

inflected by their social meaning and cannot be accounted for if they are understood in nonsocial terms—as, e.g., brain states or as biological kinds. But what has become clear to me is that social construction is a special case of a broader, ontologically more fundamental, feature of reality. A socially constructed thing or kind is what is (is *anything* at all) because of how it fits into an ineliminably social set of narratives, shaped by saliences, by mattering, by perspectivity. Narrativity, salience, mattering, and perspectivity are all typically thought of as part of what we, as humans, bring to the world; but they are, I want to suggest, better seen as at the heart of thing-ness.

Of course, everything does what it does in its own fashion—that’s what makes it the thing that it is—so we (human animals) do narrative in distinctively human—as well as culturally distinctive—ways. And coming to know something is a matter of standing, and moving, in relationship with it: even though the stone has/is its own story, my knowledge of it is inevitably collaborative, and it may well differ from yours. And the stone-as-known is itself a real thing in the world; epistemic relationships are real relationships, and like all relationships, are part of what constitute things—knowers as much as the things they/we know.

I do not think that what I want to suggest is at odds with what Thomas Norton-Smith argues about world-making or what Lara Boroditsky argues about the role of language in shaping reality: I don’t want to argue against the world-shaping capacity of culturally diverse ways of understanding the world, but rather for the idea that underlying those distinctively human activities are modes of engagement and responsiveness—saliencies, non-indifference, mattering—that are not wholly new with us—and that we do actually have something to learn from—not just about—stones and the other non-humans with which we share the planet and the cosmos.

NOTES

1. See <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cfans/diversity/2011/07/wild-rice.html>.
2. This is how Paul put it. I’m not sure what to make of the generalizing, given the wide range of indigenous cultures. There do seem to be striking similarities among indigenous cosmologies and ontologies—perhaps indicating just how anomalous Western modernity is?
3. Albeit not exactly strictly: I’m a Wittgensteinian. So it’s less a matter of commitment and more a matter of what I’m ignorant of and was taught not to understand.

BOOK REVIEW

Ontology Matters! A Review of Aztec Philosophy: A World in Motion

James Maffie, University of Maryland (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014). 512 pp. ISBN: 978-1607322221.

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INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

This is a groundbreaking text for indigenous heritage philosophy in the Americas. This text by James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: A World in Motion*, significantly explores sources of, and importantly supports the development of, indigenous philosophy in North and Central America.¹ For those philosophers interested in America’s heritage philosophy, it opens another chapter of understanding a uniquely American metaphysic, ontology, and epistemology.

For those unfamiliar with the context of Aztec philosophy, Aztecs are of the Uto-Aztecan language group, and once occupied a vast array of city states throughout the Americas. Among these groups are what Americans name the “Ute,” “Shoshone,” “Paiute,” “Pima,” “Papago,” “Yaqui,” “Hopi,” “Zuni,” “Comanche,” and many others north and up the west coast, having heritage of groups north and west of what was known as the Valley of Mexico (today the area surrounding Mexico City). These groups and others share this Uto-Aztecan linguistic base. The merging of some members of these groups is a result of migrations, of people who became some of the predecessors of Aztec civilization. It is said in story that the Aztecs came from the place of herons (some say this is interpreted as place of “whiteness”), and that this place is north and west of the Valley of Mexico. It is also said that prior to some Aztecs’ arrival many lived in the Valley of Mexico including in an empire there named “Teotihuacan,” which had pyramidal temples, worshipped a serpent named “Quetzalcoatz,” and were overthrown around 600 A.D. It is debatable whether Teotihuacanos were Uto-Aztecan language speakers. It is said that later another empire named “Toltec” arose and survived until around 1100.² The Aztecs, it is said, arrived in the Valley around 1200, after some 200 years of warfare and forced migration, and settled on a marshy island. Only some say this place was named “Tetzcoaco,” where they built a large empire and flourished in and around the Valley of Mexico, in what we know today as Mexico City, borrowing from the Toltec, Inca (Olmec), and Mayan groups. It was common that many temples survived the older empires, as well as agricultural knowledge, and religious ideas, and these earlier elements became part of what came to be named the “Aztec” culture. An aggregation of tribal and city state peoples, they moved to the Valley of Mexico, named themselves “Mexica” or “Tenochca,” and called the city they built Tenochtitlan. They say they had come from a place named “Aztlan,” and spoke Nahuatl. Many local groups bonded with them in power to create an empire of alliances, having an economy based primarily on corn. In 1521, Spanish explorers arrived in the Valley of Mexico to find spectacular Aztec cities. They came to explore and

conquer resources, and the Spanish Inquisition of the Catholic Church eventually imposed its authority, creating a caste system exploiting local labor, while at the same time depleting the wealth of gold and silver that had been enjoyed by Aztec. Aztec culture had a ruling elite, with about a quarter million inhabitants, at a time when Paris and London had no more than a hundred thousand each. Thus, the history of Aztec is long, and her people many. Aztec religion conceived four worlds, called Suns, that preceded the present world. Humankind was held to be wiped out at the end of each preceding world, and we are now in the Fifth World.³

