

Native American and Indigenous Philosophy



FALL 2018

VOLUME 18 | NUMBER 1

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Agnes B. Curry

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

AGNES B. CURRY, MANAGING EDITOR

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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry
UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH

We are excited to welcome you to Volume 18 of the *APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophies*. This edition of the newsletter focuses on scholarship, and it is particularly strong in suggesting the range of ways Native American and Indigenous philosophy can contribute across both traditional and emerging branches of philosophical inquiry, from logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind, to ethics and politics, to philosophies of art and culture.

As detailed by Lori Underwood, chair of the APA Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers, in her introductory "Notes from the Committee Chair," the scholarly articles by Purcell, Welch, and Gallegos build from papers they presented at the 2018 APA Pacific Division meeting. We are grateful to Brian Burkhart for his work organizing the sessions and look forward to featuring scholarship from other 2018 session participants in future editions of the newsletter.

Our first scholarly article focuses on logic, particularly the partial and exclusionary model of rationality conveyed by traditional logic and the gate-keeping force this model continues to exert on Native and other underrepresented students. In "Sacred Truths, Fables, and Falsehoods: Intersections between Feminist and Native American Logics," Lauren Eichler of the University of Oregon examines the resonances between feminist and Native American analyses of classical logic. After considering the range of responses, from overly monolithic rejection to more nuanced appreciation, Eichler argues for a careful, pluralist understanding of logic as she articulates her suggestion that feminists and Native American philosophers could build fruitful alliances around this topic. Eichler's paper is a development of work presented at the 2017 Conference on "Decolonizing and Indigenizing Feminist Philosophy" sponsored by the Association for Feminist Ethics and Social Theory.¹

Moving from classical Western logic as the gateway of Western philosophy, our second article makes its way to one of its citadels, if you will: Aristotle's metaphysics. In "On What There 'Is': Aristotle and the Aztecs on Being and Existence," L. Sebastian Purcell of SUNY Cortland starts from the fact that Nahuatl lacks the terms for "being" or "to be" that a Western approach would deem necessary to formulate the basic question of metaphysics—namely,

"What is there?" Yet, Purcell argues, not only were the Aztecs interested in metaphysics, their process-based answer animates a *prima facie* reasonable theory, grounding both a meaningful conception of "wisdom" and a conceptual apparatus to rival Aristotle's concept of substance. This essay is a continuation of Purcell's work comparing Aztec and Aristotelean thinking. His essay, "Nētilitzli and the Good Life: On Aztec Ethics," won the 2016 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought sponsored by the Committee on Hispanics and is printed in the spring 2017 *Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*.²

Our third article, "Dance as Native Performative Knowledge," by Shay Welch of Spelman College, focuses on epistemology—with implications of philosophical anthropology and ethics. Welch synthesizes work across Native American philosophy, cognitive science, phenomenology, and contemporary dance studies to ground a claim familiar to Native American and Indigenous people the world over yet marginalized in philosophy, that dancing vitally connects to the emergence of Truth. Moving from a propositional framework for knowledge to a performative, procedural framework that allows for attention to the work of metaphors not only at conscious but also non-conscious levels of bodily knowing, we see how dancing is storytelling. In dancing, the knowing-body summons individual and collective knowledge that can be "taken up"—in multiple senses of the term—into the lived, if not necessarily verbally articulable, knowledge-stance of a respectfully receptive viewer.

Continuing with the intertwining of epistemology and ethics, our fourth article, by Sergio Gallegos of John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), articulates the role of meta-ignorance in perpetuating epistemic injustice. In "En México no hay negros': Epistemic Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition of Afro-Mexicans," Gallegos describes how patterns of meta-ignorance undergird systemic failures of recognition that chronically render Afro-Mexicans in Mexico simultaneously invisible and foreign. After considering responses of coerced silencing and of epistemic resistance practiced by some Afro-Mexicans, particularly women from the Costa Chica region of Mexico, Gallegos then expands his inquiry to consider analogous situations affecting Native Americans in US society.

Finally, epistemological, artistic, and social-political issues animate Karl Mays's interdisciplinary examination, *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America*, reviewed by Andrew Smith of Drexel University. Smith describes how Mays's consideration of Native hip hop as an emerging art form

helps to complicate notions of masculinity as well as modernity and indigeneity.

Like contemporary Native Dance, Indigenous hip hop invites us to consider from a variety of perspectives the significance of a whole host of activities, only inadequately understood as “artistic expressions” or “cultural practices,” in Native American and Indigenous people’s ongoing efforts to craft responsible, resilient, and creative response to current conditions. Our opening photo essay, “Túkmal Tóonavqal//Weaving Baskets,” by Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner of Michigan State University, lucidly—and beautifully—illustrates this point. Along with its stunning images, Meissner’s reflection prompts us to see not only how basketry connects to her research in Indigenous philosophy of language, but, more deeply, how such practices can help make the work *existentially* possible. As such, it is a fitting launching point for the inquiries that follow it—one that reminds us of the livings stakes of our attempts to expand the philosophical field.

NOTES

1. For more information on the FEAST conference, see <http://www.afeast.org/conferences/> and <http://www.afeast.org/resources/feast-2017-compact-schedule-draft-July-.pdf>.
2. L. Sebastian Purcell, “*Eudaimonia and Neltiliztli: Aristotle and the Aztecs on the Good Life*,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, Vol 16, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 10-21, available at <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/collection/60044C96-F3E0-4049-BC5A-271C673FA1E5/HispanicV16n2.pdf>.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the spring 2019 newsletter. We welcome work that foregrounds the philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding Native American philosophers and philosophers of all global Indigenous nations. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. Editors do not limit philosophical methods, modes, or literatures, as long as the work engages in substantive and sustained re-centering of the philosophical conversation to focus on Native American and Indigenous concerns. Nor do we 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. For book reviews, in addition to evaluating the argument and scholarship of the work, reviewers should attend to whether, and if so how, the work is useful in developing Native American and Indigenous philosophy as a field and in teaching Native American and Indigenous philosophy at various levels. Evaluation of the work’s place in the project of decolonizing philosophy more generally, and of connecting to other decolonial projects is appreciated as well.

For all submissions, references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and utilize endnotes rather than in-text citations except for extensive reference to a single source.

For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website. The submission deadline for the spring 2019 newsletter is January 15, 2019. Please submit copies electronically to Agnes Curry at acurry@usj.edu.

FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Lori J. Underwood
CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY

Greetings, everyone. It’s been quite a busy year for the committee. You may have noticed a name change in our newsletter that reflects a corresponding change for our committee from “Newsletter on Indigenous Philosophers” to “Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers.” After much consideration and discussion, we decided that this name better represents our vision and our mission.

We also welcomed two new members to our committee this year, Alex Guerrero and Christopher Kavelin. Alex, who has both a Ph.D. and J.D. from New York University, teaches at Rutgers University. Chris resides in Australia, has a Ph.D. in law and indigenous intellectual property from Macquarie University, and is associated with the Institute for Social Justice at Australian Catholic University. Welcome to the committee, Alex and Christopher. We look forward to sharing your ideas and insights in the years to come!

One of the highlights of the past year for us was the Pacific APA. This year the committee sponsored two sessions. The first session, “Indigenous Contributions in Existentialism, Ethics, Metaphysics, and Social Political Philosophy,” was chaired by Alejandro Santana from the University of Portland. James Maffie (University of Maryland) presented his paper “Mexica Ethics: Balance, Nepantla, and Weaving the Good Life.” Sebastian Purcell (SUNY Cortland) presented “On What There ‘Is’: The Aztec Approach Existence and Causation.” Krista Arias (University of British Columbia Okanagan) presented “Temazcalli: Crying, Bleeding, and the PsychoPolitics of Water Womb and Woman,” and Brian Yazzie Burkhart (California State University, Northridge) presented “We Are Made from Red Earth: Cherokee Decolonial Existentialism from the Land.”

The second session, “Epistemic Resistance, Survival Ethics, Social Justice, and Performative Knowledge in Native American and Mexican America,” was chaired by Lara Trout of the University of Portland. Sergio Gallegos (now of John Jay College of Criminal Justice) presented “En México no hay Negros, no hay Negras’: AfroMexican Women’s Epistemic Resistance Against Practices of Silencing.” Shay Welch (Spelman College) presented “Dance as Native Performative Knowledge.” Gregory Frenando Pappas (Texas A&M University) presented “How to Approach Injustices? Lessons from Some Mexican-Americans,” and Lori Gallegos (Texas State University at San Marcos) presented “The Ethics of Making a Home: Tactics of Survival and the Politics of Assimilation.” The papers were insightful and elicited thoughtful and productive discussion.

The Central Division meeting also featured a panel, co-sponsored with the International Society for Environmental Ethics and chaired by Robert Melchior Figueroa (Oregon State University). He also presented "Memo to Maria: Engendering the Legacy of Environmental Colonialism in Puerto Rico." Other panelists were Chaone Mallory (University of Southern California) who presented "Decolonizing Environmental Philosophy: Whiteness, Gender, Dis/Ability, and Teaching 'the Canon' of Environmental Ethics," Brian Yazzie Burkhart (California State University, Northridge) who presented "Environmentalism through Being-from-the-Land: Indigenous Decolonial Environmental Philosophy," and Bjørn Kristensen (Oregon State University) who presented "An Interspecies Perspective on Food Justice in the Majority World."

We look forward to featuring more work developed from these sessions in future newsletters and to extending our involvement at all three divisional meetings in the coming years.

Finally, the committee would like to highlight the excellent artistic and academic works of Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner. Those interested in helping Indigenous youth, adults, and elders access quality basketweaving opportunities, please follow the [California Indian Basketweavers Association](#) and consider making a charitable donation to this important organization.

Thank you all for your continued support.

ARTICLES

Túkmal Tóonavqal // Weaving Baskets

Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Figure 1. A coil-style grass basket in progress. This is a gift for Meissner's mother.

In my research, I often feel overwhelmed and lonely, as one of very few Indigenous women in academic philosophy, and as the only Southern California Indian person I know of studying in the Midwest. I often feel very homesick, or, as we might say in Luiseño, *notmá ahiichumay*, literally, "my mouth is a little orphan." To combat this loneliness while writing a dissertation about Indigenous philosophy of language, I have been taking long breaks to weave baskets, process *kwíila*

(acorns) into delicious treats, and to practice singing and chattering to myself in my language. Participating in these cultural practices thousands of miles from my ancestral home has been a profound act of self-care and has helped me ground myself in my work.

I realize while I weave that the process of making a basket is so deeply connected to Luiseño conceptions of language; just like the basketry materials, the *tóonavpish*, come from the land, so does our language. Just as the *tóonavpish* should be gathered in our traditional gathering places, according to our ancestral protocols, our language should



Figure 2. The beginning stage of a pineneedle basket Meissner wove as a gift for one of her mentors. The centerpiece of the basket is a slice of a walnut shell. The white seashells in the corner were sewn into the crown of the finished basket.

be tended to in the places it grows best, and reclaimed according to the system of ethics embedded in the Luiseño cosmology. Just as the juncus, deergrass, pine needles, and sumac we weave our baskets with are regarded as living relatives to whom we have responsibilities, our language, too, is a living relative, not a mere system of sounds, symbols, names, and predicates. Language reclamation, like basketweaving, is an act of visiting. And just as every basket I weave is a gift for one of my colleagues, a family member, or a mentor, the language reclamation work myself and others do is first and foremost a gift for our communities.

If you are interested in helping Indigenous youth, adults, and elders access quality basketweaving opportunities, please follow the [California Indian Basketweavers Association](#) and consider making a charitable donation to this important organization.



Figure 3. Beginning stages of a tiny horsehair basket. Woven with brown horsehair and beige palm grass.

Sacred Truths, Fables, and Falsehoods: Intersections between Feminist and Native American Logics

Lauren Eichler
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

"As a young American Indian undergraduate philosophy student . . . I harbored a deep desire to do well in logic. Euro-American professors wanted philosophy students to believe that logic courses presented to us the opportunity to 'master' the methodology of philosophy, that the very structure of human philosophical thought would be revealed to us in our study of logic," writes Seminole philosopher Anne Waters.¹ Though Waters went on to teach dozens of logic courses, she remained uncomfortable with some of the characteristics of logic itself, particularly its reliance on abstraction and discrete binary dualisms. Her discontent with the limits of classical logic was mirrored by the difficulty some of her Native American students also had with the subject. Many Native students, she noted, were dropping out of and having difficulty passing logic courses. This was not because they were incapable of doing logic, but because this kind of ordering did not resonate with many of them and the methods of reasoning used by their communities.² Rather than focusing on particulars and content, the things that make inquiry into philosophical meaningful, logic was largely about form and ordering the world so as to fit that form and no other. Formal logic excluded the students' experiences and the standpoint of their nations while forcing their traditions, values, and knowledges into the framework of Western rationality.

The experience of feeling alienated by formal logic yet desirous to prove that one is an authentic philosopher and not an impostor has been shared by other traditionally marginalized groups in the discipline of philosophy, especially feminist scholars. For example, in her essay "Power in the Service of Love," Carroll Guen Hart recounts her experience of fearing and avoiding taking logic courses: "Like many women in philosophy I did not begin there as an undergraduate because of logic . . . I had taken a look at the logic textbooks . . . and knew I could never grasp all of this."³ Later, in graduate school, when taking a course on ontology, her worst fears were realized—she was told by her mentor that she had "no gift for high abstraction."⁴ Likewise, Andrea Nye reflected on her difficult experience of learning logic, asking herself, "Is it because I, as a woman, had a different kind of mind, incapable of abstraction and therefore of theorizing, is it because I was too 'emotional'? Is it because when I read the logic exercise I persisted in thinking about [the context of the problem]. . . , when none of this matters?"⁵ Like Waters's Native students, many female students in philosophy wrestled with the emphasis on form rather than substance in logic classes. The similar experiences of these two groups despite their different backgrounds demonstrate that there are recurring problems with formal logic that need to be solved so that logic can be less intimidating and ostracizing. The common experiences of these two groups also suggest that overcoming these challenges could be a collaborative effort, ensuring that

the particular effects of these challenges that each group faces are adequately addressed.

The problems identified by the writers of the above stories are closely associated with classical logic. Classical logic refers to the method of formal logic developed by the Ancient Greeks—particularly Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle. It is based on three main metaphysical principles: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of the excluded middle. In *Logic: Argument, Inquiry, Order*, Scott Pratt argues that there are four main issues that have been raised against logic, all of which can be seen in the classroom experiences described above: the problem of abstraction, the problem of dualism, the problem of incommensurability, and the problem of boundaries.⁶ As Nye's experience above shows, the problem with abstraction is that it divorces form from content, which "institutes a separation from the world, adopts a structure that is in accord with the interests of a certain class and gender, and then is returned to the world as an absolute structure which necessarily frames human interactions and experience."⁷ The problem with dualism is specific to the way that negation is treated in classical logic. According to Val Plumwood, dualisms are relations of difference that have become "relations of separation and domination inscribed and naturalized in culture."⁸ Abstraction and dualism can lead to the third and fourth problems. If divisions are necessary and those divisions have become naturalized and inscribed in culture, then it may be impossible or very difficult for different logics to be communicable or even to coexist. When one term in the division is privileged over the other as it is in dualism, the other term may be dismissed as wrong, irrelevant, or unimportant, leading to incommensurability. Dualistic thinking and incommensurability suggest that there are strict boundaries that either cannot or should not be crossed. Such boundaries divide the world into abstract categories that exclude the in-between and border spaces that connect the two sides of the dualism. Though there have been developments in formal logic since the Classical period, the laws of classical logic have frequently been treated as impervious, necessary, and objectively true. However, classical logic is just one interpretation of logic. Pratt, for example, defines logic as "a study of the principles that order the relations among claims about the world."⁹ According to this definition, there can be many different logics. As such, his definition is more expansive than the strict interpretation of logic under the laws of classical logic. Based on Pratt's definition, classical logic becomes just *one of many* legitimate forms of logic.

Scholars of various backgrounds, including feminist, decolonial, Latinx, and Native American scholars, have voiced many variations of these claims and concerns. In this paper, I draw on the criticisms of classical logic raised by feminist and Native American philosophers in order to show that logic does not have to be a site of incommensurability and domination. First, if we accept that there can be many different legitimate forms of logic such as feminist and Native American approaches, then we can move away from the idea of the superior monolithic logic that has been the tool of domination. Second, because they come from different starting points as insiders or

outsiders to Western systems of rationality, feminist and Native American scholars can each bring something to the table to solve their common problems regarding logic. In the first section I draw on the work of feminist philosophers Genevieve Lloyd, Andrea Nye, and Val Plumwood to explain how abstraction and dualism have been used to exclude certain methods of reasoning and discount the people who use those methods. Next, with the help of Native American scholars Anne Waters, Vine Deloria Jr., Viola F. Cordova, and Thomas Norton-Smith, I show how these problems have sustained the notion that Western and Native American logics are radically different and incommensurable, leading to the dismissal, erasure, and destruction of Native American logics, methodologies, and even cultures. In the final section, I argue that feminist and Native American approaches to logic offer an opportunity to overcome incommensurability for two reasons. First, both groups share many of the same criticisms of logic, which gives them a common starting point for philosophical collaboration. Second, Native American logics offer solutions to many of the concerns feminists raise, meaning that feminists, should they be truly committed to solving the problems that have been identified with logic and willing to listen, stand to learn much from Native scholars. Likewise, Native American scholars may be able to use these similarities as an opportunity to gain allies who will respect, support, and fight for them within the dominant colonial culture. I argue that the key to overcoming incommensurability and boundaries for these two groups (who are already critical of abstraction and dualism) is to become, in Anne Waters's words, "bi-cultural"—that is, able to translate information from one worldview to another and vice versa.¹⁰

I. ABSTRACTION AND DUALISM: FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF CLASSICAL LOGIC

Logic has often been touted as an entirely rational, neutral, and objective method of reasoning that can consistently lead to a clear, distinct, and truthful ordering of the world when the correct forms, methods, and principles are followed. Feminist logicians have debunked this myth, arguing that classical logic, which has formed the foundation for many subsequent formal and symbolic logics, is actually a culturally biased, selected form of reasoning that enables one group to exclude and dominate others, especially via classical logic's understanding of negation. According to Genevieve Lloyd, the domain of reason, of which logic is a part, has been historically treated as the domain of men.¹¹ Deemed irrational and emotional, women were considered in Aristotle's cosmology to be more rational than animals, but less rational than men. Such beliefs were maintained throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period, during which time women became associated with virtues such as chastity, docility, and passivity, considered opposite to the virtues displayed by men such as detachment from transient emotions and material concerns. As these values sedimented into cultural mores, women were frequently denied the opportunity to receive an education that would permit them to participate in rational discourse on the assumption that they were incapable of it. In denying women the opportunity to learn the various methods of reason proposed by philosophers like Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, men made women conform to the image they

had of them. As Lloyd puts it, "women are perforce *left* emotional, impulsive, fancy-ridden . . . [making] it true, in a way . . . that women are less rational than men."¹² As Lloyd and other feminists have pointed out, the effects of this history are still being felt by women today as the stories above and the large discrepancy between genders in the professional discipline of philosophy attests.

In her book *Words of Power*, Nye also critiques the history of reason from a feminist perspective, but with a narrower focus on logic per se. Nye argues that logic is a sphere of unlimited abstraction that has been used to assert the mastery of some groups over others by positing logic as objective, neutral, and uncorrupted by emotion, human concerns, and sensible content. From a traditional view of logic, the political, religious, and cultural views of the logician are utterly outside its concerns. The success and failures of logic are entirely formal.¹³ Logicians, she claims, "have agreed that to do logic you must remove yourself from any concrete situation in time and space to contemplate eternal verities."¹⁴ In other words, in order to properly practice logic one must ignore context—the motivations behind an inquiry, historical and cultural situations, the person of the logician, and the origins of logic and the ideas being spoken about. In this view, logic transcends interpersonal relationships and stands outside and beyond lived experience.

However, Nye contends that while logic presents itself as unfettered by human ideology, it is actually steeped in masculinist, Eurocentric assumptions. In particular, she claims that logic is a language spoken by men that excludes other forms of speech including "the emotional expression of women, the subrational words of slaves, the primitive political views of barbarians, and the tainted opinions of anyone who does manual labor."¹⁵ It employs division, abstraction, and negation as instruments to dominate the Other. Given these tendencies in logic and its disconnection from context, relationships, and lived experience, Nye advocates a strong response—do away with logic altogether and adopt a new method of arriving at truth: "reading."¹⁶ Unlike logic, which focuses on the form of propositions, reading takes the content, language, and speaker into account. Whereas Nye holds that logic can be easily manipulated by those in power because the meaning of words becomes secondary to the form of the argument, she contends that reading emphasizes the importance of textual analysis, of listening to the words of others, and of the exchange of ideas rather than forms. Reading takes into account the relationships between speakers, the place in which they are speaking, and the historical and cultural circumstances of their utterances. Broadly speaking, Nye advocates a substantive approach to determining the truth rather than a formal approach for several reasons. First, logicians deceive themselves when they claim that logic is neutral and objective because logic itself is a human-derived methodology that arose in a specific time and place. Second, formal logic, when abstracted from context, can be manipulated by those in power to dominate and control. Third, formal logic requires everyone to conform to a certain methodology, erasing differences and perpetuating homogeneity. A substantive approach to truth-finding would relinquish the myth of

the one right way to reason, thus taking logic out of the hands of the powerful and opening up the possibility of more democratic and varied ways of rationalizing. These methods would not rely on formal structures, arguments, and counter-arguments, but on creating consensus through cooperation, reciprocity, intimacy, custom, ritual, and art.¹⁷ Nye believes that by taking this approach all people, not only logicians or those in power, will be better equipped to understand and assess the ideas that are circulated in the social and political spheres.

Like Nye, Val Plumwood agrees that classical logic has been used as a tool to dominate, marginalize, and colonize non-Europeans, women, and nature. But unlike Nye, Plumwood asserts that “feminists and others concerned to develop conceptual structures which can be tools of liberation need not abandon the field of logic entirely.”¹⁸ She resists Nye’s claim that logical abstraction is inherently oppressive; rather, the problem is that particular doctrines of abstraction have been used to delegitimize the sphere of the particular and personal while claiming to be politically neutral.¹⁹ Plumwood also rejects the way in which Nye treats logic as monolithic, ignoring the many newer developments in symbolic logic such as relevant and paraconsistent logics. Nye also assumes that logic stems from a Western tradition and that non-Western cultures like Indigenous cultures do not employ their own logical systems that may not necessarily follow the same reasoning as classical Western logic. According to Plumwood, if we accept that there are many logics, then “we can begin to understand systems of logic and their corresponding systems of rationality as *selected*” to privilege certain forms of reasoning as intuitive or normal.²⁰ Because there can be a variety of different logics for determining truth, logic itself is not the problem. Taking Nye’s concerns into consideration, Plumwood focuses those criticisms toward classical logic, specifically on the operation of negation within classical logic and its tendency toward constructing dualisms and promoting binary thinking.

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle presents three principles which have become pillars of classical logic: the principles of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle. According to the principle of identity p equals p , or each thing is identical with itself. Aristotle intended us to understand this to mean that each thing is composed of its own essence and characteristics that define it as that which it is. The principle of non-contradiction holds that p and $not-p$ cannot both be true simultaneously and in the same way. Alternately, a thing cannot both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same respect. Finally, according to the law of the excluded middle, everything must be or not be.²¹ In terms of truth-statements, this means that a proposition is either true or not true and cannot be both simultaneously. These three principles rely explicitly on a mode of binarial thinking in which our understanding of truth and falsity, reality and fiction rely on a dichotomous distinction between the two. It also suggests a fixed, static, and orderly way of understanding reality and truth where change, flux, intermediaries, and borderlands do not exist. Either p exists or it does not; either p is true or it is not; p is always fixed as itself. Plumwood voices her concern with classical logic by focusing on the role of negation as it

pertains to these principles and the dualistic thinking that results.

Plumwood defines dualism “as a particular way of dividing the world which results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other . . . dualism can be seen as an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm.”²² Whereas dichotomy is simply making a division or distinction, dualism treats the division as absolute and as part of the natural order of things. It uses the patterns of difference rendered by dichotomies to establish hierarchies in which the dualized other is systematically constructed as Other. In dualistic thinking each term of a relationship (p and $not-p$) is treated as a self-identical entity that possesses an essential, unchanging nature. The two terms are then related to one another not just in terms of being different, but so that one side of the relation always represents a lack or absence of some positive quality that exists in the other. In other words, dualisms like culture/nature, male/female, savage/civilized, and human/animal treat differences as inherent and fixed where the second term in the relationship is the representation of the absence of the essence of the first term. The perpetual use of these dualisms, which place different levels of value on each term, and the way that they so neatly align with the principles of classical logic helps to naturalize systems of domination. The rational structure of dualisms plays out quite clearly in theories of classical negation if we take negation to represent “Otherness.” In classical negation $not-p$ consists of “the universe without p , everything in the universe other than what p covers,” meaning that $not-p$ depends on p for its definition and is not treated as an independent other.²³ This ultimately ends up centering p while placing $not-p$ on the periphery.

