

Maffie, James (2014) *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, University Press of Colorado (Boulder, CO), xi + 512 pp. \$80.00 hbk.

Many stories ago, when the very first gods, the ones who gave birth to the world were still roaming the night, they say there were two gods who came

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from one, Ik'al and Votán. When one turned, the other could be seen, when the other turned, the one could be seen [...] So that is how the true men and women learned that questions help to walk, and not to stand still. 'The Story of Questions'. Subcomandante Marcos (1994: 414–415)

I begin by stating that I will only do violence to the complexity of this monumental tome. In *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, James Maffie has painstakingly produced what many of us have long awaited: a comprehensive and beautifully argued account of Aztec (Mexica-Nahua) metaphysics. At 527 pages with over 1800 footnotes, it exercises a dazzling methodological and empirical precision and constitutes one of the most important treatises on Mesoamerican philosophy to date. It engages with and revises what have heretofore been the predominant interpretations of Nahua philosophy by the most important scholars in anthropology, linguistics, ethno-history and literature. To this effect, Maffie acknowledges the debt he has to Miguel León Portilla who wrote *La filosofía náhuatl* in 1956, but respectfully unbinds Leon Portilla's interpretation of Mexica thought from what Maffie considers to be the trappings of Western discourses implicit and explicit in his interpretation. The irony lies in that, while Maffie is trained as a Western philosopher, he uses the 'master's tools' to begin to dismantle the 'masters house'. Given the detail and importance of this impressive volume, however, I would have preferred for the title to remain more precise, particularly because he draws from scholarship not only about the 'ancient' Aztec (Mexica) but also from contemporary Nahua, Maya and Uto-Aztecan communities. This caveat aside, Maffie's book is an exemplary exercise in interdisciplinary scholarship and will be invaluable to scholars from diverse fields.

The first three chapters lay out the guiding principles that constitute the architecture for the rest of the book: the concept of *teotl* as an imminent, vital energy that vivifies the cosmos, the argument for pantheism as opposed to polytheism and, lastly, his theory of 'agonist inamic unity' – a transculturating move where he pairs the western notion of agon with the Náhuatl word *inamic* to describe how the Aztec world functions through conflict, revision, movement, generation and degeneration. This constitutes one of the unique interventions on Maffie's part, as it is precisely here where he departs from prevailing notions of Mesoamerican polytheism. As opposed to Zoroastrian dualism, the Aztec world is ontologically monistic and processive. He explains that competing gods and goddesses of the Aztec pantheon are not discrete deities, but rather, all manifestations of *teotl* and a product of the inevitable conflict, movement, rupture and regeneration that is constitutive of *teotl*: a dynamic, sacred energy. The word 'inamic', according to Maffie, is the Náhuatl term that explains the necessarily agonistic relationship between opposites such as day and night or life and death. The temporary and alternating dominance of one over the other does not speak to a radical dualism but, rather, what Maffie maintains is an 'agonistic inamic unity'. Thus, Maffie describes the Aztec cosmos as non-hierarchical, immanent world in motion, a world of 'continual *nepantla*-defined becoming and transformation' (p. 523). From here, the rest of the book illustrates with almost overwhelming detail his argument that the fundamental motion of the universe is regulated by three different types of movement-energy: *Olin* (bouncing/pulsing movement); *Malinalli* ('twisting energy'); and *Nepantla* ('weaving-the-universe'). These three chapters lead seamlessly into the final chapters where he explains the master trope of Aztec metaphysics: 'The cosmos is a grand weaving-in-progress' and 'Teotl is the weaver, the weaving, and the woven' (p. 14).

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The second important departure from previous scholarship grapples with notions of Aztec time and cosmogony. According to Maffie's claim of ontological monism, and in contrast to western eschatology, *teotl always already* exists. *Teotl* is in a constant state of becoming, thus dispelling the idea of a primordial 'peace' or chaos from which subsequent worlds emerge. The struggle, then, is to walk 'in balance', to move 'middlingly' because '[b]alancing is *an overarching macroprocess* consisting of a rhythmic series of mutually interdependent and reciprocally influencing imbalancing *microprocesses*' (p. 168). The 'evidential avenues' (linguistic, literary and graphic) for defending his claims about Aztec philosophy are tripartite and akin to the methodology employed by many important scholars. In sum, this book is both a continuation and radical departure from previous scholarship on Nahua philosophy, culture, and thought. The simultaneous clarity and poetic repetition make his argument not only convincing but stellar.

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