Thus this book, and its well-explicated theory telling a story about the ontological and metaphysical world of the pre-conquest Aztecs of North Central America, should appeal to a broad national and international audience, in the Americas, and beyond. The text will appeal to those who are particularly interested in building the field of heritage indigenous philosophy in the Americas, and those concerned with the research and teaching of indigenous philosophy and philosophers generally.

James Maffie explores philosophical understandings of indigenous identity and diversity, and presents a fresh, new, and exciting view of one cultural tradition indigenous to the Americas. The text is not a cure for lack of knowing about general epistemic and metaphysical thought of America's indigenous philosophy. But it does invite both broad critical reflection as well as microscopic examination of an indigenous belief system. The text uses philosophical language analysis, as well as other interpretive devices. The author honors indigenous thought by taking it seriously, and showing how it matters to modern day understandings of the cosmos. Most importantly, the author show us how the use of our philosophical skills, when employed with respect for indigenous American worldviews, can open up a perspective of ourselves, as humans, that we might not otherwise have known.

It is impossible to know with certainty whether indigenous philosophers of Aztec thought historically held close to a belief system such as this book explicates. But the volume offers good explanatory reason to weigh in with a "yes" on this question. Most importantly, by explicating a different ontological, and hence epistemological and metaphysical, system of Aztec thought, it gives back to the Americas an important part of her heritage. And we can know with certainty that records and logic point to a logical soundness of some of the conclusions made in this book. Although the author does not identify as indigenous to this geographical area, a concerted effort was made to consult with indigenous philosophers, and indigenous scholars of other fields, over many years. Indeed, the citations provide a wealth of information, and any scholar would be pleased to peruse the extensive and carefully chosen bibliography. Maffie has worked on this interpretive project on and off, as far as I know, for at least fifteen years. And he shows in this impressive work a scholar's dedication to "getting it right," and an intellectual attention to detail required to work with the evidence. As best I can tell, he does "get it right." As a philosopher I believe the explanatory power of his interpretive system holds up well, and in areas where

he questions others' superimpositions, it is a delicate dance of subtle nuances at play.

This text challenges philosophers to think with interdisciplinary sensitivity and a keen acumen for detail. It challenges anyone familiar with Kantian metaphysical perplexities of the philosophical tradition of Western Europe. Maffie, as a well trained American philosopher, brings ardent analytical tools and skills to bear upon materials of anthropology, archeology, archaeoastronomy, art history, ethnohistory, linguistics, literature, religion, and architecture, and includes reflections upon evidence from records, calendars, statues, jewelry, weaving tools, and sacred objects. His interplay with a cornucopia of evidentiary materials shows a spirited ability to juxtapose and contemplate at once a mosaic of seemingly incommensurable data. It is with skill and care that correlations are drawn among the experiences of ancient, modern, and contemporary peoples of what is named by some "Mesoamerica." The strategic philosophical method is one of bringing hermeneutic, exegetical, phenomenological, and logic techniques to the project of reconstructing a unified system of a coherent corpus of information within a causal metaphysical and ontological fit. Ultimately, Maffie's method, as he well recognizes, must not only "fit" but provide greater explanatory power than previous constructive interpretations. It must "pay its fare" so to speak, and justify its turn away from some traditionally assumed Platonic metaphysical assumptions of a binary dualism. Rising to the occasion this author shows with perspicuity exactly where he believes others took a wrong turn on the interpretive path. It is not Platonic metaphysical Being, he insists, that we must use to interpret song poems, but rather the process Becoming metaphysic of a non-discrete, non-binary dual aspect theory of constitutional monism, as understood by the Aztecs.