The problems with classical logic arise when its principles are taken to not just apply to propositional statements, but to the beings and institutions that constitute our material, social, and political reality. When this happens, Plumwood argues that this understanding of negation results in a logic of domination in which one group of people asserts its superiority over another. Dualistic thinking diminishes the importance of the negative value, the Other, in a variety of ways. Through backgrounding, the Other is deemed inessential, their contributions and reality treated as unimportant and not worth noticing. The view of the positive value, the “master,” is considered universal, and alternative perspectives are not considered or even imagined.²⁴ Despite this, the master requires the Other to be the boundary against which the identity of the master is defined. In this relational definition, the Other is perceived as a lack or negativity.²⁵ Yet, because the master does not want to admit any kind of dependency on the Other, the master polarizes the relationship by downplaying similarities while maximizing and magnifying differences, resulting in radical exclusion.²⁶ Radical exclusion, in turn, reinforces essentialist approaches to the Other, specifically via objectification (treating the Other as an object or instrument for one’s use rather than as an independent agent with its own goals and purposes) and homogenization (ignoring differences that exist within those relegated to a lesser status).²⁷ In this respect, classical

negation reflects a relationship of mastery wherein one side of a dualism or one p -value is privileged over another. Through these five characteristics, dualism imposes a stark, uncompromising, and hierarchical division between two orders that could be understood in more integrated ways. As such, dualism “provides the cultural grounding for an ideological structure which justifies many different forms of oppression, including male-centeredness, Euro-centeredness, ethno-centeredness, human-centeredness, and many more.”²⁸

Unlike Nye, Plumwood does not believe these problems are grounds for abandoning logic altogether. Instead, Plumwood affirms the notion of a diversity of logics, some of which are “fully worked out” systems with different features that do not run into these issues.²⁹ Pursuing other logics, like paraconsistent and relevant logics, can help us move away from the harmful effects of classical ways of thinking. In addition to these other systems of formal logic, many non-Western cultures have their own fully worked out logical systems. As we will see in the next section, Native American cultures have robust logics that consist of principles, which order the relations among claims about the world while not getting mired in the problems beset by classical logic.

II. INCOMMENSURABILITY AND BOUNDARIES: NATIVE AMERICAN SOLUTIONS TO CLASSICAL LOGIC

Native American scholars have identified the same problems with logic that feminists have: formal logic is exclusionary of other forms of rationality, is too abstract, and promotes thinking in terms of discrete binary dualisms. Just as formal logic has been considered the domain of the masculine, it has also been the domain of the Eurocentric worldview which has treated other worldviews as inferior and illegitimate. Yet, for Native scholars the exclusion of different forms of reasoning does not just lead to oppression, it also erases and destroys traditional ways of life and the worldviews that accompany them. In this respect, classical logic quite literally enacts what Patrick Wolfe calls the “logic of elimination,” which refers to the metaphysical principles and assumptions that characterize and justify settler colonialism.³⁰ Furthermore, Western philosophy has long used “rationality” as the measuring stick for who gets recognized as an autonomous, adult person with legitimate and worthwhile goals. Thus, denying another’s rationality is tantamount to denying that the Other is a person worthy of respect and moral consideration. This problem has plagued Native Americans for centuries as white settlers used this reasoning to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and justify practices of ethnic cleansing, forced removal, and re-education. In what follows, I outline the criticism Native scholars have brought against logic and show how the problems of abstraction and dualism lead to incommensurability and boundaries. I will also draw on the work of several Native American philosophers to show how Native methodologies *are actual* logics based on principles that describe the relations of claims about the world. Although this section focuses on what Native American logics bring over and how Native peoples have suffered because of Western logic, we can

also see a number of parallels between the criticisms of Native peoples and feminist scholars. This similarity can help provide a starting point for making Western and Indigenous logics more commensurable.

As a logic instructor, philosopher Anne Waters had the opportunity to observe the experiences of Native American students in her classroom. Noting that these students tended to have more difficulty passing and staying in logic classes, Waters determined that two main factors were contributing to this situation: logic’s reliance on abstraction and its reliance on dualism.³¹ According to Waters, the problem with abstraction can be traced back to Plato’s metaphysics in which he envisioned reality and “truth” as static, of the mind, and abstract. In his schema, “[t]he ‘true’ became an object of worship, existing in total abstraction from the physical bodies of the universe,” and the physical realm “became an object of derogation and want, drawing attention away from the realm of ‘the true,’ which for Plato is also the highest form of good.”³² By establishing a correspondence between abstraction, truthfulness, and goodness, Plato created a hierarchy in which the non-changing, abstract Forms of Truth and the Good were valued higher than the impure material world, which only functioned to distract and restrict thought. In this manner, dualisms like mind/body, abstract/concrete, and good/evil were established and connected. As an endeavor of abstraction, logic separates form from content, then that form gets applied to the world with the expectation that everything will fit into it. However, despite its aspirations toward objective, pure truth, the selection and application of this logic reflects the prejudices and hierarchies of those in power and making the distinction. This can be seen in the way Ancient Greek metaphysics spread throughout the world, first, through Christian scholars who introduced it to much of Europe, and later, when Conquistadors, pilgrims, and Catholic missionaries took it to the Americas, Africa, and Asia where it was used to impose colonial cultures.

For the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, the logic and metaphysics of the newcomers proved oppressive and deadly. The imposition of European systems of reasoning on Native cultures had several concrete effects. It obliterated opportunities for communication between the two cultures by treating one way of knowing as absolute and “right” while the other was misguided and primitive.³³ As such, Native logic was treated as incommensurable with Western logics. Because non-abstract and non-binary approaches to thought were deemed inadequate to the task of acquiring the Truth and the Good, those methodologies and peoples who used them were also relegated to the lower side of a dualistic hierarchy. This led to labeling Indigenous people as irrational, inferior, uncivilized, ignorant, primitive, and so on. The hierarchy established between the different peoples created boundaries, making it possible for the European colonists to believe Native Americans were members of an ontologically inferior category that, like animals and other resources, could be killed, used up, and transferred to more convenient locations. The imposition of Western logical systems and the metaphysics that founded them also disrupted and transformed Indigenous cultures. Theistic and masculinist worldviews took the place of more harmonious and complementary systems of relations in Indigenous

communities as large numbers of Native Americans died from disease and genocide, their traditional knowledge and methodologies disappearing with them.³⁴

As dualistic structures took hold, the effect was to artificially limit the number of possibilities and potentialities that Native ontologies typically include. As we saw above, one of the central characteristics of binary logic systems is that all meaning is put into a value system that only has two values—true and false, *p* and *not-p*. Following the law of the excluded middle, binary thinking eliminates other values. By way of example, Waters looks at the treatment of gender in Chippewa society before and after colonization. After colonization, gender became fixed into the two categories of male and female, which were based on phenotypical expressions of chromosomes. Furthermore, these categories appear to be fixed in time and space, unchanging and essential. However, from a Chippewa perspective on gender three categories exist: male, female, and indeterminate/irrelevant. Indeed, even “male” and “female” are not necessarily given categories, but are, at times, an achieved status.³⁵ In this respect Native logics and ontologies were already constructed in such a way as to think beyond the binary and beyond the laws of classical logic. But as fewer people were alive to sustain and pass on these methodologies, settlers were able to more effectively take control of these relationships and conform them to their logic.

Dualisms like the male/female are, as we see here, culturally constructed, reflecting dominant cultural identities, values, and hierarchies. Many feminists, who wish to reject these binaries, have had to struggle to imagine alternative ontologies and logics that permit the existence of third terms while not simply reversing the hierarchies. For Indigenous people, the resistance against the metaphysics of classical logic has consisted of reasserting and reclaiming the logic of their traditional methodologies and worldviews. This is vital because in Native American philosophies logic and epistemology are not separate areas of inquiry from metaphysics and ethics. What are often considered different branches of philosophy in the Euro-American view are related and intertwined in Native American philosophies. In *The Soul of the Indian*, Charles Eastman (Dakota Sioux) tells a story that illustrates the way in which these two approaches to logic and reality conflict, leading to incommensurability.

A missionary once undertook to instruct a group of Indians in the truths of his holy religion. He told them of the creation of the earth in six days, and of the fall of our first parents by eating an apple.

The courteous savages listened attentively, and after thanking him, one related in his turn a very ancient tradition concerning the origin of maize. But the missionary plainly showed his disgust and disbelief, indignantly saying: ‘What I delivered to you were sacred truths, but this that you tell me is mere fable and falsehood!’

“My brother,” gravely replied the offended Indian, “it seems that you have not been well grounded in

the rules of civility. You saw that we, who practice these rules, believed your stories; why, then, do you refuse to credit ours?”³⁶

In classical logic, either *p* or *not-p* is true; the value of true cannot be assigned to both. The missionary, who adheres to this reasoning, cannot accept the truth of the Indians’ stories while the Native people, rejecting the principle of non-contradiction, see these two origin stories as equally true. This story illustrates how the principles of classical logic can lead to incommensurability as adhering to them does not permit the acceptance of multiple truths simultaneously or for middle terms. However, in Native American logics, more than two values can appear to be accounted for without leading to radical exclusion or contradiction. In this way, Native logics are inclusive rather than exclusive. By accepting the possibility that there are different truths for different people in different contexts and situations, Native logics cannot just dismiss, background, or objectify alternative methodologies the way that classical logic does. Given this, Native logics’ approach to truth might seem as though it leads to relativism, but this is not accurate. Instead, Native logics use different principles for determining truth. Because there are as many Native philosophies as there are Native nations, all of which are practiced differently than Western philosophy, I have identified three main principles described by various Indigenous philosophers that characterize the metaphysics of Native American logic. The first principle is that there is a diversity of creations. According to Jicarilla Apache philosopher Viola F. Cordova, many Native American cultures share the idea of separate creations, of different people coming into being in their own places and times. As a result, “Native Americans do not argue over differences in how the world is described by various groups of human beings. The reason is that each description is assumed to be *local*; the stories of origin . . . are assumed to refer to a definite bounded space.”³⁷ In other words, because people come from different places with their own histories, they can have knowledge and truths that are not possessed by others. But rather than this becoming an incentive to spread one single truth to which all others should conform, the diversity of creations makes it acceptable for different groups to have different areas of knowledge and expertise. Knowing the limits of one’s own knowledge and being willing to share and listen to what’s shared are thus integral to supporting this principle. In the story above, we can see that the missionary, who treats his story as universal to all creation, dismisses the story told by the Native Americans. The Indians, on the other hand, understand their story and the missionary’s to be localized creations, reflective of their own particular times, spaces, and relations.

The incommensurability displayed by the missionary in the above story also illustrates the assumption in classical logic that boundaries are stark, fixed, and absolute. In creating a boundary between sacred truth on the one side and fable and falsehood on the other, the missionary imposes this division in such a way that implies that he is superior for having access to the truth while the Native people are inferior, ignorant savages. As such, he establishes a dualism. This, too, is antithetical to Native methods of reasoning. Ontologically speaking, American Indian

philosophies generally do not recognize hierarchies of difference. According to Cordova, “Instead of hierarchies [Native Americans] see *differences* which exist among equal ‘beings.’ The equality is based on the notion, often unstated, that everything that is, is of one process.”³⁸ In other words, Native American thought tends to ascribe to a relational ontology in which there are no discrete, atomistic individuals, but, rather, ongoing processes and practices that make and remake the world and its inhabitants.

This leads to the second principle of Native American logic—everything is related. In this story there is an emphasis on engaging in ethical relations. Note the respectful way in which the Native Americans interact with the missionary and his disrespectful response to them. For the missionary, suggesting that there might be an alternative to his version of the truth violates his principles, which hold that truth transcends the particular material situation of individuals. From Plato or Aristotle’s perspective, rejecting the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle would be proof of Native Americans’ irrationality, but this would overlook the goals of Native American philosophies. Instead, the *ethics* of assuming that both tales in the above story are true needs to be taken into account. Unlike Eurocentric logics, Native logics are not solely interested in the *p*-value of propositional statements; instead, logic is directed toward taking the right actions and developing healthy relationships. For Plato the goal of logic was to help one attain the highest Form of the Good: Truth. The goal of logic for Native cultures is also the truth and the good, but what those concepts mean from a Native American perspective is quite different. Where Plato idealized abstraction and a life free of material restraints and distractions, many Indigenous worldviews hold that the good is not an abstract concept, but a way of living that comes out of meaningful, reciprocal relationships with the community including the land and the nonhuman beings that make life possible. Brian Yazzie Burkhart explains how the principle that everything is related conveys the idea that we should focus on what is around us that are direct parts of our experience. This is because we do not just react to stimuli from the world; instead, “[w]e participate in the meaning-making of the world. There is no world, no truth, without meaning and value, and meaning and value arise in the intersection between us and all that is around us.”³⁹

Burkhart’s account of the principle that everything is related also suggests that truth is an effect of action rather than of formal propositions. According to Shawnee philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith, performances or actions have as much semantic force as language does in Western contexts. In classical logic, language is often treated as descriptive and, as such, can be judged on whether or not it makes true statements about the world that it describes. For many Native American cultures, action and performance are the primary carriers of truth. For Smith, performance does not just describe the world, it has the power to create and recreate the world. By practicing, performing, following certain procedures, one creates truth by shaping reality through one’s actions. In this respect, Native American logics reject correspondence theories of truth that hold that the world exists independently of us and our representations of it. Instead, Norton-Smith explains that “According to the

Native conception of truth an action or performance is true for an individual or group only if the action or performance respectfully and successfully achieves its goal.”⁴⁰ In other words, truth is not something figured out abstractly in the mind alone; it emerges out of a set of practices that can only be understood in a relational and ethical context. As such, rationality and logic take a different form insofar as they are directed toward a different goal. They could more accurately be described as “kinship logics,” modes of reasoning that organize the world and direct moral action based on relationships rather than on truth values.

This brings us to the third principle: the universe is alive and must be approached in a personal manner.⁴¹ To say that the universe is alive is to say that it is populated by lively beings that are not passive recipients of human actions, but active participants in relations. Just as humans can alter the world, the world can act on and alter us. In this respect, the universe is personal—that is, having personality and particularity. According to Vine Deloria Jr. of the Lakota Sioux, this means that “the personal nature of the universe demands that each and every entity in it seek and sustain personal relationships.”⁴² For Deloria, knowledge is useful insofar as it is directed toward helping humans find and walk upon the proper ethical and moral road. He elaborates, explaining, “Absent . . . was the idea that knowledge existed apart from human beings and their communities, and could stand alone for ‘its own sake.’ In the Indian conception, it was impossible that there could be abstract propositions that could be used to explore the structure of the physical world.”⁴³ Gregory Cajete, a member of the Tewa elaborates: Native philosophy “is not based on rational thought alone but incorporates to the fullest degree all aspects of interactions of ‘human in and of nature,’ that is, the knowledge and truth gained from interaction of body, mind, soul, and spirit with all aspects of nature.”⁴⁴ In other words, the type of reasoning deployed takes into account one’s context, situation, and material conditions. This is not to say that abstraction does not exist in Native American thought but that abstraction is inadequate for explaining a whole range of experiences, questions, and challenges people face that affect one’s experience of the good. Thus, knowledge divorced from content, experience, and life—in other words, pure abstraction—has only a small place in Native American thought. Focusing on the particulars and one’s relations are believed to be more successful in achieving a good life.

By examining the differences between the principles of classical logic and principles of Native American logic, we can see how the problems of abstraction and dualism are avoided in Native thought. We also see that abstraction and dualism cause the problems of incommensurability and boundary-making in Western thought. For feminist philosophers concerned with the harmful effects of naturalized notions of abstract truth and binary dualisms, Native logic appears to offer many of the solutions that they desire. The focus on the particular, the content of one’s words and actions, and the substantive over the formal satisfies Nye’s desires for a more personal, meaningful system of logic. The emphasis on relatedness and diversity helps overcome the problems with dualism that Plumwood raises while also providing space for multiple logics to

coexist. As such, Native logics fulfill Lloyd's hope for an inclusive rather than exclusive method of reason. The compatibility between the principles of Native American logic and the critiques of feminist logicians against classical logic show that there is common ground between the two groups that can help overcome incommensurability while breaking down strict binaries. In the concluding section of the paper, I consider the notion of bi-culturalism as one means of overcoming the divisions that have been imposed by Western logic.

III. LOGICAL PLURALISM AND BI-CULTURALISM

Though Waters raises many of the same criticisms against logic as those presented by Lloyd, Nye, and Plumwood, she does not reject logic outright for several reasons. First, Western rationality is the dominant paradigm, especially in academia. Learning logic skills can help Native students navigate and succeed in non-Native spaces.⁴⁵ Second, logic can be made to be relevant and relatable. Instead of just focusing on form alone, Waters strives to incorporate historical, traditional, and other relevant examples into her class to demonstrate argumentative strength and fallacies.⁴⁶ In this way she can show students why logic is meaningful for their lives. Finally, and most importantly, when logic is made to be culturally relevant it can empower Native American learning and understanding while reinforcing a positive sense of self and cultural identity.⁴⁷ Native students, she explains, are bi-cultural; that is, they inhabit Native-centric and Euro-centric cultural spaces at the same time. Because American society has treated these two worlds as radically separate and has dismissed the Native-centric worldview as unimportant, Native students may struggle to connect these two different aspects of their lives. Critical thinking and logic classes can help students to translate one set of standpoints and values to the other worldview and back again. For Waters, doing logic bi-culturally means "placing identity information about myself into the classroom setting, and using a variety of culturally relevant content for my examples."⁴⁸ Doing so creates a safe and inclusive space for students to express the diversity of their cultural values, affirming that diversity instead of forcing it to conform to a rigid set of rules. Thus, Western logic can be relatable and empowering when done thoughtfully and respectfully, with Native values in mind.

If feminists are committed to overcoming the problems they have identified with logic, then adopting a bi-cultural method should be a priority for them. However, the majority of feminist philosophers are of Euro-American descent and, thus, bi-culturalism is not something they are born into. For white feminists, affirming bi-culturalism would mean, first and foremost, acknowledging that there can be a diversity of logics, each equally effective. But acknowledgement alone is not enough. Feminists must become involved in the making and remaking of the world by practicing respectful methods of philosophical engagement with the work of non-Western scholars. This would involve attentive listening, incorporating other forms of logic into one's teaching repertoire, and adopting the practice of making logic more relevant and relatable. Through actions like these, white feminists can help break down the binary dualisms that privilege one form of rationality over others, preventing marginalized groups including women from

being backgrounded, stereotyped, and excluded. Native logics are already receptive to the idea of non-dualistic and concrete relations. It is up to feminist logicians to transform Western logic to offer the same kind of receptivity in turn. Respecting and affirming the legitimacy of other logics and bringing them into the classroom would be a major step toward decolonizing logic and philosophy. If white feminists are truly committed to toppling the oppressive regime of classical logic, then they must be especially cautious about implementing new systems and methods that perpetuate, even inadvertently, the erasure of Indigenous and non-Western modes of reasoning. Starting a dialogue between white feminists and Native American scholars is the first step to critically examining the history of logic and developing new, more inclusive and less oppressive and colonial systems of truth determination, but other voices from Latinx, Black, and decolonial scholars need to be incorporated as well. As Plumwood points out, there are many different models and forms that logic can take. Realizing the similarities between our critiques can help us build alliances, and can also remind us that logic does not have to be monolithic and absolute but can arise in different ways out of different contexts to meet the different needs of different groups of people.

NOTES

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On What There "Is": Aristotle and the Aztecs on Being and Existence

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1. WHAT "IS" THERE?

A curious feature of Aztec philosophy is that the basic metaphysical question of the "Western" tradition cannot be formulated in their language, in Nahuatl. Aristotle, writing on what he variously called first philosophy, wisdom, and theology, formulates its subject matter thus: "There is a science [*epistēmē*] which investigates being *qua* being [*to on hē on*] and what pertains to it when considered in its own right."¹ What we now call metaphysics or ontology, then, is concerned with being just insofar as it is. W.V.O. Quine, writing more than two millennia later, expresses the same broad concern. He writes that the basic problem of ontology "can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?' It can be answered, moreover, in a word—'Everything'—and everyone will accept this answer as true."²

The difficulty in the case of the Aztecs is that Nahuatl has no word for "being" or "to be." As a result, there is no way to formulate the question, "What is there?" or to claim that the aim of first philosophy is to understand "being *qua* being." This point does not suggest that the Nahuas were unconcerned with metaphysics, or that even the traditional "Western" metaphysical question could not be expressed (imperfectly) through circumlocution in their language. Rather, it suggests the grounds for why the Nahuas, the pre-Columbian people who spoke Nahuatl in Mesoamerica, approached this question so differently.

The present essay thus argues for three closely related points: first, that the Nahuas may be understood to provide an answer to the fundamental character of reality, one which served to give content to the meaning of "wisdom" just as one finds in Aristotle; second, that their conception of reality consists in a conceptual couplet *teot* and *omefeotl*, which view rivals Aristotle's substance (*ousia*); and, third, that the Nahua answer is *prima facie* reasonable. To explain, a little, the significance of these claims and the motivation for the comparison with Aristotle, one might consider the following points.

Aristotle's metaphysics is a paradigm case of substance ontology, that is, the view which holds that the answer to the basic question of metaphysics "What is there?" is substance (*ousia*). He thinks this is a good answer, moreover, because it satisfies some apparently reasonable desiderata any account should provide. In the first place, we would like to know that the answer can explain what the basic subjects of the universe are, those in which other properties inhere, and those beyond which analysis is no longer meaningful. In the second, we would like the answer to explain *what* something is, and not simply how it is, or why it is. Intuitively, we sense that we know something when we know its "what." Substance, Aristotle argues, satisfies both these criteria.

The Nahuas' outlook may instead be taken as a paradigm case of process metaphysics, that is, a view which answers the basic question of metaphysics by holding that reality at base is a "process" in a sense to be described below. This view may be distinguished from the substance approach because it rejects not only the formulation of the basic question for metaphysics, since there is no "is" for the Nahuas, but also the desiderata which Aristotle thinks any good account should satisfy.

The comparison proposed is thus of interest for several reasons. A first concerns its consequence for the discipline of metaphysics itself. The Nahua view challenges the basic presuppositions of the ontological tradition in "Western" philosophy, whether that formulation is Aristotle's, or Quine's.³ The view proposed is also rather different from the handful of self-consciously styled process-based metaphysical accounts in the "West."⁴ It matters, then, whether such a view is at least *prima facie* coherent. If one cannot use the word "being" to answer the basic question of metaphysics, after all, just what is it that is left over, and why would it make sense?

It is also of interest to indigenous, Nahua philosophy to clarify just what is intended by their "process" metaphysics. Others have claimed that their metaphysics is "relational" or "process" based, but of course Aristotle could make sense of relations and process.⁵ In some reasonable sense, the *what* of something, its *to ti esti*, just is what it does.⁶ So it is unclear, if one uses only these terms, just in what way Aristotle and the Nahua outlooks are to be distinguished.

Finally, with respect to philosophers of classical Hellenic antiquity, the inquiry matters because it presents at least one new direction of study. The major scholarly controversy in the *Metaphysics*, for example, concerns just how to make sense of Aristotle's claim in book VII.13 that no universal is a substance, when he appears to have been arguing, up to this point, both that substance is form, and form is universal.⁷ Yet perhaps Aristotle has arrived at this position because the desiderata outlined previously are themselves problematic—this is, at least, an open question—and this would bear on all the further notions which Aristotle develops, including form and matter, potency and activity, and universality and particularity. In this way, comparative philosophy may help to raise new avenues for study in Hellenistic inquiry.

As the first comparative essay on this topic in any modern language, the discussion faces a few initial hurdles that might not otherwise exist. To avoid them, it proves easiest to begin with the way in which epistemic claims are related to metaphysical ones in the thought of both Aristotle and the Nahuas. The next sections, §§2-3, thus look to distinguish a variety of forms of knowledge, including knowledge by acquaintance, know-how, experience, practical wisdom, and theoretical wisdom. The argument matches the sorts of appeal that Aristotle makes in book I of the *Metaphysics* with the accounts provided about Nahua philosophers themselves. An important difference that emerges is that the Nahuas had no notion comparable to Aristotle's *epistēmē*. In one respect, this is unsurprising, because Aristotle's notion itself is quite specific to his

philosophical outlook and not shared, even, with Plato. In another, there is a larger philosophic reason why the Nahuas had no similar notion, namely, because they were not metaphysically realist in their outlook.

To explain what might be called their quasi-realism, the argument moves, in §§4-6, to the content of theoretical wisdom for Aristotle and the Nahuas, namely, *ousia* and (*ome*)*teotl*, respectively. The claim in this case is that *teotl* is the best answer to the question (posed in English), "What is there?" but that *teotl* is always expressed under a certain cosmological configuration as *ometeotl*. The cosmological configuration is what the Nahuas metaphorically call a "sun," and they hold that our cosmos exists in the fifth sun (explained below). The formula that thus emerges is that *teotl* only exists *qua* some sun as *ometeotl*, and *ometeotl qua* the fifth sun is our cosmos. Since it is thought that this fifth sun too will pass into another configuration, it is not possible to have eternal knowledge, much less scientific knowledge (the sort expressed by Aristotle's *epistēmē*) of *teotl*. The best that can be done is to provide more beautiful metaphors of this notion, i.e., *teotl*, which may explain why the Nahuas' highest metaphysical literature is expressed poetically and not in treatise form. Moreover, since only a provisional account of reality as *ometeotl* is possible, the Nahua metaphysical outlook is best thought to be a sort of quasi-realism. The argument concludes with further avenues for research.

2. WISDOM: SOPHIA

Aristotle begins *Metaphysics* I.1 with something that he takes will be readily accepted, "[a]ll humans naturally desire to know" (*Met.* I.1, 980a20).⁸ He proceeds dialectically, teasing through ways of knowing until he reaches wisdom (*sophia*). The line of reasoning runs as follows. A sign of our desire to know is our preference for the sense of sight, which enables us to know the look of things quickly.⁹ Animals too have faculties of sensation, but some among them also have memory, which enables them to learn. What they mostly lack, however, is connected experience (*empeiria*). Still, this sort of knowledge (*to eidenai*) is limited to individual matters. For humans, memory forms experience, and when this experience gives rise to many notable observations and a single universal judgment is formed concerning them, one has an art (*technē*). While experience may thus lead to effective action and production just as well as art, since actions and productions concern individual affairs, knowledge and understanding (*to epaiein*) properly belong to art. For the one who possesses an art knows the cause, the why, while the person of experience does not. The object of study for science (*epistēmē*), unlike art, cannot be other than it is, and so exists of necessity and is eternal.¹⁰ Science does not, moreover, aim at production while art is just this disposition to produce something which may or may not be (*NE* VI.4, 1140a20-25).

