

Aztec (Mexico) Philosophy

Instructor: Jim Maffie
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Course Description: The course consists of two parts. The first pursues an in-depth examination of the philosophico-religious worldview and concepts of the conquest-era Mexica (Aztecs) with special attention to their metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and understanding of human sacrifice. The second examines European debates concerning the moral justification and legitimacy of Europeans' conquest and domination of the native peoples of the "New World."

Course Requirements and Grading*: Students are required to attend lectures, participate in discussions, and complete three take-home exams each of which counts 25% of the final grade. Class participation counts for 25%. Late papers will be penalized one-half letter grade per academic day (not per class period). Electronic submissions will not be accepted.

75%: Three 3-5 page essay take-home exams (25% each)

25%: Class participation (assessed along with each of the three exams)

Students are expected to demonstrate in their essays: (a) the ability to convey a theme or argument clearly and coherently; (b) the ability to analyze critically and to synthesize the work of others; (c) the ability to acquire and apply information from appropriate sources, and reference sources appropriately; and (d) their competence in standard written English.

Learning assessment Outcome

The course asks that students participate in class discussions and complete three essay take-home exams. Both exercises provide students with the opportunity to understand a philosophic-religious viewpoint alien to their own as well as compare and contrast the philosophico-religious concepts and categories (e.g. wisdom, reality, truth, knowledge, the sacred, language, moral goodness and rightness, and beauty) of the Aztecs with their own. This in turn provides students with the opportunity to become: (i) more sensitive and astute critics of viewpoints they encounter both inside and outside the academic environment; (ii) more subtle and resourceful advocates of views they may choose to uphold; and (iii) more self-conscious and self-critical regarding their own philosophical viewpoints. Evaluating students' written and oral performances three times over the course of the semester enables the instructor to monitor and give students feedback regarding their demonstrated performance and improvement in the above respects.

Required Texts (available for purchase at UMD bookstore and on-line):

- (1) David Carrasco & Scott Sessions. *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, 2nd ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-313-37745-7 (pbk) (C&S)
- (2) James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014.

(3) Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *In Defense of the Indians*, Stafford Poole (trans. & ed.). DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1992. ISBN: 0-8780-556-6 (pbk).
Electronic copies of all other readings will be posted on the course Blackboard.

Some useful websites:

<http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/> (useful source of general information)
<http://www.famsi.org/> (see for digital reproductions of Mesoamerican codices)
<http://www.templomayor.inah.gob.mx> (Museum of the Templo Mayor, Mexico City)
<http://www.mna.inah.gob.mx> (National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City)
<http://www.inah.gob.mx> (National Institute of Anthropology & History, Mexico)
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/> (pictures excellent; text with caution)

Course Outline:

(I) Conquest-era Aztec Philosophy

Weeks 1-2: Introduction to Course: Film: “The Five Suns” and discussion.

Reading: C&S, Chs. 1-3.

H.B. Nicholson, “Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico.”

Thomas Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place*, pp. 48-51, 65-68.

Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, “Introduction”.

Alejandro Santana, “Did the Aztec Do Philosophy?” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 8.1 (2008):2-9.

Week 3: Aztec Philosophy as Path-Oriented vs. Truth-Oriented

Reading:

Bernardino de Sahagún, *Colloquios y doctrina cristiana* (excerpts).

J. Maffie, “*In Huehue Tlamaniliztli and la Verdad: Nahua and European Philosophies in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s Colloquios y doctrina cristiana*,” *Inter-America Journal of Philosophy* 3 (2012): 1-33.

Weeks 4-8: Aztec Metaphysics

Reading:

Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding A World In Motion*, chs.1-6, 8

H.B. Nicholson, “Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico.”

C&S, Chs. 2-3.

Exam #1 assigned; first 1/3-term class participation grade assigned

Weeks 9-11: Aztec Path-Oriented Ethics, Social-Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Language, Aesthetics, and Wisdom

Reading:

Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* (selections).

Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, ch.4.

Louise Burkhart, “Mexica Women on the Home Front: Housework and Religion in Aztec Mexico.”