The human-made Aztec metaphysical system, for Maffie, constitutes what Willard Van Orman Quine refers to as a "web of belief" (science), where our beliefs about sensory experience, physical objects, and causality create an epistemological continuum of a total woven makeup, weaving together and thereby uniting theory (underdetermined by experience) and data (subject to boundary error) (8-9). This web of belief theory, used by Maffie as explanatory metaphor, is beholden to human-made values, such as what constitutes sufficient empirical adequacy, simplicity of treating diverse phenomena, conservatism (preserving long held beliefs), unification (coherent account for diverse phenomena), generality (productive resolution of common problems), and explanatory power (its ability to "fit" empirical data with theoretical assumptions) (9). It is this Quinean metaphorical web that triangulates for Maffie a reconstruction of Aztec metaphysics, combining first ontology and second epistemology, and third using (both direct and indirect) evidence to construct his own interpretive schemata of Aztec metaphysic as a unifying process philosophy (12).

One of the nice things about this text is that Maffie is clear about where he is going with his interpretation of Aztec philosophy as a constitutional monism. He notes that several scholars, including Vine Deloria, Jace Weaver,

Viola Cordova, Brian Burkhart, and other Native American thinkers (myself included), “interpret many indigenous North American philosophies as upholding a like-minded constitutional monism according to which reality consists of a single, uniform, homogenous energy or power—usen, natoji, waken tanka, yowa, orenda, or nil’ch’i—that is neutral between spirit and matter, mind and body, and so on” (49).

Maffie holds that the heart of Aztec metaphysics embodies, as the title suggests, “Understanding a World in Motion.” A dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating and re-generating sacred power, force, or energy holds all together, and is named “teotl” (12). Teotl is process, movement, change, and transformation that engenders cosmos, where the “real” always “becomes” (12). It transforms as agonistic (complementary polar opposite) unity of inamic partners, and is thus consequentially constitutionally unstable and ambiguous (13). As such, reality is complementary, as patterns of motion and change dance in an interdependent struggle to become, to self-generate, in continual flux and change, without beginning. These “inamic partners represent dual aspects of teotl—not two metaphysically distinct substances” (13).

Teotl as cosmic weaver of all life, and all that is and is not, has different patterns of motion change: (1) olin (curvy motion change); (2) malinalli (twisting motion change); and (3) nepantla (middling motion change, which is the key to understanding the metaphysical and human existential condition, and Aztec philosophy itself). Each nomenclature is descriptive of a particular pattern of motion change according to a time-place (single and seamless) unity. Because teotl as process is about the transformation of complementary polar opposites, this is not a binary dualist ontology. Maffie is clear about this ontology: “Teotl, reality, cosmos, and all existing things are *characterized simultaneously* (emphasis added) by inamic pairs such as being and nonbeing, life and death, male and female, and wet and dry” (27). And again, “Aztec binaries appear instead to be two aspects of a single thing” (51)—dual-aspect theory. So, although at times it may seem to be, or the language of this text may make it appear to be, one of a discreet ontology (polar opposites), because it is a (dual aspect) monism, and all things are characterized simultaneously, it seems to be one of a non-discreet ontology, of a non-binary, yet dual-aspect nature.⁴

This ontology is not independent of an Aztec epistemology, as teotl’s nahualli, or guise, double, or mask (39). Just as a shaman possesses power to transform into her or his nahual (e.g., jaguar), so teotl possesses power to transform into its nahual, the cosmos (39). Thus, the cosmological becoming is teotl’s ongoing self shape-shifting and transformation (39). Teotl as quintessential transformer epistemologically presupposes a dualist ontology as an epistemological phenomenon of deception—one covers the face with a mask, as the mask and face are two distinct things (40). Because Aztec philosophy is ontologically monist, however, teotl and the mask are identical, just as the shaman and jaguar are one, while at the same time teotl becomes the cosmos (41). Maffie helps us understand this phenomenon by using the linguistic tool of perception “de re” and perception “de dicto.” Humans perceive teotl de re (about

what is said), but not de dicto (about the thing) (42). We see sun, bird, flowers, but not teotl’s nahual. Deception is only an epistemological moment of not recognizing teotl’s nahual, not a metaphysical moment (42).

Aztec metaphysics understands this shamanic transformation as it is played out in the cosmos (42). Thus, that which is real is characterized by what becomes, not by being, or is-ness (43). Aztec metaphysics cannot condemn something as unreal or illusory simply because it is ever changing, not impermanent; rather, Aztec metaphysics would embrace it for this very reason, as the real.