Two conclusions follow from these reflections. First, they explain why we do not regard any of the senses to provide wisdom, for while they give knowledge of particulars, "they do not tell us the 'why' of anything" (*Met.* I.1, 980b11-12).¹¹ Second, they explain why "all people suppose that what is called wisdom concerns the first causes [*ta prōta aitia*] and the principles [*ta archas*] of things" (*Met.* I.1, 980b28-29).¹²

For while art can explain the why, or cause, of a production or action, it cannot explain the why for what is eternal and could not be otherwise. Yet wisdom is thought most to consist in just this latter sort of topic.

To get a better sense of which science yields wisdom, Aristotle changes his approach in *Metaphysics* I.2. Rather than simply consider what is commonly accepted, he considers the wise person (*ho sophos*), as commonly understood, and develops five criteria from this reflection that any science would have to satisfy to yield wisdom. This person (1) knows all things, (2) knows what is most difficult, (3) knows the exact causes and is able to teach them, (4) knows what is complete, or desirable on its own account and not for something else, and, finally, (5) knows what is most authoritative, giving instruction to other branches and people (*Met.* I.2, 982a8-19).

What these criteria suggest is that the science which yields wisdom ought at least to have these qualities. This means that the science desired must (1) give knowledge of what is universal, which is also (2) the hardest to know since it is furthest from the senses; (3) give knowledge of first principles, which are most exact and which are teachable because they explain the why; (4) give knowledge of what is most knowable and not know for the sake of another subject, which is what the first principles do; and, finally, (5) give knowledge that specifies the end for each thing to be done, and in this way is most authoritative. This last point suggests especially that the science in question is one, rather than multiple sciences, so that the same name applies to each of the desiderata (*Met.* I.2, 982a24-b10). What Aristotle leaves unresolved at this point is just what that name is, and he instead considers what would not satisfy the inquiry, including productive arts and proposals by other historical figures.

3. WISDOM: TLAMATILIZTLI

What is interesting about the Nahua approach to wisdom is that it too worked to distinguish wisdom from other sorts of knowledge. There are, broadly, four sorts of knowledge at work in the Nahua understanding: *tlamatiliztli*, wisdom; *ixtlamatiliztli*, connected experience or prudence; *toltecayotl*, artisanal knowledge; and the sort of magical knowledge that a *nahual* (shaman) was thought to possess. Finally, one should note that the basic word from which many of these terms are derived is *mati*, which means both to know epistemically (*savoir, saber*) and to know by acquaintance (*connaître, conocer*).¹³

Some of the descriptions of various knowledge-workers from the *Florentine Codex* provide sound evidence for these distinctions. The description of the craftsman, *toltecatl*, reads in part as follows:

The craftsman [*toltecatl*] is well instructed [*tlamachtilli*], an artisan. There were many of them. The good craftsman is able, discreet, prudent [*mimati*], resourceful, retentive. The good craftsman is a willing worker, patient, calm. He works with care, he makes works of skill [*toltecati*]; he constructs, prepares, arranges, orders, fits, matches [materials]. (*FC* 10, 25)

One observes in this passage that the *toltecatl* is one who is learned, “*mach-*” is the base 4 stem of *mati* used in passive constructions, in various matters (*tla-*). His¹⁴ knowledge is a sort of prudence, *mimati* (more below), but it is also primarily focused on know-how. In fact, the term *toltecati* is later best translated as “skill.”

The philosopher *tlatimini*, by contrast, is the one who possesses *tlatimiliztli* (wisdom), but who, among the people described in the *FC*, does not possess *toltecayotl*, artisanal knowledge.¹⁵ The relevant portion for the description reads as follows:

The good philosopher is a knowledgeable physician, a person of trust, a teacher worthy of confidence and faith. [He is] a teacher [*temachtiani*] and adviser, a counselor [*teixtlamachtiani*] who helps one assume a face [*teixcuitiani, teixtoman*]; one who informs one’s ears [*tenacaztlapoani*]. [He] is one who casts light on another; who is a guide who accompanies one (*FC* 10, 29).¹⁶

This description largely highlights the role of the philosopher as a counselor (*te-ixtlamachtia-ni*), which was a bit like Socrates’s role as the gadfly of Athens, and this is identified as (part of) his know-how (*ixtlamatiliztli*).¹⁷ In this capacity the philosopher is one whom one sought out for consultation. And the specific goal of the philosopher was to aid the counseled in “assuming a face.” Two highly compounded terms, *te-ix-cui-tia-ni* and *te-ix-to-ma-ni*, appear juxtaposed. The construction indicates that they are intended to express a single thought. The initial ‘*te*’ in both cases means that the action is performed for an indefinite person, for someone else, while the ‘*ix*’ is the stem of *ixtli*, meaning “face” in the most literal sense. Yet the term is widely used in its more metaphorical sense to indicate an aspect of one’s psyche, namely, the seat of one’s judgment. Finally, the root concept of both words (*cui* and *ana*) means “to take.” As a result, the idea expressed is that the philosopher helps another person (*te*) take or assume (*cui, ana*) a “face” (*ixtli*), i.e., a basis for sound judgment.

The philosopher thus has a certain sort of *ixtlamatiliztli*, but it is not of the same quality as that of the *toltecatl*, the artisan. The latter has *ixtlamatiliztli* in the sense that he knows just how to execute his craft, how to work with gold, or arrange quetzal plumes in headdresses. In the philosopher’s case, *ixtlamatiliztli* consists in being able to act as a guide for the counseled, to lay out a path for one’s life, and to serve as a mirror to clarify one’s reflections. His *ixtlamatiliztli* thus consists in knowing how to lead a good life, and knowing how to enable others to do the same. It is thus much closer to Aristotle’s *phronēsis* than the *toltecatl*’s craftsmanship.

Finally, the philosopher’s knowledge is distinct from the knowledge that other wise men receive. Specifically, the soothsayer (*tlapouhqui*), who made predictions based on the day signs, and the shaman or sorcerer (*noaoalli*) are also described as *tlatiminime* of a sort. The description of the sorcerer, for example, begins as follows: “The sorcerer is a wise man [*in noaoalli tlatimini*], a counselor, a person of trust” (*FC* 31). Similarly, the soothsayer’s description begins, “The soothsayer is a wise man [*in tlapouqui ca tlatimini*], an

owner of books and writings" (FC 31). The term *tlamatini*, then, is generally used for wise persons of various sorts and not only philosophers. But the descriptions distinguish just in what their wisdom was thought to consist. The sorcerer's knowledge involves enchantment, and the soothsayer's wisdom is limited to counting or reading (*pouh*) the day sign calendar (*tonalamatl*). While it is possible that a single person could have served in all three roles, then, the Nahuas took care to distinguish among the sorts of wise men by the sort of knowledge that they had and would have recognized the differences among those roles.

How is it, then, that the philosopher has this sort of knowledge, has the *ixtlamatiliztli* which is essential to her *tlamatiliztli*? The answer, in part, is that she will have had enough life experiences to know how to counsel in specific ways. As Aristotle would have said, she has been brought up well and lived well. Yet, she also knows because the philosopher, *tla-mati-ni*, also has wisdom, *tla-mati-liztli*, the term most directly connected with her name, concerning the most important matters. This is to say, she knows because the philosopher knows about the character of reality, i.e., the way things are through their changes.¹⁸ What follows is an example that illustrates how philosophers, in this case Nezahualcoyotl, were preoccupied with the most fundamental way things are. He writes:

Are you real, rooted [*toteycneliya*]?
 Is it only as to come inebriated?
 The Giver of Life, is this true [*nelli*]?
 Perhaps, as they say, it is not true?
 May our hearts be not tormented!
 All that is real, that is rooted,
 they say that it is not real, not rooted.
 The Giver of Life only appears [*omonenequin*]
 absolute.
 May our hearts be not tormented,
 because he is the Giver of Life.¹⁹

The passage shows Nezahualcoyotl's doubts and desires to understand the fundamental character of reality. He gives it various names. Here it is the Giver of Life (*ipalnemohuani*), but in others, including the song recorded just above in the codex, it is he who is self-caused (*moyocoya*). It is by understanding this principle and its relation to our lives, its balanced harmony, that the Nezahualcoyotl hopes to avoid a "tormented" heart.

Like Aristotle, then, the Nahuas distinguished among sorts of knowledge, and a comparison is summarized as follows:

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| knowledge by acquaintance | <i>aisthesis</i> | <i>mati</i> |
| connected experience | <i>empeiria</i> | <i>ixtlamatiliztli</i> |
| prudence | <i>phronēsis</i> | <i>ixtlamatiliztli</i> |
| artisanal knowledge | <i>technē</i> | <i>toltecatoytl</i> |
| science | <i>epistēmē</i> | |
| wisdom | <i>sophia</i> | <i>tlamatiliztli</i> |

One notes first that Aristotle and the Nahua philosophers share many roughly similar terms for epistemic matters. Yet, second, and crucially, the Nahua philosophers had no corresponding term for *epistēmē*, which defines both Aristotle's specific objective of inquiry in the *Metaphysics*, and the character of *sophia* as he understands it. The reason for this is that *sophia* is a sort of *epistēmē* about first causes. Finally, Aristotle holds that *epistēmē* can be had of matters that are eternally true, so that *sophia* also concerns eternal truths, while the Nahuas did not think such knowledge was possible, so that *tlamatiliztli* only concerns the best or most important truths.²⁰

While both Aristotle and the Nahuas thus conceived of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom (*tlamatiliztli*), where this wisdom consists in understanding the fundamental principles of what is real or true (*nelli*), they still thought of the matter differently. Aristotle's sense of philosophy is methodical, one which uses logical proof and, where this is not suitable, dialectical reasoning. His understanding of science, moreover, is a body of knowledge that seeks the eternally true. The Nahuas did not have a similar methodological focus, and this is tied to their sense that the character of reality as it is given to us is not eternal. Wisdom for them consists of the best sort of knowledge, but what makes it best is not that it is guaranteed by the seal of eternity. This point explains, moreover, why poetry would be more apt to express this wisdom than logical argument on the Nahuas' conception.

The differences between Aristotle and the Nahuas on wisdom thus turn in large part about the fundamental character of reality which they sought to investigate, so it is just to this topic which the argument now turns, beginning with Aristotle's account in the *Metaphysics*.

4. WHAT THERE "IS": OUSIA

In book III of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle develops a series of puzzles concerning the possibility of the universal science desired in book I. He writes:

We must, with a view to the science which we are seeking, first recount the subjects that should be first discussed. These include both the other opinions that some have held on certain points, and any points besides these that happen to have been overlooked. (*Met.* III.1, 995a24-7)

The statement is important, since it shows that Aristotle is still in search of this science and that having it is desirable. It also introduces the series of puzzles that follow. In a broad

way, these puzzles may be classed as (1) those concerning the possibility of this science, i.e., puzzles *about* this science, and (2) those concerning its character, i.e., puzzles *for* the science, such as those concerning substance, form, matter, and so on. It is possible to understand book IV as a response to the former puzzles about the science, while book VII, with special supplementation from books VIII, IX, and XII as a response to the latter questions.

The central puzzles about the universal science which Aristotle raises in book III, at least for present purposes, may be understood as a sort of dilemma. If the universal science studies causes, then it would appear to conflict with the special sciences, which also study causes (Met. III.2, 996a18-b1). Yet, if it studies substance, then at least two problems may be thought to follow. First, the science would not appear to qualify as the sort that studies first axioms, since it would need to take the truth of those axioms for granted as other sciences do (Met. III.2, 996b33-997a5). Second, it is difficult to understand how there could be a science of substances as such, since this science would have to discuss essence as well—a substance, in part, explains the what, or essence (*to ti esti*), of something. Yet, “there seems to be no demonstration of the essence [*to ti estin*]” (Met. III.2, 997a31-2).²¹ The universal science, as a result, would appear to take for granted what it was supposed to study.

To address the puzzles about the desired science, Aristotle begins book IV with a new approach; it is that the universal science ought to be that which seeks to understand being *qua* being.

There is some science [*episteme*] which investigates being *qua* being and the attributes which belong to it in itself [*kath' auto*]. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals generally with being *qua* being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attributes of this part—this is what the mathematical sciences do for instance. Now since we are seeking the first principles and the highest causes, clearly there must be something to which these belong in themselves. (Met. IV.1, 1003a21-28)²²

The approach is intended to avoid immediately falling into the pitfalls identified in book III. Adding “*qua* being” helps, because it shows why it is that this science does not study the same causes as the special sciences. They cut off a piece of being, but this science does not. Additionally, this approach suggests that the science studies what is truly universal, what any being must be, and so does not presuppose a set of axioms in the worried way.²³ Finally, this science does study essential properties of being, not those which are incidental, and so it does explain the what (*to ti esti*) of an entity.

Yet something additional emerges from Aristotle’s new approach, namely, a set of conditions for what this science must be. He begins IV.2 by recalling that there are many senses in which a thing may be said to be. Yet they are not homonymous, but are all rather related to a central term.

The term “to be” functions just as “health” does. Yet as the various forms of “health” are all studied by one science, because there is a basic and central meaning, so too it would follow that all the senses of “being” are studied by one science, because it too has one central and basic meaning. He concludes:

It is clear then that it is the work of one science to study beings [*ta onta*] *qua* being.—But everywhere science deals with that which is basic [*kuriōs*], and on which the other things depend, and on account of which they get their names. And so if this is substance [*hē ousia*], then it is of substances [*tōn ousiōn*] that the philosopher must have the principles and the causes. (Met. IV.2, 1003b15-19)²⁴

In addition to concluding that the science of being *qua* being is one, then, Aristotle also concludes that it must study that which is basic, and that this basic topic might turn out to be substance, *hē ousia*. As he develops the argument, however, he adds a second condition which substance must satisfy if it is to be the subject matter of the science of being *qua* being.

If, now, being and unity are the same and are one thing in the sense that they are implied in one another as principle and cause are . . . and if, further, the substance [*hē ousia*] of each thing is one in no mere accidental way, but with respect to the very what a being is [*kai hoper on ti*]*—*all this being so, there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity. And to investigate the essence [*to ti esti*] of these is the work of a science [*tēs epistēmēs*] which is generically one. (Met. VI.2, 1003b23-35)²⁵

Aristotle’s argument in this case is a little unclear, given the number of antecedents he uses before stating the consequent of the sentence. Yet his central point is that insofar as each being is one, in no mere accidental way, it is a what, an essence. And in making this case, moreover, he identifies *hē ousia* with the essence, the very what of a being, thus marking out a second condition which substance must satisfy if it is to qualify as the subject matter for the science of being *qua* being.

Collecting these points with the surrounding ones Aristotle addresses in the section, the following thesis emerges. If there is a science of being *qua* being, then it would be a single science with parts. The first among these parts is the study of *ousia*, substance, since the other parts would presuppose it. Moreover, since this is the proper topic for philosophy, the study of being *qua* being pursued in this way is first philosophy. Yet in order to supply the antecedent to this conditional claim, one must show that *ousia* both is the basic subject of intelligibility, and that *ousia* identifies the what or essence of a being. One must identify the basic subject, because otherwise one would not have reached the topic of first philosophy, and one must identify the essence, because otherwise the notion would not enjoy explanatory priority.²⁶

At the end of book VII.1, Aristotle claims to have completed the argument left unfinished at the end of book IV. He writes:

And indeed the question which, both now and of old, has always been raised and always been the subject of doubt, namely “what is being [*ti to on*]?,” is just this question, “what is substance [*ti hē ousia*]?” (*Met.* VII.1, 1028b2-4)²⁷

In short, the question which the pre-Socratic philosophers had asked, and for which they offered answers which included fire and water, has been answered instead with *ousia*. Yet in order for Aristotle to be satisfied with his answer, he needs to have shown that *ousia* is the primary subject and that it is an essence. How does he do that?

With respect to the first topic, his argument is that the doctrine of the categories, discussed earlier, shows that substance is primary because it retains the right sort of asymmetrical relation with the other categories: they depend on it. This is the case because the others are not self-subsistent, capable of being separated, and substance is that which underlies them. “Clearly then,” Aristotle concludes, “it is in virtue of this category that each of the others *is*. Therefore, that which is primarily and *is* simply (not *is* something) must be substance” (*Met.* VII.1, 1028a29-31).

To show that substance is an essence, that it explains the what of a being, Aristotle argues that substance retains explanatory priority with respect to the other categories in three ways: in time, formula, and order of knowledge (*Met.* VII.1, 1028a31). Temporally, one must recall that only substance exists independently. With respect to the formula [*logō*] of each term, substance must be present to complete the definition. Finally, he provides two arguments for the order of knowledge. At the beginning of the section, he argues from our linguistic use:

While ‘being’ has all these senses, obviously that which is primary is the ‘what,’ which indicates the substance of a thing. For when we say of what quality a thing is, we say that it is good or beautiful, but not that it is three cubits long or that it is a man; but when we say *what* it is, we do not say ‘white’ or ‘hot’ or ‘three cubits long,’ but ‘man’ or ‘God’. (*Met.* VII.1, 1028a13-18)

The argument here, then, is that we speak in such a way that we treat the what of something as its substance, but this may only be a manner of speaking. This is why, at the end of the section, he also highlights what might be called a phenomenological argument: we experience a sense of knowing something when we know its substance: “we think we know each thing most fully when we know what it is, e.g. what man is or what fire is, rather than when we know its quality, or its quantity, or where it is” (*Met.* VII.1, 1028a36-b1).

The progression of argument in the *Metaphysics* thus moves from a statement about the subject matter of *sophia* (wisdom) as the *epistēmē* (science) of being *qua* being, to an articulation of its first principle as *ousia* (substance), to

the basic criteria which an account of *ousia* must satisfy, namely, that it should identify both the basic subject of an entity and its what, or essence (*to ti esti*). Finally, in book VII Aristotle shows that *ousia* does satisfy these requirements, only to introduce the problematic relation of form and matter with their related notions, which will occupy him through books VIII, IX, and XII. Since the Nahuas conceive of wisdom rather differently, it is unsurprising that they should also understand the fundamental character of reality differently.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF OMNIPREDICATIVITY

Like Aristotle, the Nahua philosophers also sought to understand the basic character of reality. Yet the answer they proposed was not a form of being, suitably abstracted. One reason for this is that they had no word for “being” available to them. Considered semantically, the closest available term is *câ*, which means to be in some place or in some way. Nahuatl has several ways to abstract terms, so that it might have been possible to speak of *ca-yotl* as roughly equivalent to *hē ousia*, or *ca-ti-liztli* as close to *to einai*, but in neither case would the terms have been suitably general. One would only have a sense of being-in-place/way-ness, rather than being-ness (*ousia*).

The semantic deficiency, however, leaves open the possibility that “being” is in some way conceptually implicit in the syntax of grammatical constructions in Nahuatl. Surprisingly, this is also not the case, for Nahuatl is not only an omnipredicative language, it is *the* paradigm case of a strongly omnipredicative language.²⁸

In brief, an omnipredicative language is a bundle concept with eleven morphosyntactic features, where only one is necessary: that the language have no copula. To explain why Nahuatl lacks a copula verb or function, one must note first that in an omnipredicative language, as the name suggests, all lexical items can be used as (rhematic) predicates. As a result, even single nouns or pronouns can serve as a complete sentence. Yet, because nouns may function as predicates only in the present tense, it is necessary to supply a copular-type construction to broaden the tenses available. But in addition to forms of *câ*, one may use *neci* (to seem), *mocuepa* (to be turned into), *mochihua* (to become),²⁹ *monotza* (to be named), and a few other grammatical possibilities using the determiner *in* and the locative *ipan*. This range of possibilities shows that there is just no single copular verb or necessary copular construction.

A certain amount of the remaining properties are needed to establish that the language is sufficiently robust to be classed as omnipredicative, though it is not possible to produce a rule which states just how many. Yet one may imagine a scale of strength, so that at its far end one could claim that a language is paradigmatically strong if it exhibits all ten of the “optional” morphosyntactic features in addition to the necessary absence of a copula. Nahuatl is perhaps the only language which satisfies that strong requirement.

What this analysis suggests is that there is no notion in Nahuatl that is like “being” in the “Western” tradition of philosophy, whether that concept is taken to be expressed

either semantically or syntactically. While it is accurate, then, to claim that the Nahuas had an understanding of the basic character of reality, that they had a metaphysical outlook, it would be inaccurate to call it an onto-logy, where this term is understood etymologically to indicate the study of "being" (*ōn*). It is to spell out some of the features of this metaphysical but non-ontological outlook that the essay now turns.

6. WHAT THERE "IS": (OME)TEOTL

If the Nahuas did not think of "being" as the fundamental principle of reality, then what did hold that position? They had in mind two closely related notions, *teotl* and *ome-teotl*. To explain, the analysis develops five closely related points: (1) that the Nahuas took there to be one fundamental principle of reality; (2) that its name is *(ome)teotl*; (3) that it is fundamentally relational or "dualizing"; (4) that it is all of reality, entailing that the Nahuas were pantheists; and that (5) *teotl* and *ome-teotl* are related roughly as being and existence were related for some "Western" philosophers.³⁰

Beginning with the first point, recorded texts indicate that all the "gods" were taken, even by many commoners, to be a single being.³¹ In the *FC*, for example, we read the following, which is said after a child had been delivered.

The midwife addressed the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, the water. She said: our lady of the jade skirt [*Chalchiuhtlicue*], he who shines like a sun of jade [*Chalchiuhtlatonac*]. The deserved one has arrived, sent here by our mother, our father, Dual Lord [*vme-tecuhtli*], Dual Lady [*vme-cihuatl*], who dwells in the middling of the nine heavens [*chicunauh-nepan-juhca*], in the place of duality [*vme-ioca*]. (*FC* 6, 175)³²

One perceives in this text that the same being is addressed as *Chalchiuhtlicue* and *Chalchiuhtlatonac*, and then later as *Ometecuhtli* and *Omecihuatl*. This means that the single god, which is addressed, has a double gender. The singularity is underscored by the following reference to the place where the god dwells: the middling of the nine heavens, the place of duality. Despite the opinions of the Conquistadors, the Nahuas of the pre-conquest period did not believe in a pantheon of gods, but treated all as mere aspects of a single supreme being. There is, in short, just one principle of reality, just one god, who has a double gender, and who metaphorically "dwells" at the point where the nine (*chicunauh-*) heavens (*-juhca*) middle (*-nepan-*).

If the first important feature of reality for the Nahuas is that there is just one basic principle, then a second closely related point follows, namely, that this principle is best named *(ome)teotl*, by which is intended two closely related notions: *teotl* and *ome-teotl*. As a first approximation for this claim, one might focus on the support for "ome-teotl" as a basic name for the principle, leaving its relation to *teotl* for discussion with point 5 below.

That "ome-teotl" is a basic name for the fundamental principle of reality is already supported by the word for "two" or "double," i.e., "ome," included in all the significant names for the Nahua god. The passage just above, for

example, refers to this god as Dual Lord (*Ometecuhtli*) and Dual Lady (*Omecihuatl*). The conception itself appears in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, which a linguistic analysis shows to be from a period prior to the Mexica empire, likely from or just after the nomadic (*chichimecas*) period of the people.³³ Appearing in a song of philosophical poetry, it reads as follows:

Which way shall I go? Which way shall I go

To follow the path of the god of duality [*ome-teotl*]?

Perhaps your house is

in the place of the fleshless?

Perhaps in the interior of the heavens?

Or is the place of the fleshless just here, on earth [*tlalicpac*]?³⁴

What this passage shows is that the *tlamatinime* seek to follow the path of the god of duality (*ome-teotl*), the single principle of existence. Unlike the many *ome-* uses one finds in the *FC*, moreover, this passage directly names the principle *ome-teotl*, so that one can have confidence that the notion is not a philosophical reconstruction, but something held explicitly.

If there is just one principle, one god (first claim), and its best single name is *ome-teotl* (second claim), then a third claim follows closely on these: the basic principle is characterized by a sort of duality. The texts identified so far amply support this notion, with the male-female doubling of each name for the god, and the not infrequent use of *ome-* prefixes for these names. Yet in the passage that follows, from the *Códice Matritense*, an earlier version of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, one finds further support for the notion that the double is the consort or *inamic* pair. It reads as follows:

1. And the Toltecs knew
2. that the heavens are many,
3. they said that there are twelve superimposed divisions.
4. The rooted god [*nelli teotl*] lives there with his consort [*inamic*].
5. The celestial god [*ilhuicateotl*] is called the Lord of Duality [*ometecuhtli*],
6. and his consort the Lady of Duality [*omecihuatl*], the Lady of the Heavens,
7. which means:
8. he is king, he is lord over the twelve heavens.³⁵

A few words of explanation about the broader context of line 4, in which the *inamic* appears, may facilitate comprehension.

In line 1 the term "Toltec" appears. At the time of the conquest, the Nahuas, and especially the Mexica in Tenochtitlan, admired the predecessor culture they found when they, as a wandering group, came to settle on the swampy bog and found their city. They called this lofty culture the Toltec culture, and the term "Toltec" came to indicate refinement, skill, and (as noted above) a knowledge about crafts. The Mexica (especially) distinguished this culture from the culture of the wandering "Chichimechas," a term roughly equivalent to the Greek "barbarian," i.e., a people who spoke a different language and were considered rude, even though they were themselves such wanderers at one point.³⁶

With respect to lines 2-3, it is helpful to bear in mind that the Nahuas, like Aristotle, thought that there were multiple heavens, or spheres, which accounted for the movements of observable celestial bodies. Exactly how many heavens there were varies on the text consulted, ranging from nine to thirteen. What the Toltec wisdom conveys, then, is a general understanding about the structure of the heavenly bodies and our cosmos.

