

The result was that by 1950, American whiteness was no longer what it had been in 1850. If whiteness had not undergone this change, America would have already been considered a minority-majority country. In fact, this is what gets covered over in the assimilationist claim that America has always been a “nation of immigrants.” A claim that for most of its history was, in fact, used as a derisive slur about oncoming demographic changes.¹⁵ The fact is that American whiteness changed and while this change had dramatic effects that reshuffled the electoral map, the basic structure of American democracy—where a sizable majority of the white majority was sufficient to carry the day—remained the same. In a way, Latinx might today be playing a similar role as Southern and Eastern Europeans did in the early part of the twentieth century. Even as their continued migration is currently decried, thirty years from now certain segments of the Latinx population might seamlessly come to be seen as just another part of the white melting pot.

CONCLUSION

In short, it's not clear that changing demographics alone will be enough to sever the link between white supremacy and American democracy. White supremacy has shown that it is not only willing to resort to the elimination and isolation of nonwhites, but that it is also willing to expand and recruit from certain segments of the non-white population if that is what is necessary for it to maintain its dominant position. By doing so it will ensure that political decisions continue to be made by a significant majority of the majority and, even more troubling, that dog-whistle politics will remain an effective political tool for the foreseeable future.

NOTES

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2. See, for example, Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015).
3. Jens Manuel Krogstad and Antonio Flores, “Unlike Other Latinos, About Half of Cuban Voters in Florida Backed Trump,” *Pew Research Center*, November 16, 2015, accessed December 26, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/15/unlike-other-latinos-about-half-of-cuban-voters-in-florida-backed-trump/>
4. Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
5. Quoted in Andrew Rosenthal, “Lee Atwater’s ‘Southern Strategy’ Interview” *New York Times*, November 14, 2012, accessed November 25, 2016, http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/lee-atwaters-southern-strategy-interview/?_r=0
6. For example, see Ann Coulter, *Adios, America: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015).
7. For example, see Peter Beinart, “The Republican Party’s White Strategy: Embracing White Nativism in the 1990s Turned the California GOP into a Permanent Minority. The Same Story May Now Be Repeating Itself Nationally,” *The Atlantic* July/August 2016, accessed December 26, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/07/the-white-strategy/485612/>
8. For example, see Ellen Carmichael, “Minority Outreach: The GOP Must Do Better,” *National Review*, February 10, 2016,

accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/431069/minority-outreach-gop-must-do-better>

9. As an aside, there are disturbingly few philosophers who take the work of Derrick Bell as seriously as it deserves to be taken up. One notable exception is Tommy J. Curry. See Tommy J. Curry, “Saved By the Bell: Derrick Bell’s Racial Realism as Pedagogy,” *Ohio Valley Philosophical Studies in Education* 39 (2008): 35–46; and “From Rousseau’s Theory of Natural Equality to Firmin’s Resistance to the Historical Inequality of Races,” *CLR James Journal* 15, no. 1 (2009): 135–63.
10. Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders,” in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, 158–200 (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
11. For example, see Alexia Fernández Campbell, “One Reason the Rust Belt Turned Red: A Republican-Led Battle to Weaken Labor Unions May Have Helped Trump Win in Several Democratic Bastions in the Midwest,” *The Atlantic*, November 14, 2016, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/11/one-reason-the-rust-belt-turned-red/507611/>
12. For a satirical parallel, see George Samuel Schuyler, *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A. D. 1933–1940* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1931).
13. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922).
14. Khaled A. Beydoun, “Boxed In: Reclassification of Arab Americans on the U.S. Census as Progress or Peril?” *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 47, no. 693 (2016): 706–08.
15. See Donna R. Gabaccia, “Nations of Immigrants: Do Words Matter?” *The Pluralist* 5, no. 3 (2010): 5–31.

ESSAYS

*Eudaimonia and Neltiliztli: Aristotle and the Aztecs on the Good Life*¹

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1. EUDAIMONIA AND NELTILIZTLI

How shall we live? What sort of life would it be best to lead? Does that life entail obligations to other people? If so, which? These, briefly, are the questions at the heart of ethical philosophy. The first two, concerning the best sort of life, address the topic of the good. The latter, concerning our obligations to others, address the right. Among many of the philosophers of classical Greek antiquity, including Plato and Aristotle, questions concerning the good were understood to be conceptually prior to those of the right. They held, in short, that one needed to know what kind of life one sought to lead before one could raise questions about what sorts of obligations followed. The best life, they maintained, was the happy or flourishing one—a life of *eudaimonia*.² They considered, moreover, the skillful leading of such a life to be a virtuous one, and that is why this form of ethics has been called a eudaemonist virtue ethics.