This conception of reality as ever-changing and impermanent is precisely the crux of Maffie’s disagreement with the metaphysics suggested by Miguel León-Portilla, who, according to Maffie, superimposes a Platonic metaphysic upon Aztec thought (43). The discussion of León-Portilla’s superimposition of, and hence subsequent value laden misinterpretation of, Aztec metaphysical becoming and impermanence as a seeing-as, through the eyes of a Platonic metaphysics, is well worth reading. The superimposition of Platonic metaphysics results in a misinterpretation of the value of what Maffie holds out as possible existential comments made by the Aztecs, upon an experienced impermanent reality. This discussion is central and crucial to Maffie’s disagreements with León-Portilla and others. An overlay of a metaphysics of Platonic Being misinterprets precisely what a metaphysics of Becoming is able to clearly grasp: namely, that Aztec metaphysics may point to a lamenting that there are existential consequences of the fragility, evanescence, and brevity of life. This metaphysics of Becoming, rather than a Platonic metaphysic of Being (and non-being), for Maffie, is what should be applied as an interpretive framework and context to Aztec song poems (47).

In such an interpretive framework of non-discrete non-binary dualism, song poems could be interpreted as an ontological reaction to, rather than an evaluative assessment of, the cosmos. The nature of this kind of reality then, for the Aztecs, is ambiguous, neither mind nor matter, but an electric-like energy or power (48). It is from this perspective that Maffie explains the Aztec grand unfolding of the universe, as recorded by the Aztecs. Again, understanding the de re and de dicto distinction is all-important in the recording.

Maffie approaches an interpretation of the all-important concept of “space-place,” which, like time, is located or situated within the cosmos. “Space is concrete, specific, qualitative, quantitative, alive, relational (nonsubstantive), locative, and timed” (421). Maffie offers by way of example the beautiful “Valley of Mexico” as such a place. For the Aztecs it was a place of interaction with “all relations,” of participation with the unfolding cosmos, an orientation, animated and charged with power. “It is a vast, intricate web of interrelationships between humans, plants, animals, mountains, waters, and sun—all of which are animated and charged with power. And its character changes with changes in time” (421). It is not difficult to recognize and understand the similarity of Aztec thought, as articulated by this author, with that of indigenous North America⁵ (again, as mentioned early on in the text, at p. 49). Maffie

offers to us not space nor place abstractly, but tied down, even if in flux!

Maffie disagrees with Leon-Portilla's interpretation of a metaphysic of being. For Leon-Portilla Reality is *per se* Being, as immutable, imperishable, and permanent. (Maffie says Leon-Portilla attributes this metaphysics of *Nezahualcoyotl* in *Cantares mexicanos* and *Romances de los señores de la Nueva España* (43)). Differently, the Reality Maffie would attribute to Aztec metaphysics is essentially characterized as a monism, a Becoming that embraces flux and change. It does not seem to denigrate change. It is not characterized by the Being of a Platonic style dualist ontology of a difficult to achieve experience of reality, coupled with the idea of an earthly illusion, such as Leon-Portilla imposes upon it. Because Leon-Portilla's ontology marginalizes the flux of Aztec metaphysics (rather than embracing it), he superimposes platonic denigrated *value* of impermanence upon it. Thus he denigrates an Aztec metaphysic of flux, of changing aspects. Because Leon-Portilla clings to the platonic idea that life is dreamlike, transitory, illusory, and hence not real, he misinterprets the ontology of Aztec thought. And for Maffie this is problematic because doing so denigrates change, impermanence, and transformative reality of Aztec thought.

Maffie is not so interested in objecting to León-Portilla's (and John Bierhorst's) interpretation of song poems as he is in suggesting that they have both imputed their own Platonic metaphysics of Being into their interpretations, imposing a Platonic ontology, rather than more carefully investigating an Aztec ontology of constitutional monism, as Maffie has done.

Rightfully, if Maffie is correct in his interpretation of Aztec metaphysics as a metaphysics that embraces Becoming, Aztec thought will need revisiting by many (43-47). This is because if Aztec metaphysics embraces a constitutional monism, it has no dualities, cannot reduce mind to matter, and a fortiori cannot claim mind is Reality, as platonic thought does. Aztec mind and body are merely aspects or facets of *teotl* (48). And *teotl* is ever in flux and change, or, a world in constant motion, as Maffie's title suggests.

In this similar vein, importantly, Maffie says that Lopez Austin's binary thought (50) of dualism attributed to Aztec thought, carries less explanatory power than Maffie's proposal of constitutional monism. Lopez Austin's error, for Maffie, is conflating binary properties with binary substances, failing to understand the nuanced differences—what Maffie might call the property/substance distinction (50). Properties are distinct from substances, and constitutional monism can embed complementary binary properties. Again, "Aztec non-binaries appear instead to be two aspects of a single thing (51) . . . dual-aspect oneness signifies wholeness in Aztec metaphysics. What's more, agonistic inamic unity is dynamic and diachronic. It is not a static condition or state of being" (153). Thus an animism grounded in self-empowerment (115). The sacred is the disclosing and non-concealment, or revealment, of a non-static state of ambiguous being, *teotl* (112). And in the center of *teotl* is "a time-place of safety, stability, support, familiarity, balance, and well-orderedness" (224).