The remaining lines make two points. The first, in lines 7-8, is that the one god under discussion is the basic principle of the cosmos, of all reality. Here that understanding is expressed metaphorically as the god's rule over the twelve heavens. The second point, in lines 4-6, is that the one divine being, *teotl*, is identified in the singular, though it has a dual, reciprocal, aspect. In the singular, it is called the *nelli teotl*. The word *nelli* most basically means "rooted," as a tree is rooted to the earth, but in its broader sense it came to be used as the term for "truth" and "reality." This is the true god. Yet the very same line identifies this god as one that appears with his consort, *inamic*, which is why s/he always appears in doubles: the Lord of Duality, the Lady of Duality. As the context suggests, moreover, these doubles are related to each other in a reciprocal and complementary way, as are male and female, heaven and earth, day and night, hot and cold, life and death, cleanliness and filth, and so on.³⁷

These remarks support what is most important about *ometeotl*'s consorts. Though discussion of relations among pairs tends to predominate in the Nahua outlook, what matters is that a relationship of reciprocity is established among complementary aspects, so that in principle any number of consorts might be involved, from three (the underworld, the earth, and the heavens), to four (the number of cardinal coordinates), to nine or thirteen (the number of heavens). The claim that *ometeotl* is dualizing in character thus means more than that it is expressed in doubles. Most centrally it means that it is a principle that exists as a linking (coupling, or trilling, or quadrupling, *et cetera*) relation.

These points lead naturally to the next claim, namely, that the Nahuas were pantheists for whom *ometeotl* is existence. This point is supported variously, though one

finds it perhaps most clearly in the Nahua cosmological myths. The *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, which relates the character of the cosmos and the origin of human beings, especially as the Mexica in Tenochtitlan adapted the tale, runs as follows. It begins by stating that the Mexica had one god, *Tonacatecutli~Tonacacihuatl*, Lord and Lady of Sustenance, and that this being has always existed in the thirteenth heaven.³⁸ It had no beginning, and was not caused or created by another. Because it is dualizing, an *inamic*/relational being, it is the source of all the other gods and all the five Sun-Eras of cosmic history.

Tonacatecutli~Tonacacihuatl then "engendered four sons," which are identified with the cardinal coordinates: Red Smoking Mirror (*Tlatlauqui Tezcatlipoca*), Black Smoking Mirror (*Yayauqui Tezcatlipoca*), Quetzalcoatl (Plumed Serpent, also called "*Yohualli Ehecatl*," Wind and Night), and Bone Lord (*Omítecútlī*), whom the Mexica, with their penchant for rewriting myths, all called *Huitzliopochtli*, their city's specific patron deity.³⁹ These four gods are the forces which activate the history of the cosmos, as they relate, balance, and struggle with each other. They are, in brief, the first expression of the dual principle. In the second chapter, after six hundred years, the gods come together to put the world in motion and, in the following passages especially, Quetzalcoatl must undertake a series of actions to restore humans to the cosmos.⁴⁰

What one witnesses in this account, then, is a sequence of reasoning such that the primary dual principle comes to be expressed progressively as more complex sets of relations, as four forces, as time, as cosmic Era-Suns, and eventually as people, who are brought into existence through the life-force of the gods themselves. The account thus provides conceptually strong support for the claim that the Nahuas, especially their learned *tlamatínime*, were pantheists, for they held that the divine (*teotl*) pervades all things, is expressed through all of existence itself.⁴¹

This feature of the divine also explains several points concerning the names given to it. Why, for example, is its name Smoking Mirror (*Tezcatlipoca*), and how is that name related to the title Lord of the Near and Nigh (*Tloque Nahque*), or Wind and Night (*Yohualli, Ehecatl*)? For example, in the *FC* we read the following address during the rite of confession: "And can you, using human sight, behold the Lord of the Near and the Nigh, the Young Man, the Self-Creator, Our Lord, Smoking Mirror?" (*FC* 6, 33).⁴² How are we to understand statements like these?

One might begin to respond with the most straightforward of the names: Lord of the Near and the Nigh. The name is straightforward because it directly suggests that *Ometeotl* is always nearby, is omnipresent, and this is true because *Ometeotl* not only pervades all things, but self-expresses as all things. The next conceptual name, Wind and Night, evokes cases where our human vision functions poorly or fails altogether. It is hard to see the wind, because we only see what the wind moves, and it is hard to see during night, precisely because we have only outlines of those objects. The core idea at work in the name Wind~Night, then, is that *Ometeotl* is imperceptible, or at least not directly perceptible, since *Ometeotl* is everything. Stated

differently, Omēteotl is not a single object which might be the focal point of perception, and it is this imperceptibility which explains why the passage begins by asking whether human sight (*tic-tlacat(l)-itta*) will be sufficient to perceive the single and same being given all the following names. Turning to the last, and most puzzling names, Tezcatlipoca, the foregoing provides some context. Standardly translated as Smoking Mirror, the grammatically central and the uncontested portion of the name is *tezcatl*, mirror.⁴³ In Nahua literature a mirror is used as a metaphor for an object that illuminates an area. Yet the context here is cosmological, rather than local, so the suggestion is that Omēteotl is a source of light, the mirror, the sun, which is clouded, smoked, at night. This would be consistent, of course, with the panentheistic outlook of the *tlamatinime*, for whom Omēteotl is imperceptibly everywhere, and so is the cosmos and its heavenly motions.⁴⁴

The Legend of The Suns, recorded in the *Codex Chimalpopoca*, provides important details about the character of cosmogenesis as the Nahuas understood it, but it also introduces an important philosophical distinction for the fundamental character of reality, namely, the difference between existence (*Omēteotl*), and “being” or “reality” (*teotl*), which is the fifth claim for this section. The recorded text is a transcription in Nahuatl which relays the information that an indigenous *tlamatini* (philosopher) read to a scribe from an ideographic pre-Cortesian *amoxtli* (painting-book). He begins by pointing out the origin of the story: “Here is the wisdom-fable-discourse, how it transpired long ago that the earth was established, how each thing found its place. This is how it is known in what way all the suns began.”⁴⁵ The discourse records the first four suns as a complete unit, then interjects two tales, one about maize corn and another about Quetzalcoatl’s journey to bring humans back to life on earth, and then relates the story of the fifth sun, in which we are presently supposed to live.

The stories of the five suns often strike the modern reader as mythical curiosities, though it should be noted that the sense that humans had been created and destroyed, or lived and perished, multiple times was broadly shared in Mesoamerican culture.⁴⁶ Briefly, the story goes as follows (formatted for clarity).

With the first sun, named 4 Jaguar, the humans who lived survived 676 years, but were eventually devoured by Jaguars and so destroyed totally. During the period of this sun, the text tells us that the people ate “7 straw [*chicome malinalli*],” which would have been the calendrical name of a sacred food, such as corn or squash, but we are uncertain which exactly. (CC, slide 75.7)

Under the second sun, named 4 Wind, humans were blown away and became monkeys, though not totally destroyed. What they ate was 12 snake.

In the third sun, named 4 Rain, humans were rained on by fire, and turned into birds. Their food was 7 Flint.

In the fourth sun, named 4 Water, humans who ate 4 flower were inundated in a flood and became fish.

It is at this point that the two additional fables about maize and Quetzalcoatl are related, and then the story of the fifth sun, 4 Motion, is relayed. For its creation Nanahuatl throws himself into a fire, and his consort Nahuitecpatl threw herself into the ashes. Yet, because Nanahuatl would not move, the other gods living in the paradise garden Tamoanchan sacrificed themselves so that he would continue in his orbit.

This is our age, and though it is not stated in the text now entitled *Legends of the Sun*, in a companion text, *Annales de Cuauhtitlan*, the retelling of the five suns relates the following:

This fifth sun, 4 Movement [*ollin*] is its day sign, is called Movement Sun [*olintonati*], because it moves along and follows its course. And what the old ones say is that under it there will be earthquakes and famine, and so we will be destroyed. (CC, slide 2.42)

As with the previous suns, ours too will come to an end, and as was the case with those suns, it is the basic character of the cosmic organization, jaguars, rain, and so on, that spells the end of the living people. Since our sun is a sun of movement, specifically *ollin* movement, which is associated with undulating or wave-like motion, our end will be through earthquakes with famine.

What matters about the *Legend of the Suns* for philosophical purposes is that it can explain the relationship between *teotl* and *omēteotl*. For it makes clear that what happens to exist now is an expression of a specific configuration of the divine, i.e., *teotl*. Each sun is a special configuration of the *teotl* in a cosmic order, complete with the sorts of food that are appropriate to the kind of being which lives in that order. *Teotl* is thus expressed *qua* sun as *omēteotl*. Yet *omēteotl* exists only *qua* a specific sun, such as 4 Movement, which happens to be our specific cosmic configuration.

To contextualize the matter more broadly in Nahua thought, one might put it as follows. Though the Nahuas occasionally spoke of *teotl* simply as what there is, in general they spoke and wrote of it as *teotl* under some aspect, as a specific god such as *Tezcatlipoca*, or by a specific characteristic, as the Wind and Night, or most generally as *omēteotl*. Yet what the legend of the suns shows is that any of the specific configurations we witness, the way in which *teotl* takes concrete form through doubling, through balancing or rooting consorts, could have been otherwise. In fact, it was otherwise at some point, and will be again later. This is why Nezahualcoyotl claims that we live fundamentally “in a house of paintings,” in the painting book of the divine, wherein the slightest brush movement may blot us out (RS, fol. 35r). “The earth,” that is, the place where humans live, “is slippery, slick” as a famous Nahua saying goes (FC 6, 228).⁴⁷ But the cosmos itself, and not only our human condition, is fragile in its balance and ephemeral at its core.

This is why, if 4 Movement is our cosmic order, *ometeotl* may be thought of as “existence,” and *teotl*, the reality of all possible cosmic expressions, as “being.”

7. DIVINITY: OUSIA AKINĒTOS AND TEOTL

Before concluding, the argument considers what would appear to be an important difference in the accounts of reality as one finds it in Aristotle and the Nahuas. Aristotle’s presentation in the central books of the *Metaphysics*, books IV through IX, roughly, appear to proceed by way of a naturalist directive, i.e., they do not require any specific sort of religious commitment, while the Nahuas’ directive, at first blush, appears to be fully theological. (*Ome*)*teotl* may be taken as the basic character of reality, but it never loses its connection with divinity. The foregoing argument does provide grounds to understand *teotl* as “the way things are through their changes,” but it does not suggest that the term, which is most often translated as “god,” is unconnected to divinity in the Nahuatl mind. Two points should be noted in response.

A first is that certain authors, Nezahualcoyotl, for example, do question the existence of the divine and the specifics of religious belief. In a philosophic poem entitled “I Am Sad,” he writes:

I am sad, I grieve
 I, lord Nezahualcoyotl.
 With flowers and with songs
 I remember the princes,
 Those who went away,
 Tezozomocztzin, and that one Cuacuahtzin.
 Do they truly live,
 There Where-in-Someway-One-Exists?⁴⁸

Nezahualcoyotl is in these lines clearly expressing doubt about life in a place after death. Must it be a place where one in some, non-fleshy way exists? This doubt in the afterlife, further, explains Nezahualcoyotl’s ongoing preoccupation with death, since he is little comforted by the ordinary stories. Yet, beyond this and similar instances of doubt, it is important to recognize that the Nahua conception of *teotl* is hardly a personal god. *Teotl* is rather more like a universal energy which is formed into our specific cosmos for a time. As pantheists, their conception of *teotl* was closer to the Buddhist Nirvana or Benedict Spinoza’s substance than the personalist conceptions of the divine that often trouble those who would like philosophy to be strictly naturalist. Taken together, these remarks suggest that the Nahua *tlamatinime* did not think of a personal god as the fundamental source of reality, but rather argued for a view of the world that recognized a divinity to be present in all features of the natural world.

A second response is that the matter is not so straightforward in Aristotle either. One may think of the project of the

Metaphysics to be completed in either of two ways. One way is as a general theory of substance, one that articulates how substance satisfies the requirements for a science of being *qua* being, and just in what the characteristics of that substance consist. Another way is to consider substance’s most exemplary case, the first mover or uncaused cause. In the opening chapter of book VI of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle suggests that the latter is closer to his understanding. He writes:

if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science [*physikē*] will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance [*ousia akinētos*], the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this [discipline] to consider [*theōrēsai*] being *qua* being—both what it is [*ti esti*] and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being. (Met. VI.1, 1026a27-32)

Aristotle not only states that the study of this immovable substance is best named first philosophy, its consideration uses the Greek word *theōrēsai*, which is composed of the terms *theos*, divinity, and *horaō*, to see. It would be too much, in general, to take the etymological origin of the word as its meaning, namely, “to see the divine,” but in this case, Aristotle is explicitly supporting just this outlook.

What, then, is one to make of Aristotle’s approach in the *Metaphysics*? Some have suggested that this is but a holdover from Aristotle’s earlier Platonic education in the Academy.⁴⁹ Others have argued that we should rather excise the offending passage from our interpretation of the *Metaphysics* so that Aristotle completes a naturalist account of substance in book IX, and in XII undertakes a special investigation into a substance which is divine and with a mind.

Yet the most natural reading would be to take Aristotle at his word: he understands the arguments of book XII, which investigation he also explicitly calls theology, first philosophy *par excellence*. The idea would appear to be that the first mover is a model of substance, and in that way an answer to the general question of being *qua* being.⁵⁰ This would make Aristotle’s outlook generally consistent with his arguments in the NE that theoretical contemplation is the only way that we humans can act as immortalizing beings, and that this is one of the reasons why the contemplative life is the best and accompanied by the best pleasure (*hēdonē*).⁵¹

What these points suggest is that there is likely not so great a distance between Aristotle and the Nahuas in taking the basic character of reality to be divine. Similarly, neither view is committed to understanding the divinity of reality to be of the sort that is guaranteed by a personal and soteriological god.

8. CONCLUSION: WISDOM AND METAPHYSICS

The basic question of “Western” metaphysics cannot be put into words in Nahuatl, whether three or more, because the language has no concept of “being,” understood

either semantically or syntactically. Yet the pre-Columbian *tlamatinime* (philosophers) did ask about the fundamental character of reality. Like Aristotle who called this knowledge *sophia*, “wisdom,” the Nahuas called it *tlamatiliztli*, which is also best translated as “wisdom.” For Aristotle, however, *sophia* consists in grasping the first principle of the science (*epistēmē*) of being *qua* being, which he argued was identified when one understood just in what substance (*ousia*) consists. For the Nahuas *tlamatiliztli* consists in understanding the way things are through their changes, *teotl*, and giving it the most adequate expression one can, namely, in poetry. The reasons for this conclusion are two: first, one can neither grasp *teotl* directly, She-He is the Wind and Night, and, second, *teotl* is nothing but the ways of cosmic (punctuated) radical transformation. Finally, for Aristotle, any account of the substance of an entity ought to explain why it is a basic subject, and why it is an essence (*to ti esti*). For the Aztecs, *teotl* is doubly expressed, as some cosmos generally, as *ometeotl*, and as a cosmos specifically, for example, ours, which is 4 Movement—these are, if not the criteria, then at least the character of *teotl*’s intelligibility.

The present essay thus bears several fruits for scholarship. It is not only the first to undertake the comparative task in thinking through the relations among Aristotle’s ontological project and the Nahuas’ metaphysical outlook, it is the first to look seriously at the epistemic terms used and the specific epistemic claims each project implies. Aristotle is traditionally taken to hold a metaphysically realist view, since for him we can both know what there is, perhaps by induction (*epiagōgē*) or intuition (*nous*), and what there is, *ousia*, is intelligible and eternal. The Nahuas, by contrast, were quasi-realists. They did not deny that we could know, in some sense (as *mati*), the cosmic order in which we live, but they did deny that this cosmic order was the basic character of reality itself. That reality, the *nelli teotl* (true/rooted being), is only ever expressed as a cosmic order, *ometeotl*, which undergoes radical, punctuated transformations. Wisdom (*tlamatiliztli*) thus consists in grasping the limits of our knowledge (*mati*), in understanding the evanescence of the cosmic order itself.

A final and important fruit concerns the adequacy of these outlooks. The philosophic task for historical works shares something in common with anthropology and history, namely, that it aims to describe accurately the notions and basic frameworks which were held by historical persons or traditions. Unlike these other disciplines, however, philosophy also aims to evaluate the character of the frameworks under discussion for their reasonability. As Socrates might have asked: Are they true? The topics of the present essay are difficult to answer generally, and especially so in the space of a single essay. What it is hoped is that the foregoing provides the grounds for concluding that while quite different from Aristotle’s substance ontological, the Nahua’s process metaphysics is at least *prima facie* reasonable when considered alongside his. Moreover, it approaches the fundamental question of metaphysics in a way that does without the two basic criteria which Aristotle thinks any good answer should meet, namely, that the account address basic subjects and essences. If the Nahua approach is the correct one, then it

would appear that not only is Aristotle’s approach likely to be inaccurate, but much of the “Western” tradition, which follows him to some degree, is as well. Whether the Nahua account holds up under further scrutiny may form a task for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A version of this essay was presented at the 92nd Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division, arranged by the APA Committee on Native American Philosophers (2018). I am thankful to the audience members for their feedback, which contributed to the development of this essay. I am also thankful to the reviewers of this essay who provided detailed comments on an earlier draft, which resulted in a much improved version.

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W. D. Ross, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), book IV.1, 1003a20-1. To be abbreviated *Met.* hereafter. When not using the English translation, or when modifying it, I have used *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, ed. W. Jaeger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957) for the Greek source.
2. Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1.
3. The same point holds for Martin Heidegger as well, but his case is different insofar as he sought not so much to engage in the tradition of “Western” metaphysics as to dig beneath it. This is just the point that he makes in the “Introduction” to *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 2, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1972), available in English as *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). In light of Heidegger’s aim, one might wonder whether a better way to his goal might not have been simply to undertake work in comparative philosophy.
4. I of course have in mind Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), and Gilles Deleuze’s work in *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Épiméthée Press, 2013), available in English as *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), and *Logique de Sens* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1982), available in English as *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
5. See, for example, James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2014), 23. I do not, of course, disagree with Maffie. The purpose of the present essay is to clarify just what is intended by a “process” metaphysics when faced with an articulate account which would appear to take the substance of an entity to be just that, a process, *energeia*.
6. I mean only to support the tradition notion here, to write for a moment as the schoolmen did, that the essence (*to ti esti*) of an entity is its first actuality.
7. The views on this topic are vast, but two that are of interest are those who develop some form of the answer that forms are particulars, including Wilfred Sellars, “Substance and Form in Aristotle,” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 54 (1957): 688–99, and Charlotte Witt, “Aristotelian Essentialism Revisited,” *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 27 (1989): 285–98, and others who maintain that only some universals are not substances (rather than no . . . are), including G. E. L. Owen, “Particular and General,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978): 1–21, and Michael J. Loux, *Primary Ousia: An Essay on Aristotle’s Metaphysics Z and H* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1991).
8. Translation is my own.
9. The connection with sight and knowing in this passage is much closer in the Greek, since the word Aristotle here uses is “*eidenai*,” which is related to the word “*idea*,” literally, the look of things.
10. Aristotle here references his discussion of science and art in *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachae*, ed. I. Bywater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), book VI.3, 1139b22-23, and so the present development takes these points from that work to complete the argument. Hereafter abbreviated as *NE*.

11. Translation is my own.
12. Translation is my own.
13. The present study uses Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: A General History of the Things of New Spain*, vols. 1-12, ed. and trans. by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: The University of Utah Press, 1953–1981), hereafter abbreviated *FC*. For an example of “*mati*” in its use as knowledge by acquaintance, see the description of the old merchants who have already visited other places “*in inphilhoan in ie onmatia veca*” (*FC* 4, 65).
14. Although it is possible that a *tolteca*tl could have been female, this would not in general have been the case among the Nahuas, as women who were trained in practical affairs would have learned different skills such as weaving. The Nahuatl educational system was more gender equal with schooling for the arts used in governing, literature, philosophy, history, law, astronomy, and religion. I have thus used the male pronoun, since this is a more accurate gender representation of the Nahuatl culture.
15. Or perhaps they might, but it would be incidental to their role as a *tlamatini*.
16. Translation is my own.
17. Recall that “*mach-*” is the base 4 stem of *mati* used in passive constructions so that the word for counselor *te-ix-tla-mach-tia-ni* is a compound term indicating that the agent (*ni*) causes (*tia*) another (*te*) to gain experience (*ix* and *mach*) about things (*tla*). It is thus the same sort of knowledge as experience (or prudence) that *ix-tla-mati-liztli* means, namely, connected experience (*ix* and *mati*) about things (*tla*) -ness (*liztli*).
18. This phrase, the way things are through their changes, is my best translation of “*teotl*.”
19. *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los señores de la nueva españa*, transcribed by John Bierhorst (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), fol. 19v-20r. Hereafter abbreviated as *RS*.
20. The topic of truth and knowledge is a difficult one in Nahuatl thought, and it is not directly the focus of the present essay. The following may suffice for the present. The present account is likely closest to Miguel León-Portilla’s in the first and third chapters of *La filosofía nahuatl: Estudiada en sus fuentes*, seventh edition (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), originally published in 1956. He argues there that poetry is this highest form of knowledge and truth available. What the present account adds is that this is the case because of a metaphysical conception of the universe, and not our epistemic access to this reality. This approach stands at some distance from two further accounts. A first is Willard V. Quine’s in “Heidegger and the Aztecs: The Poetics of Knowing in Pre-Hispanic Poetry,” in *Recovering the World: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 85–112, argues that the Nahuas had an understanding of truth and knowledge that was close to Martin Heidegger’s sense of *alētheia*, as he develops that notion in some of his later writing, such as “*Vom Wesen des Grundes*,” in *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe*, Band 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 73–108. A second approach is James Maffie’s in “Double Mistaken Philosophical Identity in Sahagún’s ‘*Colloquios y Doctrina Cristiana*,’” *Divinatio* 34 (Autumn-Winter 2011): 63–92, argues that the Nahuas had a path-seeking understanding of truth and knowledge, rather than a (traditionally “Western”) truth-seeking understanding.
21. Translation is my own.
22. Translation modified.
23. There is, additionally, the thornier problem concerning the methodological status of the *Metaphysics*: Is it dialectical, or is it somehow the demonstrative science Aristotle develops in the *Organon*, or perhaps neither? Perhaps, as Terence Irwin suggests in *Aristotle’s First Principles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Aristotle is using a sort of “strong” dialectic here. Or perhaps the character of demonstrative science in the *Organon*, as it is generally understood, is not accurate, as Patrick Byrne suggests in *Analysis and Science in Aristotle* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). There is also the possibility that Aristotle modified his position, and that the best resources for his methods may be found in his biological works. This is a view that Gorgios Anagnostopoulos supports in “Aristotle’s Methods,” in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Gorgios Anagnostopoulos (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2013). For the present work, I set this problem aside as either solution would suffice, though I note that some such position is necessary for Aristotle’s argument here.
24. Translation modified.
25. Translation modified.
26. That Aristotle’s argument in the *Metaphysics* turns on showing that the desired science of being *qua* being study a matter which specifies both a basic subject and an essence is uncontroversial. Aryeh Kosman, for example, in *The Activity of Being: An Essay on Aristotle’s Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 23, notes that the whole argument of the *metaphysics* follows these two criteria into Aristotle’s discussion of subject and predicate, form and matter, and so on. What the present account does suggest is that Aristotle establishes these criteria much earlier than is typically identified, neither in book seven, as is often argued, or (even) in book five, as Kosman holds. The result supports the contention that the main chapters of the *Metaphysics* be read as a single, coherent argument.
27. Translation modified.
28. Michel Launey is the first to have coined the term “omnipredicative” to characterize the specific features of Nahuatl grammar in his *Une grammaire omniprédicative: Essai sur la morphosyntaxe du nahuatl classique* (Paris: CNRS Press, 1994), but similar insights were made by others at about the same time, for example, J. Richard Andrews in the first edition of his *Introduction to Classical Nahuatl* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975). Launey’s first grammar book appeared in 1979 in French as *Introduction à la langue et à la littérature aztèques*, vol. 1: *Grammaire* (Paris: L’Harmattan). For a development of the grammatical scholarship on Nahuatl, see James Lockhart’s “Editorial Preface” to the bilingual edition of Horacio Carcochi’s *Grammar of the Mexican Language With an Explanations of Its Adverbs (1645)*, ed. and trans. by James Lockhart (Stanford: Stanford University Press (2001), vii–xxii. The primary and most updated account of omnipredicativity, which the present essay uses, is Launey’s explanation in “The Features of Omnipredicativity in Classical Nahuatl,” *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 57 (2004): 49–69.
29. The root of this word, *chihua*, means “to act” or “to do,” and has a reflexive prefix *mo-* added. It is not, then, related to the system of verbs deriving from *câ*. Any connection between being and becoming, conceptually and linguistically present in English, is thus artificial, resulting from translation of Nahuatl into English.
30. The analogy is not exact, but I have in mind Thomas Aquinas in *De ente et essentia* in English translation as *Thomas Aquinas on Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968).
31. This is against Jacques Soustelle’s claim, which he develops in chapter seven of *La vie quotidienne des aztèques à la veille de la conquête espagnole* (Paris: Hachette, 1955), that this sort of knowledge was confined to an elite or at least selective class of individuals in Nahuatl culture.
32. The translation is my own. The reader should recall that “*o*” is often recorded as “*u*,” and “*u*” is sometimes recorded as “*v*,” so that “*vme*” is here a transcription for “*ome*,” meaning “two” or “dual.”
33. Angel Garibay, *Historia de la literatura náhuatl*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Porrúa Press, 1953), 128–30. Alfonso Caso makes a case for this in his *La Religión de los Aztecas* (Mexico City: Enciclopedia Ilustrada Mexicana, 1936), 8.
34. *Historia-Tolteca Chichimeca*, ed. and trans. by Luis Reyes García, Paul Kirchoff and Lina Odena Güemes (Puebla: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976), 166. I have followed Miguel León-Portilla’s Spanish in *La filosofía Nahuatl*, 149.
35. *Código Matritense de la Real Academia*, VIII, fol. 175v, which is available online <http://bdmx.mx/documento/bernardino-sahagun-codices-matritenses>. Last accessed June 20, 2018. The present translation follows Miguel León-Portilla’s Spanish translation in *La filosofía nahuatl*, 151.
36. See especially chapters three and seven of Soustelle’s *La vie quotidienne des aztèques à la veille de la conquête espagnole*

for a more careful analysis of the relationship of the Mexica to their predecessor cultures, and the Toltecs and Chichimecas in particular.