What the present essay argues is that the pre-Columbian Aztecs, or more properly the Nahuas, the people who spoke Nahuatl in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, held a view about ethical philosophy that is similar to Aristotle’s. They held to

a conception of the good life, which they called *neltiliztli*, and they maintained that understanding its character was conceptually prior to questions about rightness. What this thesis suggests is that they also held to a form of virtue ethics, though one different from the eudaemonist sort that Aristotle and Plato championed. Since *neltiliztli* means rootedness, one might call it a rooted virtue ethics.

One consequence of this thesis is that it articulates an alternative understanding of the good life which, while similar to Aristotle's *eudaimonia* in the way it guides our thinking about right action, raises a new problem for ethical philosophy: Just how closely linked is pleasure (*hēdonē*) to the good life? There is a similarity here with the fundamental ethical problem of classical antiquity, which asked whether virtue was sufficient for happiness (*eudaimonia*). Yet the focus of the present problem centers not on virtue's relation to the good life, but on just what counts as a good life in the first place. Can one really have a conception of the good life that does not have any internal relation to elevated or positive emotional states (*hēdonē*)? The Nahuas would have us believe that we can and must, at least for any life led on what they called our "slippery" earth.

A second consequence is that this essay makes some strides in filling a gap in comparative philosophy. The Nahuas are finally beginning to receive philosophic attention among Anglophone scholars, but this work has so far tended to focus on their metaphysical views.³ This is generally true even among Spanish-speaking scholars, who have been better in addressing the Nahuas philosophically.⁴ The present essay, then, moves some direction in developing our understanding of Nahua philosophy by articulating their conception of the good life.⁵ Since the matter at hand is rather complicated, I begin with the features of *eudaimonia* and *neltiliztli* as the highest end.

2. THE HIGHEST END

There are two key features of the good life which have a reasonable parallel in Aztec and Aristotelian thought, namely, that the good life is the highest end of action, and that this highest end may be spelled out by its relation to the human condition. On this last point, however, Aristotle differs somewhat from the Aztec approach since he relates *eudaimonia* to the human function (*ergon*), while the Aztecs draw their reasoning from a wider characterization of what life is like on our earth, on what they called *tlalticpac*.

Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* (N.E.) rather (in) famously by making a case for the good as the highest or ultimate aim of our actions as follows:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly, every action [*praxis*] and every decision [*proairēsis*] is thought to aim at some good; hence men have expressed themselves well in declaring the good to be that at which all things aim. But there appears to be a difference among the ends; for some are activities, others are products apart from [the activities which produce] them.⁶

The quality of the reasoning at stake in this passage has been the source of scholarly controversy. Just because

every inquiry, action, and decision aim at some good, it does not follow that the good is that at which all things aim. This would be a little like arguing that all roads lead somewhere, so all roads lead to the same place. Piecing together what Aristotle intended, then, has occupied scholars for some time.

With respect to the controversy, briefly, it seems that two points clarify what Aristotle had in mind. First, recall that Aristotle's method for ethics is to find "a view [that] will be most in harmony with the phenomena."⁷ To do this, he begins from a piece of reputable wisdom, an *endoxa*,⁸ and then proceeds to tease through possible implications to arrive at a better statement.⁹ In this case the *endoxa* is the statement: "hence men have expressed themselves well in declaring the good to be that at which all things aim." What the rest of the passage is meant to do, even if it is not fully complete, is to bridge the gap between the first observation, as a premise, and the *endoxa*, as a conclusion. In brief, the argument he develops runs thus:

- [1] If the goods of each (inquiry, action, etc.) are hierarchically ordered (and they are),
- [2] And if goods do not go on to infinity (which would be absurd),
- [3] Then there is a highest good.