Thus, importantly for Maffie's metaphysical construction of the Aztec web of thought, Aztec thought does not reify appearance and illusion, as the "Is" and "Is-Not" of Reality, but understands Reality itself to be non-discrete and non-binary. What appears discrete is in fact illusory, it is that which masks, which is also itself part of a transformative gyrating metamorphosis of Reality.

Return to the all-important seeing distinction between the "de re" of the thing itself, and the "de dicto" of the things under interpretation or description of a thing. Maffie uses Wittgenstein's "duck-rabbit" image metaphor to depict how Aztec see "de dicto" not "de re" (58). As the rabbit transforms, first a duck, then a rabbit, at once both the same yet different, the mind spins. The transformation, the change, the flux, in the spinning, the mind creates for us our very conceptualizations of an impermanence of becoming-in-the-world. It is this experience of cognitive change, of a relaxed dissonance of the mind, or again, an embracing of *teotl*'s showing of its changing self to us that is fundamentally different from a Platonic ontology. We try to peek in upon this Aztec understanding of a transformative moment, and in that moment are astounded by the change, the motion, as being spins itself into existence, continually regenerating itself. Yet for all of our effort, our experiencing remains *de dicto*, partial. We are unable to humanly grasp any permanence of this non-discrete, non-binary, dual aspect theory.

The point here is that although the complexity of *teotl* is real, is *de re*, humans perceive it only as *de dicto* (partial). Discrete boundaries are an illusion, a function of "how" we see (learn to focus). Illusion is a mental event, Maffie concludes, since We Are *teotl* (59). Two important claims stand out in this respect: (1) "*Aztec constitutional monism affirms that reality consists of a tertium quid, a third kind of stuff that is neither mind nor matter (as customarily conceived in dualists). This third kind of stuff is electricity-like energy or power*" (48); and (2) perhaps one of the more interesting claims in the book itself, and my favorite, is when Maffie tells us, "*Given the identity of humans and the one—in our case, teotl—it follows that all human perception, both veridical and non-veridical, ultimately consists of teotl perceiving itself!*" (59).

Failure to display an equal consideration of a different ontology to the study of Aztec metaphysics results in a superimposition of non-Aztec ontology onto an Aztec metaphysical system. Such a failure may result in an invidious academic disservice to our heritage. This is especially so if that imposed ontology denigrates the value of Aztec thought, reducing it to a simplistic discrete binary dualism, rather than teasing out the nuances of a non-discrete, non-binary dualism. This is important, because our interpretations of Aztec thought and understanding of self as cosmos makes a difference in how we approach this heritage philosophy. If the result of superimposing a false ontology onto Aztec cosmology means a lower value is given to Aztec indigenous thought, then this significantly and dramatically changes the current landscape of Aztec philosophy, and its role as America's heritage philosophy. To sum up this point, quite simply, "*Ontology Matters!*"

If Maffie is correct, it is certainly likely that an epistemic and ontological lack of knowing were at work in earlier interpretative analyses of song poems, and perhaps other interpretations of indigenous philosophies of the Americas as well. And that's okay, so long as further critical reflection upon Aztec ontology questions the impact of Maffie's challenge. If it is possible that a different historical moment, in a different ecological environment, has brought forth an interpretation of a very different understanding of the ontology of Aztec thought than what has hitherto been assumed, this should be taken into account in any further research of Aztec culture. This is because the ramifications of shifting from a discrete binary dualist ontology to a non-discrete non-binary dualist (as in dual-aspect of properties, not substances) ontology shows significant bearing upon other related areas of Aztec thought, such as value theory concerns of ethics and social and political thought, science itself, and the human place in an ever-changing, ever-coming to be cosmos. The lament of the Aztec song poems may not be so much about sadness but existential realization. If so, there may be a different lens of Continental existential thought that can be brought to bear upon these recordings.

In what follows I tie together the wrappings of each chapter in order to portray the development of what I understand to be important interpretive metaphysical arguments of the text.

Chapter one presents Aztec thought as a dynamic process monism: "Aztec metaphysics maintains there exists just one thing: the sacred energy-in-motion that is *teotl*" (62) where the cosmos is constituted by and "identical with the sacred electricity-like force of *teotl*" (62). Further, "Reality is defined by process, becoming, change, impermanence, and transformation" (62) where the cosmos is an artistic-shamanic, kaleidoscopic self-presentation of *teotl*'s work of performance art (62).

