consumes maize, which he steals from others. As a thief, iguana contributes none of his own vital energy to the reproduction of maize. He neither nurtures, cares for, nor reciprocates with maize. He preys upon and lives off the vital energies of others. He is a parasite. But this way of life is also unsustainable. Iguana's life of unearned and unreciprocated ease and enjoyment is a fool's paradise. He never learns the self-discipline needed for undertaking hardship and never learns the personal and social skills needed for transforming hardship and death into life. His pleasures are not good because they are neither merited nor gifted-back. They are imbalancing. Iguana thus serves as a negative role model for humans. This accords with what we saw above. Humans who do not participate in social relationships of reciprocal gifting prey upon and consume the life-energies of others, and because of this, are likened to dogs or coyotes. They live outside well-ordered social life. They are anti-social.

## CONCLUSION

Reciprocity functions like a pump at the heart of Mexica cosmos, circulating vital energy throughout the cosmos and its various inhabitants. Reciprocity also functions centrally in Mexica ethics' understanding of morally appropriate and genuinely human behavior. Since hardship figures essentially in reciprocal relationships, hardship also plays an essential role in Mexica ethics' understanding of morally appropriate and genuinely human behavior. One cannot follow the morally upright and truly human path (*ohlli*) without embracing hardship. Doing the right thing and being good have to hurt.

## NOTES

1. This essay is indebted to R. Joe Campbell, Jacques Chevalier, Julie Greene, Alan Sandstrom, Pamela Sandstrom, and James Taggart for their input and critical feedback.
2. See (a) John Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), especially 25–26, 145–146, which reproduces the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* and *Legend of the Suns*; (b) *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*, in *Teogonía e historia de los*

*mexicanos: Tres opúsculos del siglo XVI*, 1st ed., ed. Angel María Garibay K. (México, DF: Editorial Porrúa, 1965), 23–79; and (c) *Histoire du Méchique in Teogonía e historia de los Mexicanos: Tres Opúsculos del siglo XVI*, 1st ed., ed. Angel María Garibay K. (México, DF: Editorial Porrúa, 1965), 91–116; Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble (eds. and trans.), (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1953–1982), Book VII:34–68; Book X:1–62; and Judith M. Maxwell and Craig A. Hanson, *Of the Manners of Speaking that the Old Ones Had: The Metaphors of Andrés de Olmos in the TULAL Manuscript. Arte para Aprender la Lengua Mexicana, 1547* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992).

3. See Allen J. Christenson, "You Are What You Speak: Maya as the Language of Maize," in *Maya Ethnicity: The Construction of Ethnic Identity from Preclassic to Modern Times*, ed. Frank Sachse, *Acta Mesoamericana* 19 (Verlag: Anton Saurwein, 2006), 209–21; and Dana Liebsohn, *Script and Glyph* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009), 129–31.
4. The Mexica also regarded their ethics as defining a way of life and way of being human specific to themselves—as opposed to the Otomí, Totonacs, or Huasteca. For Mexica attitudes towards non-Mexica peoples, see Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble, eds. and trans. (Santa Fe: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1953–1982), Book X, Ch.29.

The Mexica made no distinction between sacred and profane or between a way of life (*nemiliztli*) on the one hand, and philosophy, religion, prudence, ethics, politics, economics, etiquette, culture, weaving, and agriculture, on the other (e.g., see Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book VII:34–68; Book X:1–62; Maxwell and Hanson, *Of the Manners of Speaking that the Old Ones Had*; and Frances F. Berdan, "Material Dimension of Aztec Religion and Ritual," in *Mesoamerican Ritual Economy: Archaeological and Ethnological Perspectives*, ed. E. Christina Wells and Karla L. Davis-Salazar (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007), 245–66. The recent work of indigenous scholars such as Abelardo de la Cruz (Nahua) and Arturo Gómez Martínez (Nahua) suggests this view has survived the last 500 years of Mexican settler colonialism: see Abelardo de la Cruz, "The Value of *El Costumbre* and Christianity in the Discourse of Nahua Catechists from the Huasteca Region in Veracruz, Mexico, 1970s–2010s," in *Words and Worlds Turned Around: Indigenous Christianities in Colonial Latin America*, ed. David Tavárez (Louisville, Colorado: University Press Colorado, 2017), 267–88; Arturo Gómez Martínez, *Tlaneltokilli: La espiritualidad de los nahuas chicontepecanos*, Programa de Desarrollo Cultural de la Huasteca, 2002; and Arturo Gómez Martínez and Anuschka van't Hooft, "Atlaltlacuallitiltli: La Petición de lluvia en Ichcacautitla, Chicontepec" in *Lengua y cultura nahua de la Huasteca*, ed. Anuschka van't Hooft (México, DF, 2012), 19. According to Anuschka van't Hooft, contemporary Huastecan Nahuas use *kostumbre* (a Spanish borrow meaning "custom") to refer to all practices of daily life (Anuschka van't Hooft, *The Ways of the Water: A Reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua Society through its Oral Tradition* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006).)