The conclusion, [3], is the highest good at which "all" things aim in the opening line.¹⁰

Since Aristotle, a little later, identifies the highest good with *eudaimonia*, what the opening argument suggests is that the good life is that sense of happiness that emerges when one considers one's life as a whole, when one considers the ordered relation among one's goals and hierarchizes them.¹¹ While a variety of commentators have noted that Aristotle does not quite complete this argument in the opening passages of the N.E., they tend to agree that this is the sort of argument he intends to make.¹² If that is so, the real difficulty is not the quality of the inference from the premises to the conclusion but the soundness of [1]. It is not clear that all of our goods are hierarchically ordered. Aristotle makes his argument by analogy to the sciences, and while it is true that *they* may be hierarchized, individual human aims often are not. Aristotle even acknowledges this much in accounting for the different sorts of pleasures that are sought.¹³ It turns out, then, that some sort of skill will be necessary to manage this relation—and this, in brief, is the purpose of the virtues: those excellent qualities of character that enable a person to live her life well.

Still, there is disagreement concerning just what that highest end should be, and in the first book of the N.E., Aristotle proposes to settle the matter by appealing to the proper activity or function (*ergon*) of human beings. He writes:

If, indeed, the function of humans is the soul's performance according to reason, or not without reason, and if we acknowledge that the function of an individual is also that of a good individual in a generic way, just as is the case with a lyre player and a good lyre player, and so on for all the

others without qualification . . . if it is thus, then the human good would be the soul's performance according to virtue, and if there are many virtues, according to the best and most complete.¹⁴

Given the way that Aristotle loads in premises to his argument, mostly here marked by ellipses, it is not surprising that the grounds for his claim have also been the subject of some rather intense philosophic scrutiny. The core of his reasoning, without addressing much of the metaphysical backdrop behind it, appears to turn on the thesis that to be is to be good. Expressed differently, he holds that to be a thing of a certain kind, say a lyre player or a bicycle, or whatever else, is to be a good lyre player, or a good bicycle, or a good anything else.¹⁵ For example, if my bicycle were to be damaged, so that its wheel were bent slightly, it would ride poorly. As a result, it would be a worse bicycle. If the bicycle were to lose its chain, then it would resemble something closer to a scooter. Were it to lose its wheels altogether, then it would cease to be a bicycle and would, rather, be only a bicycle frame. What goes for bicycles, other objects, and practices also goes for humans. The human function is to make use of reason, understood in a broad sense (i.e., as *logos*). Activities, insofar as they are properly human, thus make use of *logos*. To be a good human, by the same reasoning, is thus to be one who leads a life by means of *logos*, or at least not without it. To the extent that one fails to use *logos*, one leads a bad or vicious human life.

In sum, the good *human* life is the one which exhibits human excellences or virtues. The bad one is that which exhibits human vices. Since this understanding articulates (some of) what it means to lead a human life at all, it establishes a basic set of conditions for our highest *human* aim, for *eudaimonia*. We are obligated to pursue it, if we should seek to lead a human life at all. This argument settles the dispute concerning happiness by establishing objective conditions for all human pursuits. Finally, and to connect these points to one of Aristotle's arguments in Book 10 of the *N.E.*, it is only by pursuing this sort of life that we can enjoy *human* pleasures at all.

For the Nahuas, just as for Aristotle, it is the human condition that limits and enables one to pursue the best sort of life. Unlike Aristotle, for the Nahuas it is the character of our circumstances as humans on earth that primarily determines this condition, not a property of what we are as animal beings, like *logos*. For the Nahuas, our lives are ones led on earth, on *tlalticpac*. This place has three pertinent characteristics which set the conditions for the sort of life that we can hope to lead. It is, first of all, a slippery place. This point is amply recorded in extant Nahuatl texts. For example, the sixth volume of *Florentine Codex* (F.C.) has a catalogue of common sayings. There we read the following one:

Slippery, slick is the earth.
It is the same as the one mentioned
Perhaps at one time one was of good
life; later he fell into some wrong, as if
he had slipped in the mud.¹⁶

The "one mentioned" is the saying which is listed just above in the codex, which reads:

How is this? Look well to thyself, thou fish of gold.
It is said at this time: if one some
time ago lived a good life [and] later
fell onto some [other one]—perhaps he took
a paramour, or he knocked someone
down so that he took sick or even died;
and for that he was thrust into jail:
so at that time it is said: "How is this?
Look well to thyself, thou fish of gold."¹⁷