Chapter two presents the animated nature of *teotl*'s empowering energy, wherein a sacred force animates all existence. This chapter draws out the important difference between cognitive abilities of what we can understand about our perceptions of the cosmos, and the reality of the cosmos itself. Reality recognizes no distinction between sacred and profane, because *teotl* is sacred, and everything is identical with, constituted by, and vivified by it, thus making it power. "Teotl is sacred because it is power" (121).

Chapter three explores the dual aspect characteristic (where duality engenders unity) of an agonistic (competitive, involved in struggle or competition, striving for effect, provocative of place) inamic (foe, enemy, turned in opposite direction—stretched out to balance, two-scaled, counterweight) unity of unstable and non-teleological complementary polar opposites—what are called partners. The ambiguity of dual aspect unity is explored by looking at the struggle of inamic pairs (singles do not exist—172) that constitute and "explain the genesis, diversity, movement, and momentary orderliness of the cosmos" (143). Importantly, this chapter sets the stage for the critical understanding of the roles of pairs and ambiguity

in Aztec metaphysics: "Single things are not only internally composed of paired *inamichuan*, they are always externally paired with inamic partners. As a result Aztec metaphysics conceives apparently single things (such as *Ometeotl* and *Omeyocan*) as inherently and irreducibly ambiguous" (172). Two-ness is completion (147) signifying balance (152). Finally, as prelude to chapter four, this chapter also presents that the "how" of the process of "weaving functions as an essential organizing principle and root metaphor for Aztec metaphysics" (142).

Chapters four, five, and six each take up the three motion-changes of olin (curvy becoming), malinalli (gyrating, spiraling becoming), and nepantla (mutually reciprocal weaving as becoming), respectively. "*Nepantla holds the key to understanding Aztec metaphysics*" (14). Informative playful metaphors are used in explanation, such as bouncing balls, pulsating hearts, and earthquakes for olin; spinning fibers into thread, drilling fire, and ritual music, speech, and song for malinalli; and mixing, shaking and interlacing, such as the mixing of food ingredients, the weaving of warp and weft of a well-woven fabric, and (what may be questioned by feminists) the intermixing of male sperm and female ova. The motion heart of these sacred paired processes is clearly in the ambiguity of boundaries, wherein they act within a metaphysical system that defines the nature and constitution of the all-important notion of "*teotl*." And just as nepantla provides structure, *teotl* is the sacred transformative power of becoming; Maffie is clear that the idea of "*teotl*" as an abstraction, is *ours* (37). Understanding that weaving is a metaphorical organizational principle, nepantla is the structure of that weaving metaphor.

The metaphor of the woven floor mats, whether from palms or threads, wherefrom rulers rule, marriages join, women give birth, and an ordered and balanced pattern transforms otherwise unidirectional patterns into multidirectional patterns, operates as metaphor of transformation and motion-change. The stretching, the use of the batten, the process of weaving itself operates as metaphor wherein paired inamic components transform power within time-place. I have to confess that there is much I have not the background to understand about "the crossroads" (386), "balance," and "disorder," which is discussed in contexts of "sacrifice," "wrongdoing," and "bifurcations of divisive motion-change" (396), which seems to be a tortured affect, rather than graceful. So I leave it to those better understanding the "weaving metaphysics" to discuss this analysis, noting that the citations and credentials used by Maffie are impressive to this neophyte of Aztec culture.

Chapter seven I find much more manageable than chapters four, five, and six, which are very detail oriented and present unfamiliar evidentiary territory for me. This is the chapter where Maffie talks about two ways that his views of Aztec metaphysics conflict with traditional received views (452). First, as against the received view of a harmonious time-place without struggle, he places agonistic struggle at the center of the dualist pairs. Second, rather than holding the received view of interpretations "that there exist three essentially distinct kinds of time, and a commitment to the existence of two different kinds of time-place: sacred

versus profane" (452), Maffie posits a different theory of time-place.