37. For further development, see Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología: Las concepciones de los antiguos Nahuas*, vol. I (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1984), 55–68.
38. *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, originally published by Joaquín García Icazbalceta in *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos: Tres Opúsculos del Siglo XIV*, ed. Ángel Garibay, (Mexico City: Porrúa Press, 1965), 23.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, 25.
41. This line of argument stretches back at least to Hermann Bayer's "Das aztekische Götterbild Alexander von Humboldt," in *Wissenschaftliche Festschrift zu Enthüllung des von Seiten S. M. Kaiser Wilhelm II, dem Mexicanischen Volke zum Jubiläum, seiner Unabhängigkeit Gestifteten Humboldt-Denkmal...* (Mexico City, Müller hons., 1910), 116. It is a line of argument of course continued in Soustille's *La vie quotidienne des aztèques*, Miguel León-Portilla, even in his more recent *Aztecas-Mexicas: Desarrollo de una civilización originaria* (Mexico City: Algaba Press, 2005), and also James Maffie's *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*.
42. Translation is my own.
43. This translation of *Tezcatlipoca* is a contentious one. Frances Karttunen, in the entry to the name in her *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), notes that although the stem *poc*, from *poch-tli* for "smoke" exists, there is no corresponding verb *poca*. It might rather be related to the word *ihpotza*, which would have the intransitive verb *ihpoca*, meaning to belch, or perhaps even give forth smoke. What is critical for the present analysis, however, is the uncontested term *tezcatl*, mirror, which is amply attested as metaphor for an object which lights up another.
44. This analysis follows, *grosso modo*, the analysis León-Portilla provides in chapter three of *La Filosofía Nahuatl*.
45. *Codex Chimalpopoca: The Text in Nahuatl with a Glossary and Grammatical Notes*, ed. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 87. Hereafter abbreviated as CC. All translations of this text are my own, though in this case, because it accepts Bierhorst's corrections, the resulting translation is close.
46. See, for example, the stories of the four creations of humans in parts one and three of the *Popul Vuh*, Dennis Tedlock (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
47. Translation is my own.
48. *Cantares Mexicanos*, fols. 25r and v. Translation is slightly modified for readability from Miguel León-Portilla's in *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*, 93.
49. This is especially Werner Jaeger's view as expressed in *Aristoteles: Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin, Weidmann, 1923), English translation by Richard Robinson, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934).
50. This is the view developed in different ways by Günther Patzig in "Theologie und Ontologie in der 'Metaphysik' des Aristoteles," *Kantstudien* 52 (1960–1961): 185ff; reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle: 3 Metaphysics*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji (London: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 33ff, and chapter seven of Kosman's *The Activity of Being*. The unified view likely finds its earliest source, among "Western" commentators, in Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John Rowan (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1961).
51. This is the view of Aristotle's contemplative life that C. D. C. Reeve develops in chapter six of *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Dance as Native Performative Knowledge

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Over the past few decades, there has been an upsurge in Native American performance arts to revisit and remember—to tell through retelling—stories of the past and how they have shaped Native identities and knowledges as those stories, identities, and knowledges have struggled to survive continued expropriation, abuse, and erasure. Native dance, specifically, has experienced a revitalization through a number of Native artists' endeavors to interweave the traditional with the contemporary. Native performance arts companies such as Native American Theatre Ensemble, DAYSTAR, Institute of American Indian Arts, Dancing Earth Contemporary Indigenous Dance Creations, Oxlaval Q'anil, Native Earth Performing Arts, Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, Spiderwoman Theater, and Red Arts Performing Arts Company have utilized embodiment and motion as a way of accessing and extracting blood memory to communicate such knowledges to Native and non-Native audiences. In the Foreword of *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, Richard West explains that

Dance is the very embodiment of Indigenous values and represents the response of Native Americans to complex and sometimes difficult historical experiences. Music and dance combine with material culture, language, spirituality, and artistic expression in compelling and complex ways, and are definitive elements of Native identity.¹

Beyond the articulation of identity, dance within the Native American worldview is deeply entrenched in and as ways of knowing. Charlotte Heth explains: "Indeed, in Indian life, the dance is not possible without the belief systems and the music, and the belief systems and the music can hardly exist without the dance."²

In 1921 the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs issued the following Circular decree:

I have, therefore, to direct you to use your utmost endeavours to dissuade the Indians from excessive indulgence in the practice of dancing. You should suppress any dances which cause waste of time, interfere with the occupations of the Indians, unsettle them for serious work, injure their health or encourage them in sloth and idleness. You should also dissuade, and, if possible, prevent them from leaving their reserves for the purpose of attending fairs, exhibitions, etc., when their absence would result in their own farming and other interests being neglected. It is realized that reasonable amusement and recreation should be enjoyed by Indians, but they should not be allowed to dissipate their energies and abandon themselves to demoralizing amusements. By the use of tact and firmness you can obtain control and keep it, and this obstacle to continued progress will then disappear.³

This circular demonstrates why it is that the deployment of dance as a mechanism for articulating Native American epistemology is not merely a fanciful interdisciplinary trick. Dance, whether as social or ritual performance, has always been a cornerstone of cultural practice and education and communal relationship strengthening. Further, dance is often explicitly regarded as a highway for Truth, as exemplified by David Delgado Shorter's book title, *We Will Dance Our Truth: Yaqui History in Yoeme Performances* (2009). It is for this reason that the activity of dancing specifically was targeted by settler-colonial states as one that needed to be promptly eradicated throughout the Americas.⁴ Scholars and practitioners of Native American dance have had to fight for their right to dance within the broader fight for sovereignty and cultural rejuvenation. This is because, as María Regina Firmino Castillo rightly claims, "[i]t is in the body, and very often, the dancing body, that ontological control and regeneration begins."⁵ Historically, the fight was merely to dance at all. Today, the fight is to dance on one's own terms: as a tribal nation, as a performer, as an urban Native American, as a mixed-blood, as a storyteller. The questions surrounding the centrality and significance of dance to Native American identity and survival is explored in numerous texts, most notably Jaqueline Shea Murphy's book, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (2007) and the *Chinook Winds: Aboriginal Dance Project* (1997) anthology. Therefore, I offer this analysis of dance as a mode of Native American epistemology in solidarity with others as a decolonial act of resistance, both in the academy and on the stage.

§1

Knowers operating from within a Native American worldview do not view knowledge as something that can be gathered and owned; the idea that knowledge might be possessed by an individual is, well, rather wacky. The notion is bizarre in two respects: first, it is bizarre that knowledge is conceived of as a possession and, second, it is bizarre that a solitary individual could know any truth. Knowledge is necessarily communal insofar as the Native American worldview does not rest on a foundation of atomism and, therefore, no one individual can come to know alone. Knowledge qua knowing relies on the community consensus-building and concerted, collective analysis.⁶ And no individual could or would be positioned in a way that made it possible for that knowledge to be exploited for individual gain. Dennis McPherson and Douglas Rabb⁷ mark the communalistic nature of the Native American worldview as one constituted by epistemological pluralism⁸ and polycentric perspectives.⁹ That is, no one person can possess a whole picture of the truth of any one thing. Knowledge is constituted by a repository and conglomeration of perspectives. All persons experience the world distinctly and thus come to see the truth of matters from their social position and through their individuality that is a product of that sociality.¹⁰ To have knowledge, then, requires us to interact with others—to tell them the stories of some thing or experience—and then to ask them for their stories so that we each may develop a broader understanding of that thing or experience. Consequently, knowledge exists for the purpose of being shared; it is a social product yielded through social interactions

and practices for the purpose of action. Native American epistemology highlights two distinctive goals regarding the relationship between knower and knowledge. Primarily, the purpose of pursuing knowledge is to help guide individuals along the right path. Relatedly, knowledge has at its end the nurturing of relationships between individuals and community members, including non-human persons and the environment, to ensure harmony betwixt them and to pass down the stories of the histories of such relationships. It is in this sense, then, that knowledge within the Native American worldview is regarded not only as relational, but also as ethical.

That knowledge is social, relational, and must be constrained by and is imbued with ethical considerations has further implications for knowers themselves that do not obtain within the mainstream Western framework.¹¹ First, knowers must come to their knowledge through ethical modes of interaction that show respect for relations.¹² Ethical constraints on knowers include the need to attain consent from the person sharing their knowledge—one cannot trick another into sharing knowledge, and knowledge cannot be stolen. And trust in the speaker's credibility should be given, which is often signified through respectful practices of listening. D'arcy Rhealt explains that we are only able to truly receive our teachings through practices of ethical listening; in Anishinaabe, this practice is called *bzindamowin*.¹³ Second, the communal and individual practices around forming beliefs themselves must be ethical in nature. In "Ethics and Understanding," John DuFour distinguishes two mutually reinforcing types of merit a belief holds: state merit and content merit.¹⁴ Content merit denotes a belief's reasonableness or epistemic acceptability. State merit connotes the ethical acceptability of a belief and the ethical acceptability of how that belief came about. While Western epistemology centers on content merit and gives little, if any, consideration to state merit, they are conjoined in Native American epistemology. According to DuFour, the most important epistemological trait a knower must cultivate is that of being a responsible knower. And this epistemological trait is developed through the ethical belief practices of a society, which are, by virtue of their very persistence, (implicitly or explicitly) endorsed. According to DuFour, belief practices that generate a belief's state merit are social praxes that help knowers determine if beliefs are morally repugnant.¹⁵ Ultimately, they indicate a community's commitment to and moral concern for the care we take in the things we claim to know and how we understand them.¹⁶ DuFour, Rhealt, Marelene Brant Castellano, and many others from many distinct tribal affiliations believe that we have ethical obligations regarding how, when, and with whom we share knowledge and which beliefs we proliferate. Subsequently, this portends that we can be morally culpable for knowledge that leads one down the wrong path.

This understanding of knowledge as an ethical, active, and interactive means through which to discover the right path requires a shift in how we understand the conception of truth in itself. Thus, Native American epistemology culminates in what Thomas Norton-Smith characterizes as an analytic procedural—as opposed to propositional—analysis of knowledge and truth.¹⁷ Truth is defined by

the successful, respectful performance of some action to achieve some goal. Knowledge consists in knowing *how* to P, not *that* P. One typically cannot know how to P without “knowing that P,” but one can easily “know that P” without knowing how to P, and thus makes a propositional construal of knowledge and truth as relatively useless in the practical sense on which Native epistemology focuses. Actions are guided by information and facts, which are a function of accuracy or correctness. Truth, on the other hand, is an assignation of action, and only those actions satisfy the constraining normative criteria, which function as the basic truth conditions for the Truth of performance. It is perfectly consistent to admit that you do not know whether a story is factual, but that you also recognize that telling the story can successfully achieve its goal of conveying the sanctity and symbolism of the target in a respectful manner and therefore be True.¹⁸

As Lawrence Gross notes, within the Native American worldview, it is processes that achieve whatever goal is desired.¹⁹ Actions, unless involuntary or nonconscious, are never without purpose. When I engage in action, I already have propositional content regarding the action *and* the conditions for goal satisfaction, or else I could not do the action. I could not practice handstands if I did not know what it was to do a handstand or what it was to practice. Propositional content is never employed outside of action insofar as it is utilized to, again, achieve some purpose. Action is required to transmit propositional content. Propositional content cannot exist outside of action with some purpose, including the conventional, cultural social practices structuring the acquisition and dissemination of information. Thoughts and cognates, which propositions represent via subject-predicate structures, are the products of the complex act of thinking in, of, and with the world, whether through sensual sensing, conceptualizing, mind wandering, critical inquiry, or creative exploration. This account regards all such concepts as understanding, believing, and desiring as actions rather than mental states or propositional attitudes. Given that the entirety of our lives is constituted by actions, it seems rather unprovocative and ordinary to say that actions are the ground of Truth.

Native American languages largely give rise to this praxis-based epistemology. Generally speaking, Native languages are verb-based. Conjugated verbs can account for the vast majority of the content of European grammatical components. Subjects are within the verb. In this sense, the subject is a part of the action—not merely grammatically but also ontologically. Similarly for adjectives, which are built into the verbs.²⁰ Indigenous languages identify objects and concepts according to their relationship to other things in an active process.²¹ For example, Gross explains the distinction between English “the book is blue” and Anishinaabe “the book blues.”²² So from the Native epistemological point of view, the relation between blueness and the book is only True if the book successfully achieves its goal of, well, blueing²³—that is, if it displays and is perceived as blue to one with whom it is in relation; for why else would it blue if it did not intend to be seen as blue? It is certainly true that actors may engage in actions for purposes other than those which the receiver interprets. There remains some controversy on what color

that silly white and gold? black and blue? dress *really* was.²⁴ I suppose we would know the truth of the matter if we knew the goal of the dressmaker (or even the dress!). Maybe the dressmaker had no goal aside from confusing observers. And in that case, claims that the dress was gold OR that the dress was blue would both be False because the aim was never for us to really know in the first place. Or, rather, in all actuality, both claims would actually be a little bit True. In English, the phrase “actions speak louder than words” hints at the idea that Truth cannot be strictly about propositions of the subject-predicate form; this is the one idea that I often use as an example for my students to clarify how Truth is a measure of action rather than of statement. And because Native languages are largely verb-based, this colloquium would be trivially true insofar as Truth attributions, and the propositions regarding Truth, are simply linguistic markers for the actions themselves rather than something else entirely.

Native epistemology is not procedural merely because its language is verb-based, its language is verb-based because the worldview is fundamentally grounded in dynamicism.²⁵ This dynamicism stems from two sources. First, dynamicism is inherent in the foundational principles of Native metaphysics, science, and epistemology. This is because the Native worldview posits a creative and creativity-inducing energy and chaos that orders the universe, which is always in states of flux and that proceeds through moments of balance and harmony that are established through the participatory activities and actions of persons.²⁶ Gregory Cajete sagely explains that

Native science [, which can be used interchangeably with knowledge,] continually relates to and speaks of the world as full of *active* entities with which people engage. To our sensing bodies, all things are active. Therefore, Native languages are verb based, and the words that describe the world emerge directly from actively perceived experience. In a sense, language “*choreographs*” and/or facilitates the continual orientation of Native thought and perception toward active participation, active imagination, and active engagement with all that makes up natural reality. . .²⁷

From this one can see that the second respect in which Native epistemology is dynamic ensues from its phenomenological nature. The nature of nature, the nature of our bodies, and the nature of knowing as sensed and sensing active entities accentuates the extent through which our lived bodies are vessels of knowing. Knowing always happens from and within the body, and the things that we know emerge from the ways in which we participate as embodied beings with nature and with others.²⁸ Moreover, knowing and knowledge result from our actions and our doings, which always connect with our phenomenological performances and interactions.

§2

For both Native American philosophy and embodied cognitive theory, meaning is grounded in corporeality. According to embodied cognitive theory, meaning is phenomenological and stems from embodiment in that it

comes together for us through nonconscious and mostly unaware bodily perceptions of space, movement, and environmental qualities that constitute our experiences.²⁹ The very fact that we live on a planet with gravity gives rise to a vast amount of meaning and knowledge regarding ourselves and others that would never crop up on planets lacking gravitational pulls. Movement, specifically, grounds our ongoing connection to and interaction with others and the world; it is what keeps us in touch with the world.³⁰ We wade through creeks full of algae and fish for fun or for hygiene, we climb mountains to get closer to heaven, we twirl, we itch, we scratch, we move always—even when we are dead and merely slowly decomposing—and this movement is always in response to others or to our environment. Even an involuntary wiggle of the nose is, in part, communication with our environment, because it tells us that something is in the air—and if it's April in Atlanta, then it is telling us that the flowers and trees are having a party (though to be fair, at this point your whole face is doing all kinds of involuntary unpleasant movements). However, because meaning is born from unconscious embodied perceptions and movements, its role in the process of worldmaking becomes invisible. Mark Johnson explains:

the meaning is in what you think and feel and do, and it lies in recurring qualities, patterns, and structures of experience that are, for the most part, unconsciously and automatically shaping how you understand, how you choose, and how you express yourself. You *have* meaning, or are *caught up* in meaning, before you actually experience meaning reflectively.³¹

Initially, meaning arises from embodied movement and interactions that are later extended metaphorically in the form of image schemas in our linguistic and conceptual mappings. An image schema develops when our sensorimotor experiences track repeated patterns and relations. The resultant image schemas are what give our broader experiences shape and meaning, as well as serving as models and modes of reasoning insofar as the repetitions generate neural mappings that eventually constitute what gives rise to abstract thought. Examples of embodied perceptions that engender meaning include verticality, twisted, circular, toward, away from, into and out of, sharp, hot, shape, and rush. Thus, not only knowledge but even our particular cultural logical forms of reasoning stem from how our bodies operate in situations.

*life is change and existence is an ongoing process. The logic we humans have is an embodied logic of inquiry, one that arises in experience and must be readjusted as situations change. . . . Logical thinking can thereby actually change experience, because it is in and of that experience.*³²

A foundational, pervasive image schema, which serves as a universal primary metaphor, is that of a container. Through our embodiment, we come to have understandings of and meanings for experiences of ourselves and other things as being “in” or “out” of some perceived boundary. We can be in the water or out in the cold or within an embrace or

under a car, etc. These sensorimotor experiences, which are source domains, help us extend meaning to similar situations or ideas, which are target domains. From the basis of the source domain mapping, we then understand ideas such as categories and family concepts as operating as kinds of containers of smaller ideas. Ultimately, without our body’s capacities to act—to move, perceive, manipulate, and engage—we would have no source from which to imaginatively draw ideas, induce, or infer. Imagination itself is a function of this embodiment at the deep level and therefore cannot spawn meaning and concepts on its own.

Embodied cognitive processes initiate at a nonconscious level, and much of the content and products of this processing remains at that level. This level, this ground-floor production site—the cognitive substratum—is what Lakoff and Johnson term the “cognitive unconscious.”³³ The cognitive unconscious is the realm of the vast majority of our reasoning; it encompasses all of our mental operations and structures, including embodied emotion, perception, and memory. The reason why these operations manifest at the nonconscious level out of our control is because they occur too swiftly for us to be aware of them. They refer to this base of operations as cognitive, even though we are unaware of it and do not have access to it, because all aspects of thought, including motor operations, are cognitive “when they contribute to conceptualization and reason, including conceptual systems, meaning, inference, [induction,] and language.”³⁴ They postulate that

[Our unconscious conceptual system] creates the entities that inhabit the cognitive unconscious—abstract entities like friendship, bargains, failures, and lies—that we use in ordinary unconscious reasoning. It thus shapes how we automatically and unconsciously comprehend what we experience. It constitutes our unreflective common sense.³⁵

Therefore, if the cognitive unconscious is the locale where our embodied meaning emerges, then one can reason that it will also be the seat of our subconscious tacit knowledge, which is the deep knowledge we have of conceptual rules and structures. Embodied logic at the tacit level is the foundation for our explicit abstract logic in that it is our bodies that give meaning and understanding to rules and inferences such as causation, containment, and transitivity.³⁶ From here, as mental operations ascend closer and closer to the conscious level, we develop much of our implicit knowledge by gaining more access to embodied rules of logic and inference and applying them practically through phenomenological experience, which makes us more consciously aware of them. One can imagine the chain of meaning and knowledge reliant on embodiment progressing in the following manner: from the cognitive unconscious and tacit knowledge to implicit knowledge (intuition and implicit procedural knowledge³⁷) to, finally, explicit knowledge (propositional and explicit procedural knowledge).³⁸

Native American sources of knowledge are more substantial and prolific than those acknowledged within Western epistemology. Dreams, visions, vision quests, and interactions with nature, along with insight and intuition,

are all significant to access meaning and knowledge. Some scholars refer to the source of insight and intuition as the inscape and some call it the inner space. Others, such as Ermine, identify intuition more specifically with terms such as the Cree concepts *Muntou*³⁹ and *mamtowisowin*. *Muntou*—literally, the mystery—is the law of the underlying energy of the universe and existence qua interconnection. *Mamtowisowin* is our capacity to tap into our inner energy that comes from the universal energy in order to be creative, be in connection, or simply become.⁴⁰ V. F. Cordova calls this energy *Usen*.⁴¹ Similar concepts include the Algonquin term *Manitu*, *Namandu* in Gaurani, *Orenda* in Iroquois, *Nigilia* or *Wakan* in Lakota.⁴² In Māori and Melanese, this power and energy is known as *Mana*. In Anishinaabe, dreams (*manidoo-waabiwin*) and visions (*naanaagede'enmowin*) are regarded as primary sources of *revealed* knowledge. Intuition (*gidisi'ewin*) is a form of revealed knowledge, but it also points to our internal capacity to recognize Truths. Rhealt explains that “truth or the ability to perceive truth is the ‘feeling’ that one has, at the moment of intuitive clarity. Intuition is the voice of one’s spirit.”⁴³ Many Native people utilize dreams and vision quests as a way of closing the gap between our internal connection to the energy of the universe and our more explicit knowing and understanding of the world.⁴⁴

While embodied cognition is shared among us, our embodied knowledge, and the intuitions and subsequent insights it gives rise to, will be specific to us as individuals as a result of our experience in and with the world. Similarly, we all carry some aspect of *Muntou* or *Usen* with us by virtue of our embodiment and interconnectedness with others and the universe, but our unique experiences and relations will synthesize the two and to move between the inner and outer spaces for meaning and understanding. Joseph Couture rightly argues that most non-Natives cannot make sense of this nonlinear way of knowing that oscillates between both analytic and metaphorical intuitions, as we have seen historically through mainstream epistemology and philosophy of mind.⁴⁵ He explains that

Native “seeing” is a primary dynamic, an open and moving mindscape. This process determines and drives the Native habit to be fully alive in the present, without fear of self and others, non-compulsively and non-addictively in full relationship to all that is—in relationship with the “is”-ness of a self-organizing ecology, a cosmic community of “all my relations.”⁴⁶

These intuitions and insights are believed to be gifts to us from our relations to the earth and the world. Castellano points out that “[s]ometimes knowledge is received as a gift at a moment of need; sometimes it manifests itself as a sense that ‘the time is right’ to hunt or counsel or to make a decisive turn in one’s life path.”⁴⁷ Our individualized experiences of knowledge in and about the world, much of which evolve from the interplay between embodied tacit knowledge and intuition, are what constitutes both the phenomenological and the pluralist, polycentric components of Native American ways of knowing. Universal, “objective” knowledge as Western epistemology conceives it is not simply not possible—it’s not even

desired. The subjectivity of experiential knowledge that stems from our unique interactions is what gives us more authentic meanings of the world and more practical and sharable bits of knowledge that tie us together.

There are two other specific Native American modes of knowing that this understanding of embodied cognition and the cognitive unconscious helps to flesh out, rather than contradict. The first is the notion of blood memory.⁴⁸ Blood memory is a Native American concept that connotes the passing down of knowledge from the ancestors and the spirit world through the body to other members of the community through generations. Native dancer Monique Mojica explicates this idea by saying that

our bodies are our libraries—fully references in memory, an endless resource, a giant database of stories. Some we lived, some were passed on, some dreamt, some forgotten, some we are unaware of, dormant, awaiting the key that will release them.⁴⁹

She relies on praxes of improvisation as a method of “mining” her body for “organic texts” to motivate her choreographic storytelling. However, blood memory is within all of us and we all carry it with us; it is just that it may be more accessible through embodied activities and processes such as dancing. While blood memory is a term that is unique, at least historically, to Indigenous peoples, it is not a wholly unique conception. There are two strands by which blood memory extends to other similar notions. The first is in the idea of generational trauma. Most people conceive of this idea of blood memory as being passed down as a result of violence and genocide, much like the generational trauma of the Jewish community.⁵⁰ Trauma rewires the neural synapses and both the behavior of trauma, and the way of thinking consequent of trauma can be passed down biologically and behaviorally.⁵¹ Another similar concept is that of the collective unconscious.⁵² This is the idea that all humans inherit cultural archetypes, primordial images, and ideas from their previous generations.

Blood memory is not necessarily tied to trauma and therefore can be imagined as occupying the intersection of generational trauma and the collective unconscious, both of which are instances of the cognitive unconscious. Moreover, blood memory, generational trauma, and the collective unconscious all give rise to knowledge in the form of intuition. Native dancer Rosy Simas explains:

Recent scientific study verifies what many Native people have always known: that traumatic events in our ancestors’ lives persist in our bodies, blood, and bones. These events leave molecular scars that adhere to our DNA.⁵³

But unlike generational trauma, in most cases Native individuals see themselves as benefiting from the inheritance of blood memory, as it functions as a tie to Native ways of coming to know and be. Mi’kmaq dancer Shalan Jourdry posits that

My understanding is that as we go from one generation to the next a part of our spirit and body is passed on to our children, and they pass on a bit of their collected spirit, and so on. Therefore, within me is a piece of all my ancestors, and I have that memory within me somewhere. The challenge is to get in tune with that, to hear and feel it, and respond to that kind of memory.⁵⁴

Similarly, blood memory is distinct from the collective unconscious because it can be accessed and made aware of through individual or collective efforts qua practices, even if only intuitively or minimally explicitly. I highlight the perspective of dancers not only to remind the reader that our goal is ultimately to get to dance as Truth-making, but also to highlight the substantial embodied notion of blood memory.