A few observations are in order. A first is that the range of things that are slippery (*tlalahui*) includes the sorts of actions that we might commonly include in the ethical, because they are under our volition, and those that are not, because we have little or no control over them. We would say that taking a paramour is a choice, while knocking someone over, by tripping for example, is a bad outcome, but pardonable because out of our control. Yet these are descriptions of our condition on earth, and their point seems to be that regardless of individual choice, this is just the sort of place where we can expect these lapses. We may have to go to jail as a result, so that appeal to the condition of *tlalticpac* is not exculpatory, but it is descriptive of the general character of our human lives. A second point is that the slipperiness of *tlalticpac*, then, is not something that one can hope to avoid by reasoning well. One does not slip through an Aristotelian *hamartia*, an error in the practical syllogism of one's reasoning.¹⁸ Rather, this is just the sort of place in which one is prone to slip, where lapses in judgment will occur. The ideal for one's life, as a result (and third), cannot be one that includes no errors, no lapses in judgment. Purity in this place cannot be the goal after which we strive asymptotically. Rather, it must be the sort of ideal that recognizes that these slips occur, and yet manages them as well as possible.

A second feature of our human condition, life on *tlalticpac*, is that it is transitory. Again, this point of view is well attested in extant texts, yet no one is a better spokesman on this point than Nezahualcoyotl. In a work of poetic philosophy entitled "*Ma zan moquetzacan, nicnihuan! / My friends, stand up!*" he writes the following (this is the piece in its entirety).

My friends, stand up!
The princes have become destitute,
I am Nezahualcoyotl,
I am a Singer,
head of macaw.
Grasp your flowers and your fan.
With them go out to dance!
You are my child,
you are Yoyontzin.
Take your chocolate,
flower of the cacao tree,
may you drink all of it!
Do the dance,
do the song!
Not here is our house,
not here do we live,
you also will have to go away.¹⁹

The character of this piece cannot but strike one as of a similar character as 1 Corinthians 15:32, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Still, the context is much wider in Nahua thought. For Nezahualcoyotl, in fact, this is *the* basic problem of our existence (and not merely the slipperiness of our lives). For not only is it true that our lives are ephemeral, but it is also the case that even the structure of the cosmos is ephemeral in character. The fifth age, the one with a sun of motion, is one which, like the previous four, will sometime pass.

These considerations lead one to the third feature of life on *tlalticpac*, namely, that it is far from clear that it is a happy place. As part of an extended poem, Nezahualcoyotl writes:

Is it true that we are happy,
that we live on earth?
It is not certain that we live
and have come on earth to be happy.
We are all sorely lacking.
Is there any who does not suffer
here, next to the people?²⁰

For Nezahualcoyotl's own work these considerations led him to seek the only sort of stability and eternity for which one can hope, namely, that to be found in philosophical-poetic reflection, in the composition of "flower and song." For the Nahua's broader ethical outlook (more below), these reflections supply the reason why the pursuit of happiness is not something that they thought could be a suitable objective for one's life's plan. The transitory and slippery character of life on *tlalticpac* would make elevated emotional states, i.e., "happiness," a foolhardy goal.

The general aim of Nahua ethics, then, is not happiness but to achieve rootedness (*neitiliztli*) on *tlalticpac*. To support the idea textually, it will be helpful to have in mind a linguistic point. Should one like to form a new word in Nahuatl, the language is well equipped with the capacity for compounding, much as ancient Greek was. Yet one may also make use of what Angel Maria Garibay has called a "*difrasismo*," which is the expression of one idea in two words.²¹ Examples in English might be "with blood and fire," or "against wind and tide." This sort of expression was extremely common in Nahuatl, and one must be careful to catch the metaphorical meaning at work. For if taken literally, the meaning of a *difrasismo* is almost totally lost. One of the commonest of these in a philosophic context is the phrase *in xochi in cuicatl*, which, translated literally, means "with flower and song," but taken metaphorically means something like "poetry."