In chapter seven, what we commonly think of as time and space become a single unity of "time-place." Time-place is the ontological being of process becoming, neither substantive nor relational, but the how of *teotl* change, or continual processing of transformation. As ontological becoming, *teotl* is sacred power, force, or energy; it is a monistic reality. It is uniform and homogenous. Maffie calls this "constitutional monism" (14), that is always *teotl*izing, or becoming, as sacred processing, and as regenerative of its own transformation. "Constitutional monism maintains all binaries are derivable from *teotl*" (54). The basic premise holding this theory together seems to be that this would be so only if the ontological boundaries of the "polar opposites" are non-discreetly bounded! The basic stuff of the universe, for the Aztecs, as so constitutive, and as ambiguous, is non-intentional, and non-agentive, and like the seasons, amoral (23). Nonetheless, it is dynamic, and as ever actualizing itself.

Chapter eight discusses all-important concepts of time and place as they play out in the universe unfolding itself, with us as part of that universe. To the extent that time-place has a central role unfolding the dynamics of Aztec ontological Becoming, the Aztec notion of time plays a central role in this non-discrete, non-binary, constructive monism as one that embodies qualitative differences. This is much the same as saying different kinds of time have different energies, characters, or personalities. Yet time is concrete, not abstract, and as relationship, it locates and situates *teotl*'s becoming (420).

This last chapter undertakes to discuss how *teotl* as cosmic weaver, through the use of *nepantla*, recreates the cosmos, what is referred to as the Five Ages of the cosmos and all that is. *Teotl*, as transformative, is that which provides motion-change as weaver, is itself the weaving in process action, and becomes the woven, all at once. This weaving process operates as metaphor of the always becoming cosmos, which ontology, as a non-discreet, non-binary, dualist monistic ontology, organizes the metaphysics of the weaving process.

This is the chapter that pulls the ontology of the first seven chapters together. Remember that *nepantla* is the middling motion change, which is the key to understanding metaphysical and human existential condition, and Aztec philosophy itself (earlier). In chapter eight we find *nepantla*, as middling motion change, situated in the contextual understanding of the cosmos. The self-enforcing (and self-faceting) of *teotl*, reality, and the cosmos is a cosmological repeating of a 260-fold pattern. The 260-fold pattern is the "how" of cosmological process that self-generates transformative movement. This pattern is called the "tonalpohualli" (count of the tonalli). The tonalli is a concept about how the cosmos weaves its tonalpohualli. "Tonalpohualli" is the count of the tonalli. Maffie tells us it is the concept most "complex and difficult in Aztec metaphysics" (423). That which is made record of, recorded, or what is counted, read, and interpreted is called the "book of the tonallis" (423). This is how *teotl* becomes! (425)

For the braver readers, an account is given of the arrangement of the 260 (20 x 13) fold pattern, consisting of twenty named tonallis, and thirteen metaphysical forces, each having a unique essence or personality (425), and nine nocturnal forces for influence (426). In this chapter Maffie also discusses the pattern of days, called the "xihuitl" recorded in the book of the years, or year day book, (the "xiuhamatl") (430). This pattern, then, is the pattern that *teotl* discloses! It consists of a 365-day solar year.

Alongside this metaphysical pattern is an ontologically paired couple named "Tonacatecuhtli" (traditionally and herein interpreted as a male aspect) and named "Tonacacihuatl" (traditionally and herein interpreted as a female aspect). These dual aspects of the cosmos together are the "root and support" of a cosmological weaving. This is a weaving of a "seamless agonistic inamic unity characterized by full male and female characteristics and possessing full male and female generative and regenerative powers" (433). This weaving is accomplished by means of the "nepantla-defined process of reciprocal, back-and-forth interweaving and commingling that is continually creatively destructive, destructively creative, and hence continually transformative" (434). Maffie called this process of *nepantla* motion-change "cosmogonically primordial and metaphysically fundamental (434). "The paired inamic of agonistic inamic unity differentiate themselves into complementary quadruplicity" (434). All other "gods" and the Sun-Earth Eras come from the motion of these two paired couples (including Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli, who generate the first woman and man).

Lest readers get confused in the detail of this metaphysics and simplify it, Maffie tells us first that Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl are always there, as there is no beginning to the patterning motion. They are always there because there is no bifurcation of Being and Non-being. There is only continual becoming and transformation. Second, there is no "primordial divine act of transforming nothingness into existence," as there is no solitary "nothingness," as all things come in pairs. Maffie tells us this may result in the cosmos being understood as fundamentally pantheistic (447). (A particular notion of "pantheism" is explored here, differing from contemporary popular notions.) Third, since time-place is co-extensional with the becoming or transforming cosmos, there is no time-place prior to the time-place of this dynamic pair of unity. And fourth, the cosmos is a self-woven folding pattern, and the weaving pattern is both cyclical (repetitive motion of weaves of warp and weft) and linear (a row of weaves has a unique focus in the fabric woven), yet because a continuing repeated pattern, a non-progress oriented, non-teleological, and non-eschatological cosmos. Maffie refers to these characteristics as presenting a metaphysics that is called "acosmogonic" (448).