This leads to the second mode of knowing which might be thought to be in tension with embodied cognitive theory—the vision quest. The vision quest is its own mechanism through which to gain insight into intuitive knowledge through bodily practices; but it is also a bodily practice through which access to blood memory, more specifically, might be gained. Most times, vision quests are an individual journey towards deeper meaning and knowledge of the world and oneself through an extended testing of the body in exposed natural conditions. In some instances, these quests can be taken on in the confines of a sweat lodge alone, in community, and/or in the presence of a medicine person. But in all cases, the embodied practice is to deprive the body of nourishment and expose it to extreme conditions in order to turn in towards the inscape to tap into the knowledge that lives there. In the chapter “Dancing with Chaos: Phenomenology of a Vision Quest,” McPherson and Rabb interview a Blackfoot Métis man named Douglas Cardinal to demonstrate how it is that supposed “mystical” and “magical” Native experiences, typically discounted by Western culture and theory, actually share common features with many other similar embodied phenomena, such as the near-death experience. In their discussion of the vision quest, they argue:

In the case of the vision quest, phenomenological description allows us to discuss it without dismissing such experience as mere dream or hallucination, as many non-Natives might be tempted to do. At the same time, we are not required to admit that such experience is actually a glimpse into the spirit world, whatever that would mean. Note that many Native Americans believe that dreaming itself is a glimpse into the spirit world. . . . [And] to ask these kinds of questions [that interrogate the authenticity and reliability of Native embodied ways of knowing] is to miss the point. In one sense it really doesn’t matter whether or not he was, in a technical sense, hallucinating. What is important is what you learn from such an experience, what you take away with you.⁵⁵

And while it is true that it is a moot point as to whether the experience is mystical, spiritual, or neural, it does matter that it can be shown that these experiences create and

give access to meaning. Both modes of Native embodied knowledge—blood memory and vision quests—have accounted for the kinds of meaning and knowing that Western philosophy has rejected as valid ways of knowing historically because Western philosophers and scientists were unable (or unwilling) to identify, examine, and analyze them until only very recently. Thus, yet again, it becomes apparent that Native American epistemology has born more accuracy and comprehensiveness with respect to knowing and Truth than has Western epistemology. This also sheds some light on why it is that much of the contemporary cognitive science and quantum physics references Native American theories within their own.

Though I have demonstrated some aspects of the relation between Native American embodied ways of knowing and embodied cognitive theory, there remains a further step in this chain that must be clarified: the conceptual metaphorical component of embodied cognitive theory. It is in this respect that embodied cognitive metaphor is most noticeably relevant to Native epistemology insofar as embodied metaphor extends from the activities of the body to the most visible domains of interrelational communicative practices. Embodied conceptual metaphors are central to Native epistemology, as highlighted by McPherson and Rabb (2011), Norton-Smith (2010), and myself (2016), given that knowing and storytelling are both dynamic, embodied, oral, and metaphorical phenomena. The above discussion foregrounds how it is that many of our concepts and much of our reasoning is metaphorical at the unconscious and tacit levels. Cognitive embodied metaphor theory posits that how we conceive the world is a function of our embodied interaction with the world and, as such, most of our depictions, linguistic representations, imaginative operations, and abstract thought are metaphorical with respect to our spatial-locomotive-sensory activities and experiences.⁵⁶ That is, all of our conscious and higher-level cognitive functions are explicitly metaphorical. While most people will concede that much of our linguistic expressions and imaginative capacities are metaphorical, the remaining operations are typically met with suspicion or outright disavowal.⁵⁷ That is, most Western theorists reject the idea that metaphors are embodied, that they have meaning and are meaningful, and that they serve as anything other than linguistic devices to make propositions saucy.

Conceptual metaphors are of the kind like my twitchy person example above. They originate in our embodied image schemas constituting our primary metaphors that bring embodied logics with them and then are extrapolated and applied out and onto the world by mixing together to imaginatively create more robust metaphors that capture our higher-level conscious cognitive activities.⁵⁸ Our use of conceptual metaphors occurs naturally and automatically and becomes ingrained incognito into our linguistic understanding of the world as they become systematized through social and cultural use. But they are used systematically because the metaphors themselves are experienced systematically. We presume much of our strict theoretical and scientific posturing are free of the fluffiness of poetic, imaginative metaphor because the metaphors are natural extensions of our embodied experiences. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and then

Philosophy in the Flesh (1999), Lakoff and Johnson develop and flesh out how it is that our abstract reasoning and even linguistic understandings—meaning itself—are properties and functions of these primary metaphors. They argue that it is impossible to think about our subjective experiences without these embodied metaphors and any attempt to do so would result in impoverished understandings of the world and our existence in it.

And yet complex cognitive conceptual and linguistic metaphors are neither invisible nor ignored within the Native metaphysical and epistemological framework. Rather, metaphor is highly valorized. This can be seen just by virtue of the fact that the Native framework regards the Native mind primarily as a “metaphoric mind.” Native philosophy, science, and literature are all attuned to the significance and efficacy of metaphors, particularly in their epistemological functions when thinking from and with diverse perspectives to ensure pluralistic analyses of the world. Cajete claims that the metaphoric mind is our oldest mind and is the first foundation of Native science. I cite him at length here to reveal the extent to which Native American science has rightly understood the role and depth of metaphor as an epistemological groundwork as well as the extent to which it aligns with embodied cognitive metaphor theory.⁵⁹ He explains:

As the rational mind develops, the metaphoric mind slowly recedes into the subconscious, there to lie in wait until its special skills are called upon by the conscious mind. . . . In Native science, the metaphoric mind is the facilitator of the creative process; it invents, integrates, and applies the deep levels of human perception and intuition to the task of living. Connected to the creative center of nature, the metaphoric mind has none of the limiting conditioning of the cultural order [contained within particular linguistic or conceptual systems]. It perceives itself as part of the natural order, a part of the Earth mind. Its processing is natural and instinctive. It is inclusive and expansive in its processing of experience and knowledge. . . . Because its processes are tied to creativity, perception, image, physical senses, and intuition, the metaphoric mind reveals itself through abstract symbols, visual/spatial reasoning, sound, *kinesthetic expression*, and various forms of ecological and integrative thinking. These metaphoric modes of expression are also the foundations for various components of Native science, as well as art, music, and *dance*.⁶⁰

Native epistemology has been working with and through metaphors longer than Western theorists have recognized them as more than poetic whimsies. Metaphor as an experiential epistemological device imbues all mediums and modes of Native ways of knowing. And the most prevalent abode for metaphor is also the most conspicuous site of metaphor—storytelling. The difference is that, unlike the vast preponderance of Western philosophy, Native philosophy regards storytelling as not only a valid, but also the primary, medium through which one can come to know. This is because it operates through the oral tradition and

relies on the sharing of pluralist individual experiences for knowledge construction. Laurelyn Whitt rightly explains that indigenous knowledge is inconceivable apart from its relationship to experience, and imagination and stories “are vehicles for knowing and respecting.”⁶¹

Keith Basso raises the question of how metaphor in narrative can be effective. He portends:

For where metaphor is concerned, the question always arises, On what *grounds* is one kind of thing understood in terms of another? In other words, what must individuals believe about themselves and their surroundings for their metaphors to “work”? . . . [M]etaphors all point to the same general idea, which is that depictions provided by Apache speakers are treated by Apache hearers as bases on which to build, as projects to complete, as invitations to exercise the imagination.⁶²

Native practices of narrative storytelling as communicative action make room for and encourage the communication of differences through reciprocal and imaginative activity. The practice of reciprocity allows for narrative testimony to connote one’s subjective particularity through the uniqueness of one’s story while also recognizing and respecting the cultural specificity of social group membership by unveiling systemic patterns of shared histories and social locations between group members, which illuminate distinctive cognitive schemas and contributes to the collective unconscious. In light of multifarious expositions about differing lived experiences and preferences, individuals can see that their reference points mark their own perspective as just one of many within a holistic frame. We come to know others by relating to them, by using our imagination to imagine what it must be like for them in the world.⁶³ The imaginative procedures used to make sense of divergent perspectives exact a substantial amount of creativity in that individuals’ comprehension of the import of difference through others’ narrative requires individuals to invoke a respectful wonder.⁶⁴ A stance of respectful wonder calls on community members to engage their imaginations to try to understand the needs of others who are distinct from them. And it must be respectful in that imaginative capacities unconstrained by normative dictates are likely to go in the direction of exoticization of others rather than empathizing; an account of wonder not constrained by respect would ultimately violate the condition of respect in the Native American procedural analysis of knowing. Wonder, as an embodied experience, is also an emotional experience triggered by novel and/or inexplicable encounters.⁶⁵ The imaginative activity of a cognitive form of wonder can spark the affective motivations in listeners to reorient their schemas around what the speaker emphasizes. The employment and management of imaginative perceptions of others involves utilizing one’s imagination to piece together narratives of their lived experiences that are both similar to and different from one’s own.

There is a one-image schema that seems to play a rather vigorous role in the operations of narrative storytelling: center/periphery. The center/periphery image schema

accounts for how our field of vision is contained by the horizon. When we look at the center, everything is in focus and we can see everything clearly. When we look further and further out and away from the center, things become blurred and unclear, and many things become difficult to discern unless we put them back into relation to what is in the center. Embodied cognitive theory refers to this as perceptual framing. Conceptual metaphors in oral storytelling work in much the same fashion. Conceptual metaphors guide the listeners on the speaker's journey. This is why word choice for storytellers—and of philosophers—is of such significance. The ability to find just the right words determines the difference between success and failure in communication of the speaker's point. Varied linguistic phrases, and even prepositional phrases (most of which trace back to primary embodied metaphors), can fix the main point at the center of the listener's attention. Without a strong grasp on language, an idea can easily and quickly run away from the speaker. Moreover, any digressions can rip the moral of the story away from the listeners. Thus, in storytelling, the main objective can become crystal clear or indecipherable depending on how near to the center or far off into the horizon the storyteller's word choice takes it. One cannot be led down the right path if the storyteller can't stay right on her path, as it were.

As most contemporary cognitive theorists and phenomenologists have stressed, embodiment entails the fact that the I Can precedes the I Know and also that I Know far more than I can Tell. It should make sense, then, when I purport that narrative testimony and narrative storytelling is, in essence, literal lived Truth.⁶⁶ From the subjective perspective, our bodies are our situations insofar as they are the grounds for our experiences and organize our knowing through the cognitive unconscious.⁶⁷ The admixture of embodied forms of implicit knowing within the cognitive unconscious and the ways of knowing engendered through Native narrative cognitive schemas and ethical practices generates a form of embodied procedural knowledge. Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson capture this deep procedural structure of narrative that stems from the verb-based metaphorical nature of Indigenous languages when they explain that

Stories are unfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experience; they also renew, awaken, and honor spiritual forces. Hence almost every ancient story does not explain; instead it focuses on processes of knowing.⁶⁸

Moreover, lived Truth is the quintessential form of phenomenological Truth in that these Truths are induced through and extracted from our bodies at both the deep and surface levels. The Truths of stories are capable of being received and realized indirectly through the shared phenomenological activities. Wendelin Küpers rightly espouses that

Each story conveys knowledge, not only about one or more "subject matters" but also knowledge about the teller, her background and the common situation. In this way stories communicate always something of and about the embodied context

in which the narration is taking place. Therefore, stories convey a lot of non-explicit information, emotional knowledge, and "meta-knowledge."⁶⁹

Lived Truths are also taken up directly vis-à-vis the shared conceptual metaphors of the listeners or viewers. The implicit and explicit interactive nature of narrative storytelling ensures that the embodied procedural knowing dynamically manifests bilaterally (or multilaterally) between storyteller and storyhearer. The procedural nature of this interactive embodied knowing of narrative is consequent of the skillful knowing how on the parts of both (or all) participants involved in the coming to know that. Together, members construct a shared, holistic Truth through the deployment of shared or negotiated conceptual metaphors and participatory narrative practices.

So phenomenologically, our interactive implicit, embodied knowing constitutes procedural knowing. And the ethical participatory nature of Native American storytelling and narrative praxes satisfies the Truth conditions for respectful, successful performance within Native American epistemology. The question remains as to how dance as a form of narrative storytelling—as opposed to verbal narrative—is capable of serving as a substantial and substantive vehicle for Truth.

§3

It was only when I began the process of putting this project together that the significance of dance as a Native American metaphor jumped out at me. From Norton-Smith's book title *The Dance of Person and Place*, to the chapter in McPherson and Rabb—"Dancing with Chaos"—to the numerous other sources on and in Native Studies that reference the dancing of ideas and the dancing of the creative energy of the universe and the dancing of relations, and the dancing of water and earth, the notion of dancing as an active underlying principle and way of knowing and being is pervasive within the purviews of Native and other Indigenous worldviews. What I discovered was that dance has been and continues to be such an intractable component of Native identity, culture, and epistemology that for me to argue that dance is a paradigm way of knowing for Native American epistemology became somewhat redundant. It is something that is and has always been known in Native communities. As it turns out, there is an entire sphere—an entire hemisphere!—of Native dance studies that is thriving. Therefore, I must state in no uncertain terms that my general claim is no jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring revelation in the field of Native Studies. What I hope to do, that I hope that I can add to what has been a long-standing Native epistemological given, is flesh out that which is given. My aim is not to engage in a sort of philosophical masturbation game, but to make the analytical philosophical connections between the assorted and distinctive conversations within Native theory and Native Studies in an attempt to make evident the unifying circle underlying the connected but discrete accounts of knowing and dancing that I have encountered by linking them together through the implementation of what I take to be connecting strands available from disciplines of dance theory and embodied cognition. What I hope to do is draw from the knowledge already apparent within the

Native and other Indigenous Studies to contribute to the growing discourse in Native Philosophy.

There is a sense where it may seem as if I am working in reverse, given that I addressed the significance of narrative storytelling in the previous section using deep embodied knowledge, including the cognitive unconscious. However, this is not the case. To glean how dance is a form of storytelling and knowing, it is first imperative to understand how narrative storytelling works as a mode of embodied procedural knowing in the more obvious, explicit sense. From there, we can dive deeper into the body in the more literal sense. From a dancer's perspective, and from the perspective of the Native American worldview, dance is more apparent as a way of knowing because it is this literal embodied examination and exploration of embodied knowledge. Yet, for most, the idea of the dancing body as a direct form of creating and communicating knowledge is foreign because the colonial approach to knowledge is inherently static, stale, and propositional. It is for this reason that I began with an approach to knowing that is more familiar to most readers and then worked to reveal how it is that narrative is not static propositional knowledge but rather a decidedly dynamic knowing that stems from the body. Since I have shown how narrative knowing emerges from embodied knowing through embodied cognitive theory, it should be more palpable for the reader to extend this understanding of embodied knowing to the immediate source of embodied metaphors—the dancing body.

The meaning and role of dance within the Native worldview far surpasses that of dance within Western culture. Certainly, dancers and performance philosophers themselves would refute this claim, and with good reason; they have learned something that Native folks have always known and that I have recently come to know. But dance does not constitute nor contribute to the ontological foundations of the Western worldview as it does in Native and other Indigenous worldviews. Within Western ideology and philosophy—give or take an Aristotle or Nietzsche—dance is utterly marginalized as a frivolous obsession with the body that is contraindicated with the real and serious modes of rationality that yield knowledge and Truth. Conversely, within Native and other Indigenous worldviews, dance is intimately embedded in and constative of the metaphysics and epistemology. To be clear, dance theory and embodied cognition do not substantiate or legitimate performative knowing in Native dance; Native dance shines a light on, and provides a richness to, the claims put forth in dance theory, performance philosophy, and embodied cognition theory. Because dance is so entirely interwoven into Native American philosophy as a form of knowing, we can see how staunchly traditional Western philosophy has denied its significance as an art, as a mode of being, and as a way of knowing.

Murphy states that Aboriginal stage dance and its choreography are epistemological ways of knowing because it is about the stories they tell, “the theories of embodiment and enactment the dance work investigates, the familial and tribal connections, processes, dedication, and intention with which the dancing is made.”⁷⁰ Jerry Longboat explains that dance is part of the oral tradition in

that it combines story and myth into a form of expression.⁷¹ It is an expression of embodied knowledge because, he says, “it is ‘in the bones’”. And, when we dance, our timeless oral narratives possess the ancient stories of wisdom and understanding.”⁷² But it is important to realize that the communication of values and Native knowledge through dance is not constrained by ritual forms. By engaging in creative processes such as “undoing and remaking,” Rulan Tanagen sees contemporary performances as practices of decolonization of both practices of dance and of the imagination. For her, contemporary dance captures and communicates how Native values, stories, and lived experiences adapt and regenerate in resilient and innovative ways.⁷³ She argues:

contemporary embodiment can protect the traditional by allowing that to stay private, while filling in missing links that have occurred through various treacheries of colonization... There are gaps, yes. The stories that are remembered and interpreted are important, but so too are the ones that had been forgotten, and that emerge from the creative process without a word or thought or plan, but come into being and knowing because of the entity of motion.⁷⁴

Native forms of dance are embodied metaphorical, kinaesthetic creations and communications of knowledge both above and below the surface of the body. Below the surface, Native dancers draw heavily on implicit body knowledge, often through blood memory and the inscape, as a way of “remembering the future.” But just as much knowledge acquisition occurs above and on the surface. Tanagen explains that drawing on knowledge through the senses by closing one's eyes, as children do in many Indigenous games, is central to understanding the world; these senses operate as “kinetic portals” that “we begin to fill with Intention, Intuition, Instinct, Imagination.”⁷⁵ Because Native dance often has multiple functions, such as telling stories for continuance, healing trauma, recovering and sharing Native identities and values—ultimately, proliferating Indigenous ways of knowing—embodied movement metaphors play crucial roles in satisfying these objectives. Broad metaphors such as circles, expressions of gifting, and repetition play a role in such knowledge cultivation; but more specific metaphors aid in the ability for knowledge to come through clearer. Metaphors that Tanagen identifies include undoing, shedding, cleansing, releasing, and purifying. Sandra Laronde also highlights embodied movement metaphors:

Throughout the dance project, I learned delicate, softer, spiraling movement . . . I realized that different images and emotions inhabit these finer crevices of movement . . . our bodies continue to carry cultural memory, imagery, knowledge, and emotion. If trusted and approached with respect, the body has an infallible memory. . . . When dancing traditional, for example, there is a downward rhythm of the body towards the earth, which acknowledges our connectedness with Mother Earth.⁷⁶

In addition to dance being relational in terms of its communal nature, it also is a source of ethical relations itself. The activity of dance establishes ethical relationships between the dancer(s) and the audience. In the Native framework, relations are held together by processes; this is true in many ethical frames, but what makes dance in the Native framework distinctive is that it is within the dance, it is the dance, that galvanizes the bond. Typically, this sort of bond is accounted for through Native songs—one primary example being the songs by medicine persons during healing ceremonies. It is not that the medicine person is the healer; the song used unites the medicine person and empowers healing powers between them in their relation together; without the song, there would be no relation and therefore no ability to cure. Gross explains:

It would be incorrect to say the song belongs to the person, since as a living being the song cannot be owned by another person . . . the song has a life of its own, which is spiritual in nature. . . . One develops a relationship with the song . . . and relationships take work, hard work.⁷⁷

One way to explain how dance can be respectful and vitalize ethical relations is through creating kinesthetic empathy at the level of the cognitive unconscious using embodied moving metaphors. When we see others move in ways that connect with our embodied shared understandings of the world, specifically through movements that convey embodied metaphors associated with emotions, those emotions transfer from the dancer through the dance into ourselves and we feel those emotions as well. This is one of the reasons why people describe dance as being so powerful and connecting.

This notion of kinesthetic empathy also satisfies on part of the success criterion of Truth insofar as it is the embodied medium through which knowledge is successfully picked up by the viewer. It is how, for example, dance is not merely subjective interpretation of entertaining movement but, rather, how knowledge that is created by and drawn from one's body may be communicated to an external, but connected, other in a rather objective sense. I say "rather objective" because "objectivity" is not a facet of Native epistemology insofar as it is a polycentric frame. What I mean is that, like all stories, there are values and principles and claims that are to be taken up through the narrative. Narratives are not open to subjective readings because that would violate the relation. To be seen as successful, and not purely subjective, the story, which is never intended to be a direct telling, should help lead the audience to knowledge rather than try to force some "objective" claim onto her/ them. This is the second notion of success that must be satisfied—it must lead the audience down the right path through guiding knowledge. Ultimately, a dance may fail to communicate Truth in two ways: it can fail to ignite kinesthetic empathy as a result of inauthentic movement and expression, and it may fail to lead the audience to a shared knowledge. But dance that relies heavily on embodied knowledge both above and below the surface will typically succeed in these respects and gift Truth unto others.

This section is clearly much shorter than one would like, as there are oh so many questions left unanswered. This is because I am still thinking through the diverse and wide-ranging questions that must be addressed around and in between the claims offered here. There are questions about the relations between dancer and audience; questions on how the limits of ethical knowing constrain and protect Indigenous kinesthetic storytelling; questions on whether or not nontraditional Native folks will have less difficulty or equal difficulty receiving the embodied metaphorical narratives gifted to them on the stage, however one conceives of a stage. The conditions of success for a procedural analysis of knowing that is grounded in performance are delicate conditions to satisfy. What this means is that there is a much larger domain for failure, which entails that there is going to be a much smaller realm of knowing in the fullest sense and greatest degree. I hope that you keep an eye out so that you may dance with the finished project.

NOTES

1. Richard West, "Foreword," *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, ix.
2. *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, 9.
3. Creeden Martel, "Historic Letter Recalls Time When Indigenous People Were Discouraged from 'Excessive Indulgence' in Dancing." While dance was entirely prohibited in Native North America, there was a slightly different approach to the regulation of Indigenous dance by the colonizers in Native South America. The Christian enforcers allowed dancing, but only insofar as it kept them busy, as it were, and did not address any of the original Indigenous spiritual purposes.
4. Such edicts were made throughout the Indigenous Americas. See Castillo, "Dancing the Pluriverse: Indigenous Performance as Ontological Praxis," 55–73.
5. *Ibid.*, 60.
6. Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge"; Cordova, "Ethics: The We and the I"; Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*; Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*.
7. Dennis McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers), 2011.
8. Whitt uses this term in "Indigenous Peoples and the Cultural Politics of Knowledge" and *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledges*.
9. According to McPherson and Rabb, the polycentric perspective applies both internally and externally to the Native American worldview. Internally, it accounts for the fact that knowledge must be collaborative. Externally, it accounts for how the metaphysical and epistemological frames of the Native American worldview contribute one component of a complete metaphysical and epistemological picture that is supplemented by and with the metaphysical and epistemological frames of other worldviews. Norton-Smith uses the frame of constructivism to account for the polycentric and pluralist nature of Native epistemology.
10. That knowledge is necessarily comprised of plural perspectives is not unique to Native American epistemology. Much of Western feminist philosophy holds this tenet, but it is neither constitutive of the foundation of all of feminist philosophy, nor is it a standard position held within mainstream Eurocentric epistemology.
11. For related Western work on this issue, see Damian Cox and Michael Levine, "Believing Badly," *Philosophical Papers* 33, no. 3 (2004): 309–28; Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60, no. 3 (2000): 667–95; and William James, "Percept and Concept," *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1911), 21–60. For Western neuro-cognitive science regarding

- the social, relational, and value-centered nature of knowledge, see Vittorio Gallese, "A Neuroscientific Grasp of Concepts: From Control to Representation," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 358 (2003): 1231–40; Vittorio Gallese and George Lakoff, "The Brain's Concepts: The Role of Sensory-Motor Systems in Conceptual Knowledge," *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22 (2005) 455–79; and Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. University of Chicago Press, 2007.
12. Cordova, "Ethics: The We and the I"; Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*; McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*; and Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person & Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*.
 13. D'Arcy Rheault, *Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaaziziwin (The Way of the Good Life): An Examination of Anishinaabe Philosophy, Ethics and Traditional Knowledge* (Peterborough, Ontario: Debwevin Press, 1999), 75.
 14. John DuFour, "Ethics and Understanding," *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 36.
 15. *Ibid.*, 37.
 16. *Ibid.*, 38.
 17. Thomas Norton Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
 18. *Ibid.*, 68.
 19. Lawrence Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 107.
 20. *Ibid.*, 110.
 21. Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2000), 50.
 22. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, 112.
 23. While I will not get into specificities here, I should point out—and it is important to this line of thought—that the book could not be blue in the absence of a perceiver. Colors only happen as they exist as a property of our body's interactions with some thing. Without our color cones, there would be no colors since what exists outside of our color cones are merely untranslated light waves. For more, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
 24. If you were on another planet and out of the dress sensation loop (or you just weren't born at the time this was written), see, <https://www.wired.com/2015/02/science-one-agrees-color-dress/>.
 25. For further clarification of Native metaphysics and ontology, see Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*; Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*; Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*; Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person & Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*. See also Shay Welch, "Native American Chaos Theory and the Politics of Difference," *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Gary, Serene Khader, and Alison Stone (New York: Routledge Press, 2017), 370–81.
 26. Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*; Welch, "Native American Chaos Theory and the Politics of Difference."
 27. Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 27 italics mine.
 28. An analysis of perception itself as an action, and a particularly participatory action, is fleshed out in Noë, *Action in Perception*.
 29. Johnson, *The Body and the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*; Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*.
 30. Johnson, *The Body and the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning*, 20.
 31. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, 79.
 32. *Ibid.*, 105. The role and significance of cultural constructs and practices in embodied logic helps clarify how it is that some different cultures operate according to differing logic systems. The Native American system of logic is non-dualistic and therefore does not contain nor need the law of non-contradiction.
 33. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
 34. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 12.
 35. *Ibid.*, 13.
 36. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, 139.
 37. Lieberman demonstrates that the relationship between intuition and implicit knowledge is a recurring feedback loop. See Matthew D. Lieberman, "Intuition: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience Approach," *Psychological Bulletin* 126, no. 1 (2000): 109–37.
 38. For a general account of the differences between kinds of knowledge, see Martin Davies, "Knowledge—Explicit, Implicit, and Tacit: Philosophical Aspects," *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., vol. 13 (London: Elsevier, 2015), 74–90. For a more detailed distinction between intuition and insight, especially as it relates to implicit forms of learning, see Richard Brock, "Insight and Intuition: Two Concepts that Illuminate the Tacit in Science Education," *Studies in Science Education* 51, no. 2 (2015): 127–67.
 39. Because the notion that there is an underlying energy which organizes the world and allows us to create relations is a foundation of Native American metaphysics, most Native American languages have some version of this concept.
 40. Willie Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," *First Nation Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, ed. M. Battiste and J. Barman (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 104.
 41. Viola Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, ed. Kathleen Moore, Kurt Dean Peters, Ted Jojola, and Amber Lacy (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007). I capitalize *Usen* and *Muntou* because they are terms that identify the great energy of the universe and thus are concepts of great significance.
 42. Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*, 76.
 43. Rheault, *Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaaziziwin (The Way of the Good Life): An Examination of Anishinaabe Philosophy, Ethics and Traditional Knowledge*, 92.
 44. McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 63.
 45. *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture*, ed. Ruth Couture and Virginia McGowan (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 49.
 46. *Ibid.*, 48.
 47. Marlene Brant Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge," *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George Sefa Dei, Budd Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 24.
 48. For more on how blood memory is a function of ancestor-related collective memory, see Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007).
 49. Monique Mojica, "Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts," *Native American Performance and Representation*, ed. S. E. Wilmer (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 97.
 50. See M. Gerald Fromm, *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations* (London: Karnac Books, 2011).
 51. Shay Welch, "Radical-cum-Relational: Bridging Native Individual Autonomy and Feminist Ethics," *Philosophical Topics* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 203–23.
 52. See Carl Jung, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 9, Part 1, The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