This view accords with the views expressed indigenous North American philosophers. *Ohiyesa* (Charles Eastman [Sioux]) writes, "Every act of [the Indians'] life is, in a very real sense, a religious act" (quoted in Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism*, rev. ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 15). Jack D. Forbes (Powhatan/Lenape/Saponi) adds:

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think—all of these things—24 hours a day. *One's religion that is one's life, not merely the ideal life but life as it is actually lived.*

Religion is not prayer, it is not a church, it is not theistic, it is not atheistic, it has little to do with what white people call "religion." It is our every act. If we tromp on a bug, that is our religion; if we experiment on living animals, that is our religion, if we cheat at cards, that is our religion. . . . *All that we do, and are, is our religion.* (Forbes, *Columbus and other Cannibals*, 15–16, emphasis in original).

- Ella Deloria refers to this as “a scheme of life”; see Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 1998), 24. See also Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002); and *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*, ed. Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner, and Sam Scinta (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999).
5. I borrow this wording from Catherine J. Allen, *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2002), 73. See also Berdan, “Material Dimension of Aztec Religion and Ritual.
  6. For full discussion of *nepantla*, see James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014), chs. 6, 8, and Conclusion.
  7. Love implies care and respect, not carnal passion. Nahuatl is the language of the Mexica. Nahuatl is a modern dialect of Nahuatl spoken in the northern Sierra de Puebla which drops the final ‘l’ of Nahuatl words. For the views of Nahuatl-speakers, see James M. Taggart, *Remembering Victoria: A Tragic Nahuatl Love Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); “Nahuatl Narratives of Love and Envy and the Problem of Evil in a Time of Change” (unpublished manuscript); “Ethics as Emotional Discourse” (unpublished manuscript); and “Translating Nahuatl Meanings of Love” (unpublished manuscript). For the views of Nahuatl-speakers, see (a) Catherine Good Eshelman, “*El trabajo de los muertos en la Sierra de Guerrero*,” *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 26 (1996): 275–87; “*Trabajando juntos: los vivos, los muertos, la tierra y el maíz*,” in *Historia y vida ceremonial en las comunidades mesoamericanas: los ritos agrícolas*, ed. Johanna Broda and Catharine Good Eshelman (INAH: México, 2004), 153–76; “*Ejes conceptuales entre los Nahuas de Guerrero: expresión de un modelo fenomenológico mesoamericano*,” *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 36 (2005): 87–113; and “*El concepto de fuerza y la constitución de la persona entre Nahuas de Guerrero*,” paper presented at *La noción de vida en Mesoamérica. Ethnoclasificación y teorías de la persona Colloquium*, UNAM, May 20, 2007; and (b) Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom, *Following the Straight Path: Pilgrimage in Contemporary Nahua Religion* (unpublished manuscript).
  8. See Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 5–8; and “*El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y la tradición mesoamericana*” in *Cosmovisión, ritual e identidad de los pueblos indígenas de México*, ed. Johanna Broda y Félix Báez-Jorge (México, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes / Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 47–65. This view is also voiced in the Quiche Maya creation story: see *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, trans. Allen J. Christenson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 67–90, 193–200.
  9. Good Eshelman, “*Ejes conceptuales entre los Nahuas de Guerrero*.” Other scholars defending “upstreaming” or inferring from present practices to past ones include: Rossana Lok, “The House as a Microcosm,” in *The Leiden Tradition in Structural Anthropology: Essays in Honor of P. E. De Josselin de Jong*, ed. R. De Ridder and J. A. J. Karremans (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 211–33; van’t Hooft, *The Ways of the Water*; and Eva Hunt, *The Transformation of the Hummingbird: Cultural Roots of a Zinacantan Myth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).
  10. Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, vii.
  11. See note #2.
  12. See *Codex Chimalpopoca* and *Legend of the Suns*, both reproduced in Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 25–26, 145–46. See also Garibay, *Teogonía e historia de los mexicanos*.
  13. Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 280.