Returning to the discussion of rootedness, I would like to examine the short piece "Flower and Song / Xochi Cuicatl," found in the *Cantares Mexicanos*, which was composed and recited before a meeting of wise men and poets in the house of Tecayehautzin. The question at stake in the piece is how to achieve some sort of permanence. Lord Ayocuan is said to be acquainted with Life Giver, one of the names for the single being of existence, *teotl*. Invoking and recalling the lord, the suggestion of the piece is that it is by creating "flower and song" that one finds this permanence.

We read the author's realization that this (poetic creation) must be the answer to the transitoriness of life on *tlalticpac* in the following lines:

So this is how that lord, the vaunted one,
comes creating them. Yes, with plume like
bracelet beads he pleases the only-being.
Is that what pleases the Life Giver?
Is that the only truth [*nelli*] on earth [*tlalticpac*]?²²

So the author comes to the conclusion that by writing flower-song, especially the type that addresses the greater problems of our human existence, one is best able to find "truth" on the slippery earth.²³

What matters for ethical purposes is obscured in the English translation. The phrase "*aço tle nelli in tlalticpac*" is best translated as "Is that the only truth on earth?" But the word *nelli* is related to *nelhuáyotl*, which is a root or base.²⁴ The metaphorical idea behind the Nahua understanding of "truth," then, is that it is a matter of being rooted like a tree, as opposed to sliding about on our slippery earth. The goal, the solution to our human problems, then, is to find rootedness, which as an abstract substantive would be expressed in Nahuatl as *neitiliztli*.

An important point here is that the context of the poem makes clear that one is to find rootedness in the only being of existence, in *teotl*. Just as is the case with Aristotle's function argument, there is equally a metaphysical backdrop to the Nahua account of the good life. The Nahuas were pantheists of a sort and took our world to be an expression of the single fundamental being of existence. A rooted life, then, is not only our highest end, but carries a similar normative force. One ought to seek rootedness not only on prudential grounds, but because rootedness is the way that one truly *is* given our circumstances.

The philosophic poem "Flower and Song" provides one source of evidence for the normative similarity between Aristotle and the Nahua understanding of the good life. For additional textual evidence, one might turn to the tenth volume of the F.C., which addresses "the people" of the Nahua culture. There one finds descriptions of persons at work in socially recognized roles. The codex author Bernadino de Sahagún is responsible for asking what the good and bad forms of each is, e.g., asking, What is a good feather worker? What is a bad one? So one cannot say that the Nahuas would have formulated the matters explicitly in terms of good and bad. What one can note is that in their responses, one finds their general understanding of how approval and disapprobation were allotted in each case, and how they reasoned about what ought to be. In describing an adult nobleman, we read the following:

The good [*qualli*] middle-aged man is a doer, a worker [who is] agile, active, solicitous.

The bad [*tlauelilloc*] middle-aged man is lazy, negligent, slothful, indolent, sluggish, idle, languid, a lump of flesh [*quitlatzcopic*], a lump of flesh with two eyes [*cuitaltzcocopicitli*], a thief.²⁵

Similar statements are found throughout the F.C. so that one can be certain that this sort of language is not isolated. The suggestion is double. First, good adult men are those who perform their duties and roles well, while the bad ones are indolent. Second, bad adult men hardly resemble men at all. They become, rather, mere lumps of flesh. Stated otherwise, there are conditions for leading a life in a human community, and should one not observe them, one tends towards not leading a human life at all.

To bring all these points together, one might write that Aristotle and the Aztecs both held to a conception of the good life as one that is the highest aim one could have, or, more aptly, live out. They differed in the grounds they provided for their views. Aristotle's argument turns on a thesis about the function (*ergon*) of a human being, while the Nahuas held that one should aim for rootedness as (i) a reasonable response to our circumstances on earth, and as (ii) a basic condition for leading a life in the human community as part of *teotl*. What needs to be clarified now is how exactly this understanding of the good life could guide our actions.

3. VIRTUE AND ACTION GUIDANCE

To spell out how their accounts are action guiding, one must broach two questions. First, Aristotle's *eudaimonia* is clearly linked to his discussion of excellence, *arētē*, but this close link between *neltiliztli* and excellence has not been shown for the Nahuas. While the above shows that they had an understanding of the human good which supports this line of reasoning, is there a Nahuatl word or phrase that serves roughly the same role as *arētē*, and is it connected to an account of rootedness? Second, even though the above shows that the Nahuas had a conception of the good life, it does not show that *neltiliztli* functioned in the way required. Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill both had conceptions of the good life, but neither was a virtue ethicist. How do we know that *neltiliztli* functions like Aristotle's *eudaimonia* and not the *summum bonum* for Kant and Mill?