53. Rosy Simas, "My Making of We Wait in the Darkness," *Dance Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2016): 29.
54. Cited in Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 224.
55. McPherson and Rabb, *Indian from the Inside*, 60, 62.
56. In addition to the individual and co-authored works by Lakoff and Johnson, see *Cognition and Categorization*, ed. Eleanor Roche and Barbara B. Lloyd (Hillsdale: Erlbaum Press, 1978); and Francisco Valera, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Roche, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991). Earlier analyses on the relation between phenomenology, movement, and motor skills, which serve as a jumping off point for many contemporary embodied cognition theories, include Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (New York: Routledge Press, 2012); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964 [1968]); and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1999). For example, Sheets-Johnstone remarks that movement is the mother of all cognition (253). However, she rejects the terms "embodiment" and "lived body" for "animate form."
57. The idea that metaphor has meaning beyond accounting for similarities between ideas or objects is almost completely rejected by mainstream Western Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language. One theorist in particular that is cited regularly as the paradigm of Western philosophy's resistance to the significance of metaphor is Donald Davidson. See Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 31–47.
58. In fact, studies have shown that the implementation of metaphors can purposefully activate the cognitive skills associated with those metaphors. For example, using metaphors denoting creativity can actually enhance people's ability to be creative. See, Angela K.-y Leung, Suntae Kim, Evan Polman, Lay See Ong, Lin Qiu, Jack Goncalo, and Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, "Embodied Metaphors and Creative 'Acts'," *Psychological Science* 23, no. 5 (2012): 502–09.
59. And it's worth mentioning that neither Johnson nor Lakoff are cited in Cajete's book, so one can be certain that he did not glean his understanding of the metaphoric mind from them.
60. Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, 28–30, italics mine.
61. Laurelyn Whitt, *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledges* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.
62. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Place: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 68, 85.
63. Whitt, *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples*, 35.
64. Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120–35.
65. Robert Fuller, "From Biology to Spirituality: The Emotional Dynamics of Wonder," *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Sophia Vasalou (Eugene: Pickwick Press, 2012), 67.
66. To satisfy any far-fetched, obvious philosophical objections, let me state that I do not include the telling of knowingly incorrect or inaccurate stories or lies, nor do I mean to include fables, and I put aside questions of narrative testimony by those with intense mental disabilities such as schizophrenia (which may or may not give access to other forms of truths).
67. Wendelin Küpers, "Phenomenology of Embodied Implicit and Narrative Knowing," *Journal of Knowledge Management* 9, no. 6 (2005): 16.
68. Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 77.
69. Küpers, "Phenomenology of Embodied Implicit and Narrative Knowing," 121.
70. Jacqueline Shea Murphy, "Editor's Note: Doing Indigenous Dance Today," *Dance Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2016): 7.
71. Jerry Longboat, "Dancing a Higher Truth," *Chinook Winds: Aboriginal Dance Project*, Heather Elton, ed. (Banff: The Banff Center Press, 1997), 8.
72. *Ibid.*, 9.
73. Rulan Tangen, "Dancing Earth: Seeds Rooted Plants and Foods, from Origi-Nation to Re-Generation," *Dance Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2016): 21.
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, 19.
76. Sandra Laronde, "They Give Us Their Strength," *Chinook Winds: Aboriginal Dance Project*, ed. Heather Elton (Banff: The Banff Center Press, 1997), 18–19, 21.
77. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, 106.

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Epistemic Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition of Afro-Mexicans: A Model for Native Americans?

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INTRODUCTION

Though it is well documented that some of Hernán Cortés's companions during the conquest of the Mexica (Aztec) Empire were black men¹ and that hundreds of thousands of African slaves were brought to New Spain during the colonial period and that they contributed greatly to the development of the territory,² many Mexicans nowadays maintain that there are no black people in Mexico. But how can this be the case? One of the most common accounts that is offered to explain this assertion is that the African slaves brought to New Spain progressively mixed with white Spaniards and Amerindians, thus giving rise to a *mestizo* (mixed-race) population. In fact, this explanation has also been used to support the view that there is no racism in Mexico since all the different castes that existed during the colonial period gradually vanished after the Independence through a process of *mestizaje* (i.e., race-mixing) that eventually homogenized the post-colonial Mexican population.³

However, the thesis that pervasive *mestizaje* in Mexico has brought an end to racism by dismantling the racial distinctions made during the colonial period is a myth. In particular, various scholars have argued that the process of *mestizaje* has in fact strengthened and perpetuated certain forms of racism in Mexico to the extent that, by promoting the view that all Mexicans are *mestizos*, Mexicans whose

visible markers (i.e., skin color, hair texture) depart from a certain norm are racialized in ways that push them to the margins of Mexican society.⁴

To be more specific, as the traditional narrative about modern Mexican identity typically stresses that Mexicans are descendants from Spaniards and Amerindians in different degrees of admixture, Mexicans who exhibit visible phenotypical markers associated with Afro-descendant populations often fail to be recognized as Mexicans by their own countrymen despite providing testimony about their national identity. In particular, when Afro-Mexicans (who traditionally live in isolated and impoverished rural communities in coastal states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz) venture outside their communities, Mexican civil authorities often mistake them with undocumented Caribbean or Central American immigrants. In fact, in some cases, police officers and civil servants disbelieve the testimony of Afro-Mexicans about their national identity, thus resulting in consequences that range from a denial of services in government offices to actual deportations.⁵ Given the occurrence of these situations, two pressing questions emerge: How can philosophy help us explain the systematic failure to recognize Afro-Mexicans as Mexicans? And can philosophy help to develop remedies to the treatment that Afro-Mexicans are subject to (i.e., being treated as strangers in their own country)? The pressing nature of these questions is further amplified by the fact that the treatment that Afro-Mexicans receive is not an isolated case, but rather part of a pattern of recognition failures that also afflicts other minorities in different geographic locations. In particular, Native Americans are often misrecognized as foreigners in the US by both civil authorities and average citizens.⁶

My two main goals in this paper are to provide some tentative answers to these two prior questions by using some tools developed both by feminist epistemologists and recognition theorists—namely, the concepts of meta-ignorance, epistemic injustice, and recognition—and to show how the application of these concepts to the situation of Afro-Mexicans illuminates how they are related to each other. After offering a brief account in Section 2 of how blackness was perceived in colonial times and in the post-Independence period in Mexico to provide some context, I contend in section 3 that one can effectively explain the situations that many Afro-Mexicans face (i.e., having their Mexican identity questioned by others) in virtue of the fact that other Mexicans who fail to recognize their national identity are subject to what José Medina refers as “meta-ignorance.” Using Medina’s analysis of the nature of meta-ignorance and of the circumstances in which it arises, I show that the failure of recognition which Afro-Mexicans are subject to can be accounted for in terms of the existence of a first-level ignorance about the history and the current presence of Afro-descendants in Mexico, which is compounded by a second-level ignorance about the social relevance of race in Mexico—a second-level ignorance that is manifested in the belief that racial differences are nonexistent, or, at least, irrelevant in contemporary Mexico. In addition, I also show that the application of the notions of meta-ignorance, recognition, and epistemic injustice to this case illuminates the relationship among them in

the following way: meta-ignorance creates relations of misrecognition, and these in turn promote instances of epistemic injustice (in particular, of testimonial injustice) that are directed against Afro-Mexicans. Subsequently, I show that the systematic misrecognition of Afro-Mexicans as Mexicans by many of their fellow countrymen has another deleterious effect, since it promotes instances of coerced silencing. Following Kristie Dotson, who maintains that “many forms of coerced silencing require some sort of capitulation or self-silencing on the part of the speaker,”⁷ and using Rae Langton’s insight that certain forms of speech can be considered as silencing acts since they disable the conditions to make certain assertions,⁸ I show that in the case of some Afro-Mexicans (particularly from the state of Veracruz), testimony about their own identity illustrates in certain cases the occurrence of coerced silencing given that they often refer to themselves in conversations with others as “morenos” (“swarthy”), thus foreclosing further conversation about their African ancestry.

Having done this, I then argue in section 4 that, in response to the epistemic injustice they suffer, some Afro-Mexicans (in particular, women) have engaged in activities that José Medina describes as instances of “epistemic resistance.”⁹ In particular, I show that one of these instances of epistemic resistance by Afro-Mexicans involves a struggle for recognition that I label “self-referential empowerment,” which consists in a demand to be able to self-designate rather than letting others (in particular, Mexican civil authorities) name them. Using the taxonomy of different forms of recognition developed by Axel Honneth,¹⁰ I also show in this section that the struggle for recognition that Afro-Mexicans are engaged in has a dual dimension, which involves a demand for respect of civil rights and a demand for social esteem. Finally, in section 5, I provide a brief conclusion that aims to explore to which extent some of the strategies used by Afro-Mexicans in Mexico can be modeled or replicated in the US to address the situation faced by Native Americans, and I also sketch some lines of future inquiry.

2. BLACKNESS IN MEXICO DURING COLONIAL TIMES AND IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

As I mentioned in the introduction, historians have documented extensively the vicissitudes of African men and women who were brought in large numbers to New Spain throughout the colonial period (1521–1810). In particular, Herman Bennett has maintained that by 1640, Spaniards had imported 275,000 slaves from West and Central Africa into New Spain in order to replace Amerindian populations as sources of labor,¹¹ since some groups had been decimated as a result of diseases introduced by Europeans.¹² Now, in the framework of the Spanish colonial system (which was structured on the basis of caste divisions), African slaves were perceived, as Gates and Appiah have pointed out, under a negative light, and, in virtue of this, “they were invariably placed at the bottom of the hierarchical society that the Spaniards had established.”¹³ Given their position at the bottom of the hierarchical Novohispanic society, African slaves and their descendants pursued different strategies to resist or subvert the oppression they were

subject to. In particular, while some openly revolted and escaped from plantations to remote mountainous areas where they established free settlements (*palenques*),¹⁴ others sought to undermine the colonial caste system from within by assimilating to the upper castes, learning their language and mixing progressively with Spaniards, Amerindians, and mestizos in order to climb the social ladder. This climbing was made possible in part by the fact that, in contrast to the North American English colonies, the one-drop rule did not exist in New Spain. As a result of this, while caste divisions were established and enforced by colonial authorities, their borders were rather porous and could be challenged in individual cases within the court system. Thus, while blackness was perceived within the Novohispanic colonial framework as a feature that was demoting or devaluating for individuals, it was not deemed to be a characteristic that was fixed once and for all in populations, which were considered to be capable of racial transformation over time.¹⁵

Even after the triumph of the independence movement in 1821 and the official abolition of caste divisions, phenotypical and cultural markers of blackness remained features that pushed individuals to the margins of Mexican society, making them both invisible and foreign at once. In light of this, one can then maintain, using the notion of cultural imperialism articulated by Iris Marion Young, that Afro-Mexicans have been traditionally subject to cultural imperialism, since “victims of cultural imperialism are (. . .) rendered invisible as subjects, as persons with their own perspective and group-specific experience and interests. At the same time, they are marked out, frozen into a being marked as Other, deviant in relation to the dominant norm.”¹⁶ One of the manifestations of this cultural imperialism was that although several prominent Mexican politicians and intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (in particular, Justo Sierra and Francisco Bulnes) vigorously debated how the project of building a strong and modern nation and creating a common Mexican identity should unfold, none of the proposals that were articulated acknowledged the significant presence of Afro-descendants in the territory and their economic and cultural contributions to the Mexican mosaic.¹⁷ As a result of this neglect, though the ideology of *mestizaje* (or race-mixing) was promoted by members of the Mexican intellectual and political elite such as José Vasconcelos (1925) and Manuel Gamio (1916) as a policy that that would allow Mexicans to finally turn the page on the lingering racial divisions and discriminations inherited from their colonial past, it actually operated, as Christina Sue has pointed out, as “a mechanism to whiten the country through the dilution and eventual elimination of the country’s black and indigenous populations.”¹⁸

In particular, while some photographers such as Romualdo García (1852–1930) and Agustín Casasola (1874–1938) documented during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the presence of people of visible African descent in Mexico, as Wendy Phillips has shown,¹⁹ systematic efforts were made to ignore (or, at least, downplay) the role of Afro-descendants in the construction of the Mexican nation to the point that an important theme in several Mexican movies and novels in the late 1940s,

1950s, and the early 1960s was the ignorance of one’s Black heritage.²⁰ Moreover, insofar as blackness was implicitly perceived as a stain or a badge of shame, any cultural expressions associated with it (such as certain types of culinary practices or musical compositions) were either systematically suppressed or attributed to the *mestizaje* process while deliberately ignoring or whitewashing their African roots. For instance, in the 1940s, certain regional musical expressions from Veracruz with African influence progressively became symbols of Mexican culture on the national stage while their origins were ignored, as Theodore Cohen has argued:

As “La Bamba” became a popular song in the radio, in politics and in feature films, it became a national symbol that sometimes lost any affiliation with blackness. In the mid to late 1940s the Mexico City-based radio station XEQ regularly broadcast Baquero Foster’s Suite Veracruzana No. 1 on the Sunday evening [program] “El Instituto Salvador Díaz Mirón’ Sección cultural del Casino de Veracruz.” The program celebrated the history and culture of Veracruz. . . . One commentator declared that “La Bamba” etymologically and musically originated in Andalusia, Spain. There was no reference to indigeneity or blackness.²¹

Now, considering the strength of this tremendous social pressure to negate or make invisible blackness in Mexico in the post-Independence period, I argue that, given this historical context, it is not very surprising that people of visible African descent in Mexico have been subject to forms of epistemic injustice such as disbelieving their testimony when they are asked about their nationality. In my view, this can be explained in terms of the fact that most Mexicans are subject to what José Medina has referred to as meta-ignorance.

3. RACIAL META-IGNORANCE, MISRECOGNITION, AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN MEXICO

One can explain the epistemic injustice that Afro-Mexicans are subject to when they give testimony about their national identity in terms of the presence of a meta-ignorance that is prevalent in Mexican society. In order to appreciate how this meta-ignorance affects mainstream Mexicans, let me first briefly rehearse how Medina characterizes meta-ignorance in racial relations with others. Following Medina, one can characterize meta-ignorance, which is a specific type of ignorance about one’s beliefs or cognitive gaps, by distinguishing it from another type of ignorance, which operates at the level of objects:

On the one hand, there are specific things we should know about the racialized subjects we interact with: for example, how they think about themselves, how society thinks of them, the history and current status of the social positionality of their group, and the history and current status of the social relationality that binds the perceived and perceiving subject together. One may fail to know all kinds of specific things in these areas; and these

failures constitute (some degree of) *first-order or object-level of racial ignorance*. But, on the other hand, specific mistaken beliefs or lack of beliefs about the racial others with whom we interact may be rooted in and supported by very general attitudes about them and about social relationality: for example, the inability to see racial others in their differences—*blindness to racial differences*; or the assumption that racial differences are irrelevant to one’s life—*blindness to the social relevance of race*. Here we would have a *second-order or meta-level ignorance*, which is what I have termed *racial meta-blindness*: blindness to one’s blindness, insensitivity to insensitivity.²²

In the case of Afro-Mexicans, I contend that the epistemic injustice that they endure vis-à-vis their testimony about their national identity is the product of a racial meta-ignorance that most other Mexicans are victims of. This type of meta-ignorance arises in virtue of the fact that, as the school curriculum has traditionally privileged the narrative according to which modern Mexicans are the descendants of Spaniards and Amerindians in various degrees of admixture, most Mexicans nowadays associate the presence of the descendants of African slaves in Mexico with the colonial period, and thus fail to consider them as part of the fabric of contemporary Mexican society.²³ This type of ignorance, which is a first-order or object-level ignorance insofar as it pertains to the current status of the descendants of African slaves, has been compounded by the fact that most Mexicans tend to believe, given the pervasive myth that the process of *mestizaje* has homogenized Mexican society and erased the racial divisions imposed by the colonial caste system, that racial differences have either vanished in contemporary Mexico, or that they have become irrelevant in everyday life. Thus, the development of a second-order or meta-level racial ignorance has led most Mexicans to ignore the social relevance of race in Mexico, and the effects of this ignorance are manifested in various facets of life. For instance, given that this meta-ignorance erases racial differences by perpetuating the belief that Mexicans are racially homogenous, it shapes common patterns of social identification by systematically making mainstream Mexicans associate phenotypical markers of blackness (e.g., skin color or hair texture) with foreignness.²⁴ And since Afro-Mexicans are often misidentified as foreigners, they tend to be subject to a deep credibility deficit, which can be a type of epistemic injustice,²⁵ because they are often taken to be undocumented Caribbean or Central American migrants that use Mexico as a platform to ultimately reach the US when they travel outside their communities.²⁶

Considering this, the situation that Afro-Mexicans endure casts light on the relationship between the notions of meta-ignorance, recognition, and epistemic injustice. The racial meta-ignorance that has traditionally been created and maintained in Mexico through the ideology of an homogenizing *mestizaje* underpins a particular relation of misrecognition, and this failure of recognition in turn supports the emergence of instances of epistemic injustice in which the testimony that Afro-Mexicans give about their national identity is systematically doubted or challenged by other Mexicans. The illumination of the relations

between these three notions is of crucial importance because it suggests that failures of recognition, which are often driven by forms of ignorance, promote instances of epistemic injustice. And, if this is indeed the case, this is potentially quite useful since the nature of the relationships between the three notions suggests that, in order to remedy the systematic instances of epistemic injustice created by misrecognition, we have to push back against the forms of ignorance that create and perpetuate failures of recognition.

Having clarified this, I want to examine some reactions that Afro-Mexicans display to the epistemic injustice they are subject to. In particular, I argue that one usual type of reaction that Afro-Mexicans have developed involves developing certain attitudes that correspond to what Dotson calls “coerced silencing,” which obtains when “a speaker capitulates to the pressure to not introduce unsafe, risky testimony.”²⁷ It is my contention that a form of coerced silencing can be appreciated in the case of certain Afro-Mexicans, when they are questioned about their identity. For instance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. has provided, in his recent book *Black in Latin America*, a clear example of this coerced silencing among some Afro-Mexicans when narrating a conversation that one of his hosts in Mexico, Sagrario Cruz-Carretero (who is an Afro-Mexican professor at the Universidad Veracruzana), had with her grandfather in her late teens. As Gates points out in his narration, when Cruz-Carretero traveled to Cuba, she came to discover that “my family was black—because [Cubans] looked like my grandfather, like my father. I started tasting the food and I said ‘Oh, my God—this is the food my grandmother prepares at home’.”²⁸ After describing to Gates Jr. the realization of her Black heritage and the feelings that this generated in her, Cruz-Carretero subsequently narrates to him the interactions with her grandfather: “I came back to Mexico and I asked my grandpa why he never told me we were Black. And he told me, holding my hand, “We are not Black; we’re *morenos*.”²⁹

I contend that the assertion of Cruz-Carretero’s grandfather is a clear case of coerced silencing. Indeed, if we agree with the claim, made by Rae Langton, that “it is possible to use speech to disable speakers and possible to prevent them from satisfying the felicity conditions for some illocutions they may want to perform,”³⁰ one may argue that, in claiming a *moreno* identity, Cruz-Carretero’s grandfather aimed to disable the line of inquiry undertaken by her regarding the family’s African ancestry. This form of coerced silencing is prevalent among many old Afro-Mexicans, who often prefer to pass as Indigenous rather than accepting a Black identity. Indeed, since indigeneity is acknowledged by virtually all as a familiar and recognizable feature of individuals within the Mexican social fabric (in spite of being a negative social marker) while blackness is perceived as a foreign and potentially disruptive element, the deployment of this strategy enables its users to push back partially against failures of recognition of their Mexican identity since being *moreno* does not preclude (as being Black very often does) being Mexican in the collective imagination. However, despite the tremendous social pressure that has traditionally existed to hide, downplay, or ignore blackness in Mexico, it is important to

emphasize that not all Afro-Mexicans have bowed to this pressure and that certain groups (particularly, associations of women from the Costa Chica region that overlaps Guerrero and Oaxaca in the Pacific coast) have in the last three decades developed various attitudes and actions that can be properly considered as constituting a type of epistemic resistance.

4. 'SOMOS AFRO-MEXICANAS': SELF-REFERENTIAL EMPOWERMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF EPISTEMIC RESISTANCE DEVELOPED BY AFRO-MEXICAN WOMEN

As I mentioned at the end of the previous section, in response to the traditional social pressure to either conceal or ignore their African heritage, a number of Afro-Mexicans from the Costa Chica region (particularly, women) have engaged in actions to push back against the epistemic injustice that they suffer. Echoing Medina, I maintain that these actions are forms of epistemic resistance since they involve "the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains this structure."³¹

One of the axes pursued by Afro-Mexican activists has consisted in pressuring institutions of higher education such as the National School of Anthropology and History to modify the school and university curriculum to make visible the African heritage of Mexico. This is of great importance given that, as Carlos López Beltrán and Vivette García Deister have emphasized, most of the anthropological and medical research undertaken in Mexico during the twentieth century was focused almost exclusively on Amerindian and mestizo groups, leaving aside Afro-Mexican groups whose invisibility was then further reinforced and perpetuated.³² Considering this, one of the main victories of the epistemic resistance led by Afro-Mexican groups has been the establishment in May 2017 of a UNESCO Chair at the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) that is devoted to the study of Afro-descendants in Mexico and Central America.³³

In addition to the creation of spaces for the study of the African diasporic experience in Mexico, another axis of epistemic resistance has been the struggle of Afro-Mexicans to be recognized in the national census and to be able to choose how they want to be named. In my view, this has been the most difficult struggle because it aims to roll back deliberate and systematic efforts by the Mexican state to eliminate racial distinctions in the twentieth century. Indeed, after the 1921 national census, the Mexican government stopped collecting data about the racial status of the different regional subpopulations that inhabit Mexico under the assumption that using racial categories in the census promoted and perpetuated racism.³⁴ However, although this deliberate ignorance vis-à-vis any racial origin or status of people was well intended, it had some perverse consequences since it made Afro-Mexicans demographically and legally invisible.

As a result of this, Afro-Mexican communities (which are still nowadays among the most socially marginalized and

impoverished in Mexico, often lacking electricity, running water, sanitation, or basic health-care services) have been traditionally disadvantaged with respect to Amerindian communities. Indeed, Amerindian communities have been usually recognized by the Mexican state on the basis of linguistic affiliation and, in virtue of this, data have been collected in the national census concerning the lacks and lags that they suffer. Because of this, the Mexican government was able to devise and implement development policies which, though exhibiting a very mixed track record, have been at least aimed to alleviate the marginalized and impoverished situation of Amerindian groups. However, since Afro-Mexicans became demographically and legally invisible as a group (even though individuals were singled out as potential undocumented foreigners) in virtue of the cultural imperialism they were subject to, no targeted efforts were made to improve their material conditions.

In virtue of this, some Afro-Mexican women have developed a form of epistemic resistance that I call *referential self-empowerment*. This form of epistemic resistance has consisted in organizing their communities to pressure the Mexican government to include, once again, racial designations in the national census to be able to identify them and, rather than letting the government impose certain categories to designate them, to retain the right of how they want to be named and recognized. And as one of their spokeswomen, Yolanda Camacho, explained in a 2016 interview, after organizing a debate in their communities on this issue, they agreed that they want to be named and politically recognized as "Afro-Mexicanas" rather than as "costeñas," "morenasm," "negras," "mascogas," or "jarochas" because "we are descendants of Africa, but we live in Mexico, we were born in Mexico, we are in Mexico."³⁵

In virtue of this, the process that Afro-Mexican women have followed to resist the epistemic injustice consists in articulating a positive double identity (as descendants of Africa and as Mexicans) and demanding that they are recognized as possessing this double identity. As a result of the pressure exerted by various Afro-Mexican NGOs, the Mexican government allowed a question about racial self-adscription to be included in its 2015 national census so that people of African descent in Mexico could be identified as Afro-Mexicans if they so chose. In undertaking these actions, I contend that Afro-Mexican women activists have implicitly adopted a general recommendation put forth by Young for victims of cultural imperialism, which is that "having formed a positive self-identity through organization and public cultural expression, those oppressed by cultural imperialism can then confront the dominant culture with demands for recognition of their specificity."³⁶

It is important to point out here that the demands for recognition that Afro-Mexicans make have a dual nature: as Camacho emphasizes in the interview, they want to be recognized specifically as *descendants of Africa* and as *Mexicans*. This is important because the recognition that they demand has a double dimension. On one side, Afro-Mexicans want to be recognized as Mexican citizens who are entitled, just as any other Mexicans, to the same civil and social rights that their fellow countrymen enjoy. In virtue of this, one aspect of the Afro-Mexicans' demand for

recognition involves a specific pattern of intersubjective recognition that depends on being accepted in a community of equal citizens where all are entitled to the same civil and social rights. This form of recognition, which Honneth labels “legal recognition,” is important since it is tied to the acknowledgment of the obligation to respect certain rights. In particular, as Honneth remarks, “in being legally recognized, one is now respected with regard not only to the abstract capacity to orient oneself vis-à-vis moral norms, but also to the concrete human feature that one deserves the social standard of living necessary for this.”³⁷

On the other side, Afro-Mexicans want to be recognized as descendants of Africa who are different in their specificity from other groups of Mexicans. In virtue of this, the other aspect of the Afro-Mexicans’ demand for recognition involves a different pattern of intersubjective recognition that depends on becoming socially esteemed for possessing certain characteristics that differentiate one’s particular group from others while contributing, nonetheless, to the collective realization of societal goals. This form of recognition, which Honneth terms “social esteem,” is also important since it is tied to the development of a positive self-valuation that drives individuals to acknowledge and take pride in the contributions that their specific characteristics allow them to make to society. Indeed, as Honneth observes, “people can feel themselves to be ‘valuable’ only when they know themselves to be recognized for accomplishments that they precisely do not share in an undifferentiated manner with others.”³⁸

For Afro-Mexican activists, achieving these two forms of recognition is a very important step, given that when Afro-Mexicans have gained not only legal recognition but also social esteem from other Mexicans, they will not only become visible as an important group that that has been (and is) a crucial part of the Mexican nation, but they will also be able, as individuals, to develop symmetrical relations of solidarity with other Mexicans. Thus, for Yolanda Camacho and other activists, the struggles for legal recognition and social esteem (which are two parallel forms of epistemic resistance) are of the utmost importance since they view them as gateways to the achievement of a true social equality. Because of this, they clearly accept the insight of Young, who has maintained that “groups cannot be socially equal unless their specific experience, culture and social contributions are publicly affirmed and recognized.”³⁹ Indeed, according to these activists, once there are actual data on the total number of Afro-Mexicans, the locations where they live, their levels of health and educational attainment, Afro-Mexican communities will be in a better position to demand from the Mexican government targeted intervention policies to improve their material conditions.