  14. Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 146.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. As claimed by John Monaghan, “Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions,” in *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 6, ed. John D. Monaghan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 24–49.
  17. Garibay, *Teogonía e historia de los mexicanos*, 91–116.
  18. Quoted in Laurie Ann Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, and Vicki Grieves, “Indigenous Perspectives,” in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden: Blackwell, 2001).
  19. For a recent defense of such a view, see Jane English, “What Do Grown Children Owe Their Parents?” in *Aging and Ethics*, ed. Nancy Silbergeld Jeckler (Clifton, New Jersey: Humana Press, 1991), 147–54.
  20. I borrow the phrase “other than human” from A. Irving Hallowell, “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” in *Contributions to Anthropology: Selected Papers of A. Irving Hallowell*, ed. A. Irving Hallowell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 357–90.
  21. *Chihuani* derives from *chihua*, “to make something, do something, engender, perform.” See “Online Nahuatl Dictionary,” Stephanie Wood, editor 2000–2016, <http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/index.lasso> [accessed 12/12/18].
  22. Linda Brown and W. H. Walker, “Prologue: Archaeology, Animism, and Non-Human Agents,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 15 (2008): 298. For further discussion, see Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources, 2001); Brian Yazzie Burkhart, “The Physics of the Spirit: Indigenous Continuity of Science and Religion,” in *Routledge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. James W. Haag et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), 34–42; Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *A Native American Theology*; and Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, chs. 1–2.
  23. Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 146. See also Miguel León-Portilla, “Those Made Worthy by Divine Sacrifice: The Faith of Ancient Mexico,” in *South and Mesoamerican Spirituality: From the Cult of the Feathered Serpent to the Theology of Liberation*, ed. Miguel León-Portilla and Gary Gossen (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 41–64; Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*; Ulrich Köhler, “Debt-Payment to the Gods among the Aztecs: The Misrendering of a Spanish Expression and its Effects,” *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 32 (2001): 125–33; and Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario en Lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana*, 4th ed. (México DF: Porrúa, 2001 [1571]).
  24. Kelly S. McDonough, “Plotting Indigenous Stories, Land and People: Primordial Titles and Narrative Mapping in Colonial Mexico,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 18.
  25. See (a) Roger Magazine, *The Village is Like a Wheel* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); (b) Perig Pitrou, “Co-activity in Mesoamerican and in the Andes,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 465–82; (c) Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); and Sandstrom, “Sacred Mountains and Miniature Worlds: Altar Design Among the Nahua of Northern Veracruz, Mexico,” in *Mesas and Cosmologies in Mesoamerica*, ed. Douglas Sharon (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Man Papers 42, 2003), 51–70; (d) Sandstrom and Sandstrom (unpublished manuscript); and (e) Taggart, *Remembering Victoria*, and three unpublished manuscripts, note #7.
  26. For discussion of making amends, see Linda Raznik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
  27. See Catharine Good, *Work and Exchange in Nahuatl Society: Local Values and The Dynamics of an Indigenous Economy*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; Good Eshelman, “*El trabajo de los muertos en la Sierra de Guerrero*”; Good Eshelman, “*Trabajando juntos: los vivos, los muertos, la tierra y el maíz*,” 153–76; Good Eshelman, “*Ejes conceptuales entre los Nahuas de Guerrero*”; and Sandstrom and Sandstrom (unpublished manuscript).
  28. Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom, “The Behavioral Economics of Contemporary Nahua Religion and Ritual,” in *Rethinking the Aztec Economy*, ed. Michael E. Smith, Frances F. Berdan, and Deborah L. Nichols (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 110. See also Alan R. Sandstrom, “Ritual Economy among the Nahua of Northern Veracruz, Mexico,” in *Dimensions of Ritual Economy*, ed. E. Christian Wells and Patricia Ann McNaney (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, Ltd., 2008), 93–119.
  29. Frank J. Lipp, *The Mixe of Oaxaca: Religion, Ritual and Healing* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1991), 83. See Good, *Work and Exchange in Nahuatl Society*; Good Eshelman, “*El trabajo de los muertos en la Sierra de Guerrero*,” 275–87; Good Eshelman,