I begin with the matter of "virtue." In some ways the topic is difficult because of the abundance of possible terms available. One should recall that *arētē* in Greek is derived from the god Ares, and in Homeric times the word meant primarily nobility and strength on the battlefield. Over the following several hundred years of recorded Greek texts, one

finds the term slowly changing from a quality of character primarily focused on competitive activities to one focused on cooperative ones—ones that foster life in the city state (*polis*). Plato and Aristotle, moreover, played a significant role in this change, rather willfully adapting common terms to their purposes.²⁶ "Virtue" or "human excellence," in short, did not spring from Zeus' head fully armored, but was a concept developed over the course of several centuries among the Greeks. One should be wary, then, of finding an exact equivalent in other cultures. Additionally, one should not expect the Nahuas to have only one such term just because Hellenistic philosophers ultimately settled on one. In the Confucian tradition, for example, one finds two words used for "virtue," namely, *de* and *ren*.²⁷ It might turn out that the Nahuas had more than one term. The proposal that I venture here is that there is one broad phrase for excellence, and that there may be further, more specific terms for excellence available in other ways, just as *de* is the broad term for virtue in the Confucian tradition, and *ren* the more specific term focused on human relations.²⁸

To begin, in Nahuatl, as in Greek, there are several words for the good, the noble, and the beautiful. Generally, the most broadly used term for "good" is "qualli," and I have indicated it in brackets in above quoted texts.²⁹ The root of the word derives from the verb *qua*, which means to eat. The general idea indicated, then, is that something is good because assimilable, edible in a way that will aid in one's flourishing. Another common word is *yectli*, which is something good because it is straight. Likely the best translation for *yectli*, then, is rectitude. The Nahuas also made use of a *difrasismo* with these two words as components: *in qualli in yectli*, meaning, too literally, "with goodness and straightness."³⁰ My suggestion is that this is the Nahua way of expressing "excellence." In the tenth volume of the F.C., for example, one finds a description of the "good" daughter which reads: *ichpuchtli in iectli in qualli, in qualli ichpuchtli*, which might be translated as "the excellent daughter, the good daughter."³¹

In this passage, one also finds an explicit connection between excellence, so understood, and the good life as rootedness. Since the matter is critical, I provide a word-by-word translation and commentary in the table below.

yn tecuheuh yn ichpuchtli	One's daughter [who is]	This is a phrase indicating the whole idea of a daughter in her relation both to a male and female speaker.
quiztica, macitica, vel,	unspoiled, perfect, good,	These terms are all difficult to translate, because Christianity had already influenced the meaning of the words. Yet, none of them in Nahuatl have a fundamental connection to Christian understanding of virginity.
nelli,	rooted,	Dibble and Anderson omit this word in translation, as it fits poorly with the Christianized interpretation of the Nahuatl description. ³² It is the root of <i>neltiliztli</i> .
ichpuchtli in iectli in qualli,	[who is] the excellent daughter,	There is no sentence break in the Nahuatl, so the idea is continued: the rooted daughter is the excellent one ...
in qualli ichpuchtli . . . ³³	the good daughter ...	the good one, <i>et cetera</i> .

One here finds a description of the “good” daughter as one who is rooted, who is leading the best life possible, and one who is excellent in doing so. The passage is a difficult one to analyze and translate because some Christian influence was present at the time that it was recorded, but it does indicate that the Nahuas thought to connect virtue (*in yectli in qualli*) and rootedness (*neltiliztli*). The best life available on earth, in short, is one that is performed excellently.