Arthur J. O. Anderson, “Aztec Wives”.

C&S: Chs. 4, 5, 6.

James Maffie, “Aztec Philosophy” (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aztec.htm>

... "Flourishing on Earth: Nahua Philosophy in the Era of the Conquest," *The Nahua Newsletter* 40 (Special 20th Anniversary Issue) (2005): 18-23.

<http://www.nahuanewsletter.org/default.html>

... *Aztec Philosophy*, Conclusion.

... "To Walk in Balance: An Encounter between Contemporary Western Science and Pre-Conquest Nahua Philosophy."

... "Pre-Columbian Philosophies," *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Octávio Bueno (eds.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010: 9-22.

... "Mexica Ethics of Reciprocity" (manuscript).

Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place*, ch.5.

Week 12: The Demands of Reciprocity: Aztec Ethics of "Sacrifice"

Reading:

Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* (selections)

Inga Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society"

Miguel León-Portilla, "Those Made Worthy by Sacrifice"

Davíd Carrasco, "Human Sacrifice/Debt Payments from the Aztec Point of View"

Kay Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (selections).

Davíd Carrasco, "The Exaggeration of Human Sacrifice"

C&S: Ch. 7.

Thomas Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place*, ch.6.

Exam #2 assigned; second 1/3-term class participation grade assigned

Weeks 13-14: Debating the Morality of the Conquest: Aristotle and Jesus in the 'New' World

Reading:

Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés de, "Prologue to the Members of the Congregation"
(selections)

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, Stafford Poole (trans. & ed.).
DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1992.

Rec:

Approaches to teaching the writings of Bartolome' de las Casas.

Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study on the Disputation between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians.*

Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the Americans.*

Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, chs. 4 & 5.

Exam #3 assigned; third 1/3-term class participation grade assigned.

University Policies

1. The preceding course schedule, requirements, procedures, and reading assignments are subject to change by the instructor in the event of extenuating circumstances.

2. Individuals having any disability, either permanent or temporary, which might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform me at the outset of the term. Adaptation of methods, materials, or testing will be made as required to provide for equitable participation.

3. Disruptive behavior: Students deemed by the instructor to be guilty of behavior disruptive to the class (e.g. cellphones, text messaging, passing notes, or talking) are subject to permanent expulsion from the class.

4. Religious observance: Please inform your instructor of any intended absences for religious observance well in advance. <http://www.umd.edu/catalog/index.cfm/show/content.section/c/27/ss/1584/s/1540>. Due dates of assignments will be adjusted according to the students' religious needs. The instructor will be available during office hours or by appointment to review missed lectures with students.

5. In case of inclement weather: the due date of assignments will be postponed until the following class meeting.

6. The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>) which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following University of Maryland **Honor Pledge**, approved by the University Senate, should be handwritten and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."

7. All class lectures and class readings are copyrighted. As such they may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission of the instructor.

8. Regarding attendance, I quote the following from UMD websites.

Regular attendance and participation in this class is the best way to grasp the concepts and principles being discussed. However, in the event that a class must be missed due to an illness, the policy in this class is as follows:

1. For every medically necessary absence from class (lecture, recitation, or lab), a reasonable effort should be made to notify the instructor in advance of the class. When returning to class, students must bring a note identifying the date of and reason for the absence, and acknowledging that the information in the note is accurate.
2. If a student is absent more than 4 successive times, the instructor may require documentation signed by a health care professional.
3. If a student is absent on days when tests are scheduled or papers are due *[or other such events as specified in the syllabus]* he or she is required to notify the instructor in advance, and upon returning to class, bring documentation of the illness, signed by a health care professional.

"It is the policy of the university to excuse the absences of students that result from the following causes: illness of the student, or illness of a dependent as defined by Board of Regents policy on family and medical leave; religious observance (where the nature of the observance prevents the student from being present during the class period); participation in university activities at the request of university authorities; and compelling circumstance beyond the students control."

For further information, see <http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/instructionalguide201112.pdf>.