- "Trabajando juntos: los vivos, los muertos, la tierra y el maíz," 153–76); Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*; Sandstrom, "Sacred Mountains and Miniature Worlds"; Sandstrom and Sandstrom, unpublished manuscript.
30. Lewis F. Hanks, *Referential Practice: Language, and Lived Space among the Maya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 364.
  31. The last quote is from Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 68. For related discussion of gifting in indigenous North American philosophy, see Thomas M. Norton-Smith's account of "gifting as a world-constructing performance," in *The Dance of Person and Place* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
  32. Sandstrom, "Sacred Mountains and Miniature Worlds," 61. He adds that contemporary Nahuatl-speakers regard "spirit beings as social beings who respond to the normal exchanges that lie at the heart of all human interaction." See also Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*; Sandstrom, "Sacred Mountains and Miniature Worlds"; Sandstrom and Sandstrom 2017, manuscript in progress.
  33. As reported by Timothy Knab, quoted in David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 169–70. For further discussion of the interdependency of humans and creator beings, see James Maffie, "Normativity in the Fifth Age," in *Comparative Metaethics: Neglected Perspectives on the Foundations of Ethics*, ed. Colin Marshall (New York: Routledge, forthcoming); and Maffie, "Weaving the Good Life in a Living World: Reciprocity, Balance and *Nepantla* in Aztec Ethics," in "Cross-Cultural Studies in Well-Being," special issue of *Science, Religion, Culture*, ed. Owen Flanagan, forthcoming; and Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice*.
  34. See Wood, editor (2000–2016) (accessed 1/6/19); Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 233; and R. Joe Campbell, *A Morphological Dictionary of Classical Nahuatl: A Morpheme Index to the Vocabulario en lengua mexicana y castellana of Fray Alonso de Molina* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1985), 320–21.
  35. Good Eshelman, "El concepto de fuerza y la constitución de la persona entre Nahuas de Guerrero" (translation from Spanish by author), writing about contemporary Nahuatl-speakers residing in the Balsas Valley of Guerrero, Mexico. Good Eshelman argues this understanding of *tequitl* is shared by Nahuas across Mexico. I submit it applies *mutatis mutandis* to the Conquest-era, Nahuatl-speaking Mexica. See note #9 for discussion of upstreaming.
 

That *tequitl* includes emotional effort such as crying brings important light on the Mexica annual ceremony called *atl cahualo* ("ceasing of water") that was dedicated to obligating the four *Tlaloque* (water "spirit" helpers of *Tlaloc* who controls rainfall) into ending the dry season by providing rain for crops. *Atl cahualo* involved the gifting of young children to the *Tlaloque* as a way of meriting rainfall. Conquest-era sources report that the Mexica not only looked favorably upon the tears of the children but that they actively encouraged the children to cry, thinking that their tears would help induce rain (see Philip P. Arnold, *Eating Landscape* (Niwoot: University Press of Colorado, 1999), 78–86). The connection between children's tears and rainfall has long puzzled Western scholars who have typically resorted to explanations in terms of the non-autochthonous concept of "sympathetic magic," citing the shared wetness of tears and raindrops. I suggest this is fundamentally mistaken and not only because it mistakenly attributes a notion of sympathetic magic to the Mexica. (Western scholars standardly invoke magic when unable to understand non-Western practices. The concept of magic functions as a substitute for "I do not understand".) Rather, the Mexica regarded the energy contained in the children's tears as part of the overall *chichahuilztl* expended and conveyed to the *Tlaloque*, thus increasing the degree which the Mexica merited rainfall.