I turn now to the question whether the Nahuas understood the good life in the way required for a virtue ethics. One may begin by recalling what is distinctive about *eudaimonia* as it functions for action-guiding purposes. For eudaemonists generally, action guidance follows from the priority of the good to the right. This is to say that in the order of justification, one appeals to a conception of the good first, and then concludes to a judgment of right action. A eudaemonist, then, might argue that one ought not cheat on one’s partner, or that cheating on one’s partner is morally wrong, because it harms her by inhibiting her flourishing. For a modern philosopher who holds to the priority of the right to the good, as Kantian deontologists do, moral wrongness functions in a premise to one’s conclusion. One ought not cheat on one’s partner because it is morally wrong, and one can discern this moral wrongness by appeal to an independent test, like the categorical imperative procedure.³⁴

If this difference in the order of justification is what distinguishes Aristotle from Kant on the good, then what distinguishes Aristotle from Mill on the good? Utilitarian consequentialists also appeal to a conception of the good, say, a maximum of average utility, in order to determine whether an action is right. How is Aristotle, or the eudaemonist generally, different?

To answer this question, one is returned to an untranslatable point in the second line of the N.E., since it is there where Aristotle introduces an important qualification about the character of the highest good as an end. He writes: “But there appears to be a difference among the ends; for some are activities, others are products apart from [the activities which produce] them.”³⁵ In writing this, Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of activities: *ta erga* (productions) and *hai energeiai* (performances/activities).³⁶ Productive actions are of the sort that yield a product apart from the action, such as a potter’s vase. Performance actions are those that are actions (*erga*) in (*en*) themselves; the doing constitutes what they are. They are like a dance or a jazz solo. Importantly for Aristotle, the highest end, *eudaimonia*, is a performance. This means that he is thinking of it in a fundamentally different way than a utilitarian would. To clarify, in the opening lines of *Utilitarianism* Mill writes: “All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and color from the end to which they are subservient.”³⁷ Happiness, as Mill understands it, then, is the *product* of acting in such a way as to promote the happiness of the greatest number. For Aristotle, by contrast, *eudaimonia* is not conceived of as a product, the end result of action, but the performance of living one’s own life well. It is your life performed well, not a set of mental states. As a result, it would be incoherent to speak

of maximizing this sort of happiness, apart from living it better—with more virtue.

Did the Nahuas think of *neltiliztli* as Aristotle thought of *eudaimonia*? One may answer in the affirmative for two reasons. First, in no extant literature is there a discussion of an independent test for assessing right action, so they did not think of it in the way that Kant does. Second, if one looks to their analysis of good and bad performance of social roles, one sees that they justify assessment by appealing to a harm or help rendered. For example, here is how the philosopher, or *tlatamini*, is described in volume ten of the F.C.:

The good [*qualli*] *tlatamini* is a physician, a person of trust, a counselor; an instructor worthy of confidence, deserving of credibility, deserving of faith; a teacher. He is an advisor, a counselor, a good example; a teacher of prudence, of discretion; a light, a guide who lays out one’s path, who goes accompanying one. . . . The bad [*amo qualli*] *tlatamini* is a stupid physician, silly, decrepit, pretending to be a person of trust, a counselor, advised. . . . [He is] a soothsayer, a deluder, he deceives, confounds, causes ills, leads into evil.³⁸

What one notes in this description is the way in which a person performs her social role, the quality of her contribution to the community, is the source of praise or blame. The bad [*amo qualli*] philosopher specifically causes ill, both to the person counseled, and to the community at large. The good [*qualli*] philosopher is he who is a light and a mirror for his patients and the community. Assessments of right action, then, follow from an understanding of what it means to lead a good human and communal life. I think it clear, then, that the Nahuas reasoned about the good and the right in the same sort of way as eudaemonists do.

4. WAYS OF LIFE

At this point one might have some further pertinent questions. Aristotle’s understanding of *eudaimonia* is connected to a way of life, the contemplative, and a program for general living. To what extent is something like this present in the Nahuatl understanding of *neltiliztli*? The answer, I think, distances the Nahuas from Aristotle, since the Nahuas do advocate for two (or more) approaches to rootedness, but they have no notion that is like the Greek *bios*.

Beginning with Aristotle, much of the picture for his understanding of *eudaimonia* emerges from the foregoing. Each of us leads her life by organizing and deliberating about her ends. This is not something that happens easily, and so it requires skill, virtue (*arête*), to perform such organizing well. Moreover, Aristotle tells us that the way that we lead our lives as humans, the way that we enjoy human *Eudaimonia*, is to employ *logos*, to employ reason broadly understood.³⁹ The special virtue of *logos* for ethics is, of course, prudence, *phronēsis*. And it is *phronēsis* which acts in consort with the other virtues to enable each of us to live well, to lead a *eudaimon* life. None of this, however, tells us what sits at the top of the telic hierarchy. Is it just anything we could choose?