5. CONCLUSION

Let me recap. I have argued that, in response to the epistemic injustice that they have been traditionally subject to when they are questioned by other Mexicans (in particular, by police officers and other civil authorities) about the intersection of their national and racial identities (which is an epistemic injustice that is rooted in a relation of misrecognition), Afro-Mexicans deploy at least two different responses. While some resort to some form of

coerced silencing, others have developed certain types of epistemic resistance in order to create beneficial epistemic friction that would force the vast majority of other Mexicans to acknowledge their existence and recognize them as both descendants of Africa and as Mexicans. As I mentioned in the introduction, I am interested in exploring briefly whether some of these strategies can be replicated in the US to address the situation of Native Americans, which is very similar to that of Afro-Mexicans. Indeed, various scholars have pointed out that “what differentiates Native Americans [from other minorities] is that they uniquely experience absolute invisibility in many domains in American life,”⁴⁰ and this invisibility causes them to be misrecognized as foreigners (in particular, as Mexicans). Now, though Native Americans have been recognized in the US census for a longer period than Afro-Mexicans have in the Mexican census, they are subject to policies by the US federal government that have made them invisible to the extent that they usually have to prove a certain degree (or blood quantum) of Nativeness to be recognized as Native Americans.⁴¹ This is particularly problematic, as Native Americans themselves stress, because these policies not only divide them against each other, but they also promote in the long run a dilution of Nativeness, thus paving the way to a situation in which, once they are erased, the federal government will no longer have to respect treaties and will be able to take over Native American lands and resources.⁴² In virtue of this, perhaps a way in which Native Americans could exert epistemic resistance against the treatment they are subject to would consist in collectively organizing (as Afro-Mexicans have done) to pressure the US federal government to change the ways in which they are recognized at the national and state level. In future work, I intend to explore whether other potential strategies (such as collective organizing to put pressure on film and other media industries to change the traditional representations of Afro-Mexicans in Mexico and of Native Americans in the US) could be effective to change the relations of misrecognition that give rise to epistemic injustices on both sides of the US-Mexico border.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 2017 California Roundtable on Philosophy and Race at Emory University and at the 2018 APA Pacific Meeting in San Diego. I would like to thank the audiences that were present at both events for their generous comments and unwavering enthusiasm about this project. In particular, I am deeply grateful for the encouraging feedback and support of Falguni Sheth, Mickaella Perina, Janine Jones, Sybol Anderson, Taryn Jordan, José Medina, Michael Monahan, Lara Trout, Carlos Sánchez, Lori Gallegos, Brian Burkhart, and Gregory Pappas. Last, but not least, I want to thank the editors of the *APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy* (in particular, Agnes Curry and Andrea Clarke-Sullivan) for all the suggestions they offered to improve this paper.

NOTES

1. Matthew Restall, “Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America,” *The Americas*, 57, no. 2 (October 2000): 171–205.
2. See, for example, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: estudio etnohistórico* (Fondo de Cultura Económica: México, DF, 1946).
3. For a careful analysis of how *mestizaje* has operated to create and perpetuate a series of racist beliefs and practices in Mexico, see Mónica Moreno Figueroa, “Distributed Intensities: Whiteness, *mestizaje*, and the Logics of Mexican Racism,” *Ethnicities* 10, no. 3 (2010): 387–401.

4. Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
5. For further details, see the reportage "Somos Negros" made by the Mexican TV channel Televisa, which was aired in 2013 in the news segment *Primero Noticias* and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrvjN1z1WhY>.
6. This is clearly illustrated by the treatment received by Kanewakeron Thomas Gray and Skanahwati Lloyd Gray, two Mohawk brothers who were detained by police officers on April 30, 2018, while participating in a campus tour at CSU-Fort Collins for prospective students and their families after the mother of another prospective student called 911 to have them questioned since they looked out of place and foreign (in the phone call, she told the dispatcher: "I think they are Hispanic, one for sure"). For further details, see <https://safety.colostate.edu/reported-incidents-of-bias/>. In addition, it is important to notice that the misrecognition of Native Americans as foreigners is underscored by the structure of Harvard's Implicit Association test for bias against American Indians, which is available at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>. (I thank Agnes Curry for bringing this to my attention).
7. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia*, 26, no. 2 (2011): 244.
8. Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1993): 293–330.
9. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
10. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
11. Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness. A History of Afro-Mexico*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 4.
12. The traditional narrative stresses that the dramatic decline of Amerindian populations in New Spain (and in the rest of the hemisphere) was due to epidemics such as that of *cocoliztli* in 1545–1548. However, some historians, such as Andrés Reséndez, have recently provided a far more nuanced picture according to which the decline was also due to the fact that Amerindians groups were subject to slave-like treatment under the *encomienda* system. See Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2016).
13. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Africans in Colonial Mexico," in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd ed., Vol. II (2005), 167.
14. The most famous example of a free Black settlement in New Spain is the one founded by the runaway slave Gaspar Yanga. For further discussion, see Sagrario Cruz-Carretero, "Yanga and the Origins of Black Mexico" *Review of Black Political Economy* 33, no. 1 (2005): 73–77.
15. A recurrent theme in *casta* paintings (pintura de castas) made during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is that, though improper mixes lead to offspring that tumble down the social ladder, the proper mixes lead instead to a progressive improvement of one's descendants who may become, after several generations, white. In light of this, *casta* paintings had not only a descriptive role of portraying different mixes, but also a prescriptive dimension. For further discussion of this, see Magali Carrera, *Imagining Identity in the New Spain: Race, Lineage and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).
16. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 123.
17. See, in particular, Sierra, "México Social y Político," and Bulnes, *El porvenir de las naciones latinoamericanas ante las recientes conquistas de Europa y Norteamérica. Estructura y evolución de un continente*.
18. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico*, 65.
19. Wendy E. Philips, "Representations of the Black Body in Mexican Visual Art: Evidence of an African Historical Presence or a Cultural Myth?" *Journal of Black Studies*, 39, no. 5 (2009): 774–79. It is important to stress here that, though photography has had historically an important role in documenting the existence of Afro-Mexicans as Phillips shows, it also has been used in ways that either perpetuate their "otherness" by representing them as "primitives" or that emphasize their integration to mainstream Mexican society by "taming" distinctively African features such as hairstyles. For a thorough discussion of this, see Mariana Ortega, "Photographic Representation of Racialized Bodies: Afro-Mexicans, the Visible and the Invisible" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 2 (2013): 163–89.
20. For further discussion of this theme (and, in particular, for a detailed analysis of two case studies, the movie *Angelitos Negros* from 1948 and the novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* from 1962), see Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas, *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), chapters 8 and 9.
21. Theodore W. Cohen, "Among Races, Nations and Diasporas: Genealogies of 'La Bamba' in Mexico and the United States," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 35 (2017): 63–64.
22. José Medina, "Color-Blindness, Meta-Ignorance, and the Racial Imagination," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 35.
23. Rodrigo Zárate, "Somos Mexicanos, no somos Negros: Educar para visibilizar el racismo 'anti-negro,'" *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva* 11, no. 1 (2017): 72. In particular, "De modo sistemático y consistente a través del tiempo, la pedagogía nacionalista del Estado ha construido como inexistente la afrodescendencia en el territorio nacional, y se ha limitado a señalar la presencia de esclavos en los procesos de conquista y colonización emprendidos por los españoles en América," 58.
24. A clear example of this association consists in the fact that, as Sagrario Cruz-Carretero has pointed out, dark-skinned Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz are often referred to as "cubanos" (i.e., "Cubans"). See her presentation at the national colloquium "¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?" ("How do we want to call ourselves?") on April 17, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-wfYVXKN88>.
25. Miranda Fricker has argued that credibility deficits that some people suffer in virtue of their social identities constitute instances of epistemic injustice, which are injustices "in which someone is wronged in her capacity as a knower." Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.
26. This misrecognition is further reinforced by the fact that, in recent years, a growing number of Cubans have traveled to Mexico in order to reach the US more easily and request asylum. See the ABC news article by Esteban Roman published on October 12, 2012 and available at https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/cuban-immigrants-entering-us-mexico-spikes-400-percent/story?id=17516832.
27. Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 245.
28. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Black in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 64.
29. *Ibid.*, 65.
30. Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," 319–20.
31. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*, 3.
32. Carlos López Beltrán, Carlos and Vivette García Deister, "Aproximaciones científicas al mestizo mexicano," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 20, no. 2 (2013): 391–410.
33. For further details on this, see the official announcement made by the INAH as well as portions of the inaugural lecture by Alberto Barrow, which is available at <http://www.inah.gob.mx/es/boletines/6138-instauran-la-catedra-unesco-afrodescendientes-en-mexico-y-centroamerica>.
34. For further discussion of this, and for a detailed historical analysis of various shifts in the methodologies employed in the realization of national censuses in Mexico, see Emiko Saldivar and Casey Walsh, "Racial and Ethnic Identities in Mexican Statistics," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 3 (2014): 455–75.

35. In order to appreciate the crucial importance of the issue of self-identification for Afro-Mexican women, see the interview made by journalist Lulú Barrera in the internet TV channel *Rompeviento TV* of two Afro-Mexican activists, Yolanda Camacho and Patricia Ramírez, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1JiQsKX5wo>.
36. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 155.
37. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, 117.
38. *Ibid.*, 125.
39. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 174.
40. Peter Leavitt, Rebecca Covarrubias, Yvonne Perez, and Stephanie Fryberg, "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (2015): 41.
41. It is important to stress here that there are some tribes that recognize documented genealogical connection to those whose names were on the 1934 rolls, even if that puts them below blood quantum levels that would kick them out of other tribes. For further discussion of the multi-layered legal complexities pertaining to this issue, see the blog post by Paul Spruhan published on February 27, 2018, which is available at <https://blog.harvardlawreview.org/warren-trump-and-the-question-of-native-american-identity/>. (I thank Agnes Curry for bringing this issue to my attention).
42. For further discussion of this, see the documentary by Michèle Stephenson and Brian Young, "A Conversation with Native Americans on Race," which is available at <https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000005352074/a-conversation-with-native-americans-on-race.html>.

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BOOK REVIEW

Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America

Kyle T. Mays (SUNY Press, 2018). 194 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4384-6945-4 (Hardcover, 2018); 978-1-4384-6946-1 (Paperback, 2018).

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This compact, engaging book operates at a number of cultural intersections. Over the course of five chapters, along with an introduction and conclusion, Kyle T. Mays provides an academic study of a musical subgenre that is about as far from the proverbial ivory tower as one can get, at least in North America. Mays's primary focus, the character and contours of Indigenous hip hop, highlights a site of cross-cultural pollination—sometimes good, sometimes not—between Native peoples and Black Americans. He introduces us to rappers who employ artistic and aesthetic techniques that have great currency in popular culture expressly to resist settler colonialism. He considers how Indigenous feminists' challenges to heteropatriarchy and hypermasculinity, prevalent as they are in hip hop culture, can serve as a corrective to ailing aspects of Indigenous masculinity. And he concludes that Indigenous hip hop reveals there to be far less tension than we may assume between embracing modernity and adhering to tradition. I focus on the last of these issues first.

MODERNITY AND TRADITION

Being modern is typically associated with being white, Mays contends, and with comfortably finding one's niche in present times. "Being Indigenous means being nonwhite [. . .] and lacking the ability to live in a world that has passed [one] by—at least that is how the narrative goes" (13). This narrative is ambient in settler culture. It's frequently deployed quite overtly to render Indigenous peoples invisible, primarily in order to dispossess them of their land. Indigenous artists seek to unsettle this narrative expressly "to position themselves as modern people" (18), not just for personal edification but as part of a larger struggle for Native sovereignty.

Embracing modernity isn't an act of assimilation or capitulation, at least in this context. While it's hardly useful to ally oneself with "certain products of modernity, including colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and so forth" (24), the language of modernity also supports a discourse of resistance that serves to remind us that while we may be products of colonialism, we needn't be bound by it.¹ We see this discourse deployed today by members of such movements as #NoDAPL, #MeToo, and #BlackLivesMatter. It also permits us to acknowledge and appreciate that there are countless ways to be Indigenous, Mays states, that expectations of what it means to uphold tradition can fit within prototypical modern contexts.

Take, for example, the fact that most Native people in Canada and the United States live in cities. "The 'urban' is supposedly where premodern Native people go, lose their 'traditions,' and bring back the negative aspects of cities to the rez, which [negatively] impacts social relations," Mays remarks (2). There are a number of problematic assumptions at work here. The author highlights two. The first is that Native people are constitutionally ill-suited for urban life.² They are perpetual outsiders who only live in cities in such great numbers because of the enactment of policies like the Relocation Act of 1956, which was designed to force assimilation by severing ancestral ties. The second is that exposure to Black culture is detrimental to Native people, "who are supposed to be pristine, innocent, stoic" (3). This is partially because of rampant poverty in the inner city (as if this too isn't the result of government policy) and partially because Black and Latinx cultures—typified in the media by violence, drug use, and gang activity—are themselves perceived as retrograde and dangerous, including by some Native people (125).

Aside from the fact that the latter assumption perpetuates a form of lateral hostility that only serves to strengthen settler colonialism, it also does a genuine disservice to the idea of a quintessentially modern way that Indigenous people can uphold, and even strengthen, their traditions. Traditions aren't static. Indigenous hip hoppers are exploring new ways into them, members of the artist collective Beat Nation note (13). In the process, they're enacting "ways of being and knowing in the world that are informed by our ancestors," states Scott Richard Lyons, "but not in such a way that makes us relics of the past, participating in the colonial imagination constructed by settlers" (quoted on 23-24). And they're working, indicates the artist Dreezus, to build bridges and break down misconceptions between Indigenous people who live in cities and those who live on reservations (33).

Consider, too, how Indigenous hip hop serves to disrupt settler fantasies about "authentic" Indigenous representations, which, in part, have been appropriated and commodified through the use of mascots. Citing the artist David "Gordo" Strickland, Mays states that while hip hop may be rooted most firmly in Black culture, "the spirit of indigeneity" has been there from the beginning. Strickland's "metaphoric reasoning is simple," Mays adds: "the drummer serves as a deejay, the singers and storytellers are the rappers. Thus, we see the collusion of modernity and 'tradition' easily adapted to contemporary times" (37). Perhaps this is why Indigenous hip hoppers, Tall Paul among them, have found success encouraging young people to learn their Native tongue and, more broadly, asserting their peoples' right to their own voices employed in speaking their own language to express with their own beats and rhymes what it means to be Indigenous.

INDIGENOUS FEMINISM AND MASCULINITY

While Mays asserts that Indigenous men like himself "should strive . . . to continue to learn from our grandmothers, aunts, cousins, nieces, and non-gender binary people" (68), he is adamant that Indigenous feminism isn't intrinsically tied to gendered bodies. Instead, it's a generalizable stance that promotes care for one's community, including non-

Indigenous relatives. Women, though, are more likely to maintain this stance than are men, and both men and their communities suffer as a result of men's reluctance. This isn't a moral failing on the part of men, Mays maintains. Still, the responsibility inevitably lies with them to resurrect healthier, empowering, feminism-friendly forms of masculinity. While hip hop artists are all too frequently heteropatriarchal, alternative voices—Indigenous voices—are coming to the fore.

Where do the heteropatriarchal tendencies in hip hop come from? Black masculinity has been shaped for centuries by racialization. Black male selfhood is itself a product of white-supremacist patriarchy, bell hooks asserts. It "is the image of the brute—untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling."³ Framing Black masculinity in this way isn't just a means to control Black men's bodies but to justify their destruction at white hands, Mays notes. We've seen this scenario play out time and again in recent years with the deaths of unarmed Black men and boys at the hands of the police. (This phenomenon is nothing new, of course. In the age of the smartphone, it's simply more routinely been captured on video.) Duly internalized, the racialization of their bodies bolsters the presumption among Black men and boys that manhood requires visceral toughness, including the willingness to engage in deathly violence and to assert control over female bodies.⁴

Indigenous masculinity is racialized, too, but it's also treated by settlers as an anachronism. Indigenous men may have a proud warrior past, Mays comments, but they've been rendered powerless by settlers "taming" a continent—the very words Trump used during a recent commencement speech at the US Naval Academy.⁵ Both this sense of pride and its conquest are represented by the pervasive, often stereotyped, Indigenous symbolism and imagery throughout settler culture. The dispossession of Native lands coincides with the appropriation of the Native countenance.

Indigenous feminism provides particularly fertile ground for Indigenous men to reclaim and refashion their masculinity in the fight against these settler practices, Mays argues:

In reimagining Native masculinity, we must realize that we do not need to rely on the Western idea of heterosexual social relations. In fact, we should embrace all types of families, however it becomes necessary to raise an Indigenous child in the modern world, where they can be Indigenous and healthy. Above all, Indigenous young men need to know that they can love themselves, their communities, and their people, while performing progressive forms of masculinity that uplift their communities. (77)

While Mays seems to suggest that Indigenous masculinity is tied to gendered bodies in a way that Indigenous feminism is not (is the difference a matter of the *-ity* and the *-ism?*), I don't see why this should be the case. While the female artist Eekwol is a staunch defender of Indigenous women's agency, for example, she emphasizes the need for women, men, and, yes, two-spirit people to reengage with their communities and acknowledge one another as sources of

mutual support. For his part, Frank Waln emphasizes the importance of Indigenous men walking with, beside, and, when appropriate, behind, Indigenous women. He uses beats and rhymes to unpack his own latent patriarchy as openly and honestly as he can (119).

Eekwol and Waln hereby both stand as "progressive warriors." While they acknowledge the ways in which hip hop can be less than socially conscious, they actively "question the imposition of patriarchy and the relegation of Native women" (75) within the genre. Again, the goal here isn't merely to refashion the genre but to facilitate a form of Native sovereignty fit for modernity. This, in part, is what it means "to teach the next generation to be more progressive and loving in our social relations," Mays remarks. "Indeed, if Indigenous masculinity is going to be anything worthwhile in the twenty-first century, then it needs to be rooted in care for community and love of humanity" (68).

To what extent Mays's visions of Indigenous feminism and Indigenous masculinity actually differ is an open question. So is their applicability as a result. Perhaps it would help if we heard more from Indigenous female hip hop artists. Eekwol is the only artist he quotes, although there's a photo of Miss Chief Rocka in a chapter on the fashion of Indigenous hip hop to provide an example of "Native bling." Nor is there much representation of rappers from the Indigenous LGBTQ+ community. This provides a worthwhile avenue for further exploration.

BLACKNESS AND INDIGENEITY

Indigenous hip hoppers routinely appropriate linguistic, sartorial, and musical styles from their Black counterparts. This is unavoidable insofar as hip hop is most firmly rooted in Black culture. While it's neither malicious nor invidious, it nevertheless must be made explicit, Mays states. Otherwise, Indigenous hip hoppers risk repeating the same forms of unacknowledging cooptation that have routinely occurred as Black hip hop styles have become pervasive in settler culture.

The artistic endeavors of Indigenous rappers both are and aren't a "Black thing," as Frank Waln puts it (124). The influence of Black (and, to a lesser extent, Latinx) artists is obvious to anyone familiar with the musical genre. Again, it's unavoidable, and there's no salient reason to avoid it. Black language gives hip hop its particular vibe and power. It serves as a stark rejection of the normalization of "standard" English. Geneva Smitherman⁶ asserts that it's both linguistic and stylistic, a performative form of resistance against racial subjugation. While paying respect to hip hop's cultural roots, Indigenous artists can employ linguistic crossover (and sartorial and musical crossover too) to resist colonial subjugation. So too can they meld these styles with traditional Indigenous musicality and attire, as Supaman does in the video for "Prayer Loop Song," to express their particular mode of modern indigeneity.

Tensions between blackness and indigeneity in hip hop culture persist, though. In the early days of hip hop, Pow Wow, a member of the Soul Sonic Force, led by Afrika Bambaata, wore a ceremonial headdress. So did Pharrell

Williams, a regular collaborator with black rappers, on the cover of *Elle* in 2014. The Grand Hustle Gang uses a chief head as the symbol for its brand. And in 2004, André 3000 of Outkast “dressed up as an ‘Indian,’ and scantily dressed women emerged out of a large teepee” (87) during a televised performance on the Grammy Awards. “The Natives are getting truly restless,” he muttered, as his song began.

These depictions are complicated, Mays remarks. Perhaps like other non-Indigenous people the artists are unaware of Native genocide in North America. Perhaps they “find something noble in Native histories, a white settler masculine version, where they desire to align themselves with being a chief, the best artist in the game” (51). And maybe, just maybe, young men trapped in the ghetto are expressing solidarity with those trapped on the reservation. But redfacing is redfacing, he concludes, including when it’s executed by Indigenous rappers, as Chief does (in the process of objectifying Native women) in the video for “Blowed” with Snoop Lion (formerly Snoop Dogg). It’s unacceptable on its face, a form of complicity with settler colonialism. Being at the forefront of the fight for racial justice doesn’t excuse being in the wrong when it comes to the fight for Indigenous humanity and sovereignty.

Fortunately, Indigenous artists also are finding creative ways to reimagine Black-Indigenous relations in hip hop. In one song, for instance, rapper SouFy highlights that “black labor plus red land equals white gold.” This illustrates “how white supremacy and settler colonialism can operate in parallel, impacting two groups treated differently historically, at the same time,” Mays states. “It is also a reminder of that painful history, and a call to action for those folks to get together” (111–12).

“WARRIORS WITHOUT WEAPONS” AND THE STRUGGLE FOR VISIBILITY

In his wide-ranging conclusion, Mays hints at a number of areas in which Indigenous rappers can serve as “warriors without weapons” (75), a term he uses in another context but that’s equally fitting here. Mays remarks that “The two major goals of Indigenous hip hop artists are obtaining Native sovereignty and asserting themselves as modern Native people. [. . .] Other groups use hip hop to assert their humanity; Indigenous people have to convince others that they exist” (5). There are many—too many—avenues for them to do so.

More work must be done to foster antiracist-anticolonialist alliances. Standing against the construction of pipelines and police brutality are but two forms of activism about which artists can speak. They are well positioned in their respective communities to take a firm stand against the kleptocratic and repressive practices of both the US and Canadian governments and their affiliates. Indeed, taking a firm anticolonialist stance is entirely compatible with antiracism, and vice versa.

Indigenous artists also must step up for their communities, Mays insists, in part by acknowledging the ways in which Indigenous men reproduce regressive practices of settler culture. The “restoration of progressive masculinities and

gender performances” (135) includes taking up the cause of the thousands of missing and murdered Native women in North America. Combatting youth suicide, the erasure of urban Indigenous voices, and harmful relations between human and other-than-human beings also deserve their attention. Given what Mays offers here, Indigenous artists even have a powerful pedagogical role to play in adding depth and nuance to both Native and Hip Hop Studies. It will be interesting to see how the involvement of more Indigenous artists in these various forms of advocacy and activism plays out academically, musically, and culturally.

Mays provides a good deal to work with philosophically as well, even if his considerations only scratch the surface. He insists, for example, on defending modernity as a basis for Native identity. But with the debate over the merits of *post-modernity* seemingly having long since run its course among academics, what is it about modernity that should hold such charm? Perhaps the term is just a stand-in for living—and being visible *and* being heard—in contemporary times. Perhaps also there’s something powerful about linking Indigeneity with modernity that has yet to be made explicit.

Mays’s discussion of the revitalizing prospects offered by Indigenous feminism deserves more attention too. And it’s not just the fate of Indigenous masculinity that’s at stake. Women, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have played a (if not *the*) central role in establishing and scaling up every currently active progressive movement. Feminists—elders, activists, scholars—today are vocal defenders of men, themselves, and the land. Now, what resources do feminists have at their disposal to decolonize popular culture? Mays offers a discursive foothold for a much broader conversation.

Lastly, *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes* should find a welcome audience among instructors across the humanities, particularly for courses involving cultural criticism. Chapters are modular in their construction; each one can be studied on its own. The text also lends itself well to integration with multimedia. This makes it user-friendly, particularly for undergraduates.

NOTES

1. Scott Richard Lyons, “Actually Existing Indian Nations: Modernity, Diversity, and the Future of Native American Studies,” *American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 294–312.
2. Hilary N. Weaver, “Urban and Indigenous: The Challenges of Being a Native American in the City,” *Journal of Community Practice* 20 (2012): 470–88.
3. bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xii.
4. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness* (New York: Free Press, 2010); and Aimé Ellis, *If We Must Die: From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).
5. Jason Le Miere, “Donald Trump Says ‘Our Ancestors Tamed a Continent’ and ‘We Are Not Going to Apologize for America,’” *Newsweek*, May 25, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-tame-continent-america-945121>.
6. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986); Geneva Smitherman, *Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans* (New York: Routledge, 2006).