In the end, Maffie affirms that his view of this metaphysical cosmology is not a substantive but a relational view. Space and time are not entities but relationships of processes and events. This universe is constitutionally monistic, processive, and agonistic, and Maffie readily admits, unlike interpretive views previously offered by others. "Ometeotl," the name given to the pairing of Tonacatecuhtli

and Tonacacihuatl, engages in the how of metaphysics, the nepantla of becoming and transforming that has always been in process as a weaving motion change, woven by time and place. Omēteotl is as a Sacred Energy, a Two Teotl, or God of Duality, and “Omeyocan” as describing the place of unified Twoness, is a continued nepantla-defined struggle of motion change and becoming. It is a dynamic and agonistic balance, neither static nor quietistic (461).

Maffie makes no qualms about asserting his metaphysical disagreement with scholars of the past. He states, “In short, the received view operates from a set of metaphysical assumptions that I believe are *alien* to Aztec philosophy: first, the equating of peace, harmony, activity, stasis, and perfection, on the one hand, and the converse equating of disharmony, agonism, activity, opposition, and movement on the other; second, the notion that harmony, equilibrium, and balance are produced by inactivity, stasis, and peaceful coexistence rather than inamic agonism; and third, the idea that an orderly cosmos must be created from a prior condition of absolute disorder” (461). The processing of reality as the nepantla motion change weaving-in-process, a unified pattern of Omēteotl time-place, forms a unifying “eurhythmy” represented by a diagram showing all other time-places, as integrated within Omēteotl time-place, are rhythmic tensions weaving back and forth (461-62).

The conclusion of the text is eloquent, and worth the quote.

Time-place is an immanent pattern in the modus operandi of teotl’s continual becoming and transforming. It is how teotl moves. Time-place is relational, not substantive. Since teotl has always existed, time-place has always existed. Since nepantla motion-change defines teotl, and since time-place is the modus operandi of teotl, it follows that nepantla motion-change is the modus operandi of time-place. Time-place weaves back and forth as teotl weaves the cosmos. The cosmos is a grand weaving-in-progress whose various patterns constitute various times-places. (465)

For scholars interested in heritage philosophy of the Americas, this text will delight with its metaphysical playfulness. It is, however, to be taken seriously. For if Maffie is correct in only some of his disagreements with traditionally received views, he has forever changed the weave of the rug! I encourage the use of this text in higher level undergraduate courses, and graduate courses. It will challenge the understanding of many students who may need a cognitive challenge. It will awaken them from a slumber of not knowing about this chapter of their own heritage, about America’s heritage philosophy. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to know more about the heritage philosophies of our native soil. And all American philosophers should be familiar with the metaphysics of these philosophies if they hope to have any kind of understanding of their own philosophical influences since coming to the Americas!

NOTES

1. This lively and amazing Aztec metaphysics and ontology book has 592 pages, including a comprehensive 35-page bibliography!
2. “A Toltec king, the founder of Tula in about 950, is a priest of Quetzalcoatl and becomes known by the god’s name. This king, described as fair-skinned and bearded, is exiled by his enemies; but he vows that he will return in the year ‘One Reed’ of the 52-year calendar cycle. In 1519, a ‘One Reed’ year, a fair-skinned stranger lands on the east coast. The Aztecs welcome him as Quetzalcoatl. He is the Spanish conquistador Cortes.” <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=aa12>.
3. I am indebted to Thayer Watkins, San Jose State University Economics Department, for his informative article, “History of the Aztecs,” located at <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/aztecs.htm> (homepage of applet-magic.com).
4. See Anne Waters, “Language Matters: A Metaphysic of NonDiscreet NonBinary Dualism,” in *Newsletter on American Indians in Philosophy* 01, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 5–14 . [Reprinted as “Language Matters: Nondiscrete Nonbinary Dualism,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Anne Waters (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 97–115].
5. If not already obvious, the problematics of interpreting any North American Indigenous texts as understood within a Platonic metaphysical framework are overwhelming. Yet this is precisely what happens when such an ontology is superimposed upon American Indigenous thought. There is a need to understand that *America’s heritage indigenous philosophy* presented to American pragmatists a different metaphysic than they had known on the European Continent; an Indigenous metaphysic that influenced and affected the very development and growth of American pragmatic philosophy in the United States. Credit for providing this background metaphysical system has not yet been properly given to our heritage philosophy.