For further discussion of *tequitl*, see Catherine Good, *Work and Exchange in Nahuatl Society: Local Values and The Dynamics of an Indigenous Economy*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; Catherine Good Eshelman ("El trabajo de los muertos en la Sierra de Guerrero"; "Trabajando juntos: los vivos, los muertos, la tierra y el maíz"; 2005; 2007) and "Usos de la comida ritual entre Nahuas de Guerrero" *Amérique Latine Historie et Mémoire Les Cahiers ALHIM* 25 (2013) URL: <http://alhim.revues.org/4505> (accessed 7/16/16); and Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood*, 247, 252, 258, 302, 309; "Sacred Mountains and Miniature Worlds"; "Ritual Economy among the Nahua of Northern Veracruz, Mexico"; and Sandstrom and Sandstrom (unpublished manuscript).
  36. See Wood, editor (2000–2016; accessed January 6, 2019); Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 46; and Campbell, *A Morphological Dictionary of Classical Nahuatl*, 63. The word's root, "*chicahua*," means "to grow vigorous, to gather strength, to live to an old age" and "to strengthen, fortify, animate something, someone" (Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 46). For the contemporary context, see Good 1993, Good Eshelman ("El trabajo de los muertos en la Sierra de Guerrero"; "Trabajando juntos: los vivos, los muertos, la tierra y el maíz"; 2005; 2007; 2013); Lourdes Báez, "Ciclo estacional y ritualidad entre los Nahuas de La Sierra Norte de Puebla," in *Historia y vida ceremonial en las comunidades mesoamericanas: los ritos agrícolas*, coord. Johanna Broda and Catharine Good Eshelman (Mexico: INAH, 2004), 83–104; Claudia Leyva Corro, "Culto dedicado a Totatzin: la tradición cultural mesoamericana en Tetelcingo, Morelos," in *Historia y vida ceremonial en las comunidades mesoamericanas: los ritos agrícolas*, coord. Johanna Broda and Catharine Good Eshelman (Mexico: INAH, 2004): 321–38; Yuribia Velásquez Galindo, "Comida y significación entre los Nahuas de la Sierra Norte de Puebla," in *Comida, cultura y modernidad en México. Perspectivas antropológicas e históricas*, coord. Catherine Good Eshelman and Laura Corona (México: ENA, INAH, CONCACULTA, 2011), 225–51; and Sandstrom and Sandstrom (unpublished manuscript).
  37. See Jill Leslie McKeever Furst, *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, 2 vols., trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988); and Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*.
  38. For further discussion of the interdependency of humans and creator beings, see Maffie (forthcoming a & b) and Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice*.
  39. According to López Austin, the Mexica regarded struggle and suffering as virtually "synonymous." Mexica metaphors commonly tie struggle and suffering to one another through the idea of physical pain. Fray Alonso de Molina, for example, glosses the metaphor "*ic tonehua, ic chichinacac in noyollo, inonacayo* (thus they hurt, thus they cause sharp pain in my heart and my body)" as a metaphor for "acquiring what is necessary for life through work" (López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, vol 1, 249–50). The relevant verbs, *tonehua* and *chichinaca*, refer to burning pain, torment, suffering, weariness, and affliction (Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 49, 52, 247; Campbell, *A Morphological Dictionary of Classical Nahuatl*, 372).
  40. See Campbell, *A Morphological Dictionary of Classical Nahuatl*, 333–35. Talk of personhood, of personhood vs. humanness, and of humans becoming persons by participating in reciprocal relations with others has recently become common in ethnographic and philosophical discussions of indigenous North American and Mesoamerican philosophies. There is however no historic, linguistic, or ethnographic evidence suggesting the Mexica embraced such an idea. They employed the concepts of humanness and agenthood only. Introducing the concept of person into understanding Mexica philosophy only muddies the water. I am grateful to James Taggart, Pamela Sandstrom, Alan Sandstrom, and Laura Speckler Sullivan for helping me crystallize my thinking on this matter.
  41. Molina, *Vocabulario en Lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana*, 8.
  42. Sahagún (1953–1982) Book VI:72.
  43. Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 218. The Mexica notion of *tecuani* resonates with Forbes' rendering of the Cree notion of *wétiko*, Powhatan notion of *wintiko*, Ojibwe notion of *windigo*, which designate a cannibal or someone who preys upon the life-energies of others. See Forbes, *Columbus and other Cannibals*, xvi, 22, 24, and *passim*.
  44. Good Eshelman, "Ejes conceptuales entre los Nahuas de Guerrero," 95.
  45. See Alan R. Sandstrom, "Center and Periphery in the Social Organization of Contemporary Nahuas of Mexico," *Ethnology* 35, no. 3 (1996): 161–80, and "The Weeping Baby and the Nahua Corn Spirit: The Human Body as Key Symbol in the Huasteca Veracruzana, Mexico," in *Mesoamerican Figurines*, ed. Christina T. Halperin, Katherine A. Faust, Rhonda Taube, and Aurore Giguet (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 261–96.

46. See Sahagún (1953–1982) Book VI: *passim*; *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, ed. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), folios 56v–60r.; and Marcus Eberl, “Nourishing Gods: Birth and Personhood in Highland Mexican Codices,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 23 (2013): 453–76.
47. My thinking on this matter is indebted to conversations with Gregory Pappas and to Brian Yazzie Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land. A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming 2019).
48. I designate this relationship using the tilde “~”. For further discussion see Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, ch. 3.
49. I owe my appreciation of these narratives to Jacques M. Chevalier and Andrés Sánchez-Bain, *The Hot and the Cold: Ills of Humans and Maize in Native Mexico* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), ch. 7; James M. Taggart, *Nahua Myth and Social Structure* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); and Alan R. Sandstrom, “Center and Periphery in the Social Organization of Contemporary Nahua of Northern Veracruz,” *Ethnology* 35, no. 3 (1996): 161–80. These same themes are also expressed in Gulf Popoluca narratives according to Chevalier and Sánchez-Bain.
50. Sandstorm and Sandstrom (unpublished manuscript), 34–35.
51. Taggart, *Nahua Myth and Social Structure*, 161; see also page 7.
52. See references note #4.
53. Chevalier and Sánchez-Bain, *The Hot and the Cold*, 205.