Aristotle's answer is somewhat elliptical, but it looks as though he suggests that what sits at the top of the telic hierarchy is a way of life, a *bios*. He writes:

For three ways of life stand out most; the one just mentioned [i.e., of pleasure], the political, and third, the theoretical [*theōrētikos*]. The many appear to be quite slavish in deciding [*proairoumenoi*] on a way of life [*bion*] fit for livestock, but their argument has support on account of the many of means who share the sentiments of Sardanapalus. The refined, on the other hand, and those of action decide on a life of honor; for the life [*biou*] of politics has nearly this end [*telos*].⁴⁰

In this passage Aristotle gives a few brief rebuttals to the life of pleasure, and that aimed at honor, though he waits until book 10 to provide a full defense of the life of contemplation. What matters for the present is what Aristotle's comments suggest for the structure of *eudaimonia*, namely, that a *bios* is decided on as an end (*telos*). This is not the same, however, as choosing a particular outcome, or set of outcomes. For a way of life is a characteristic way of choosing and ordering one's ends so that their performance is of a typical kind. At the top of our telic hierarchy, then, is not a final goal, but a way of life.⁴¹ And Aristotle later argues (in book 10) that only one such way of life, that typified by theoretical contemplation, is suitable to humans as a complete goal.⁴²

There is an additional point which proves helpful for a comparison with the Nahua conception of the good life. One of the reasons Aristotle so hastily dismisses the life of pleasure is that he identifies it with one that is fit for livestock, *boskēmatōn*—literally for fattened animals. Implicit in Aristotle's language is a distinction between a way of life, *bios*, and mere life, *zoē*. In the opening passages of his *Politics*,⁴³ Aristotle distinguishes between a natural tendency, like procreation, which he does not think is the result of a decision (*proairēsis*), a natural union, like a household, which is an association to meet the needs of daily life, and a state, which "exists for the sake of living well."⁴⁴ While humans also lead a life of *zoē*, one of satisfying those necessities like eating, we also decide on certain goals for the sake of living well. When we engage in activities or practices (like music and dance) for these latter ends, we are leading a way of life, a *bios*. This is why it is a sort of category error, for Aristotle, to decide on a way of life that would be co-extensive with the activities needed for mere survival. It also means that *eudaimonia* ultimately concerns the performance of one's life by organizing ends that are chosen above and beyond necessities.

The specification of which way of life is best for Aristotle has been a source of controversy, not because it is unclear, but because scholars have been puzzled in trying to explain the compatibility of the intellectualist account of *eudaimonia*, in book 10, with the comprehensive account that is articulated in the rest of the *N.E.*⁴⁵ I shall not here try to provide my own sense of the compatibility of these two accounts in Aristotle. Rather, I would like to note that the Nahuas also seem to give an account of the good life that is in some ways split between a comprehensive and

an intellectualist approach. Yet, because they do not make use of anything like *bios* as a concept, they do not have a similar tension.

To understand why the Nahuas may have this advantage, it might be helpful to recall that *neitiliztli* is recommended both on prudential grounds and on the grounds that one takes root in *teotl*, the way things are. So that if one is to lead a life in a human community, one must lead a rooted life. Surveying the existing literature and anthropological record, one finds that for the Nahuas one's life appears to take root at four related levels: in one's body, in one's psyche, in one's community by social rites and role, and in *teotl*.

Rootedness in one's body was made possible by participating in a number of practices. The Nahuas held that the body serves as a temporary location for three forces which animate us: *tonalli*, which resides in the head and provides the energy needed for growth; *teyolia*, which resides in the heart and provides memory, emotion, and knowledge; and *ihiyotl*, which resides in the liver and provides passion, bravery, hatred, and love, among others.⁴⁶ Anthropologists have recovered many figurines posed in ways that look like yoga poses; they include, for example, a position almost exactly similar to the lotus position. From the description of the body and its movements, one gathers that a regular practice of yoga-like movements was thought to help balance or root some of our bodily energies.

An additional way in which one sought a rooted life was in one's psyche—bearing in mind that the difference between psyche and body was not nearly as sharp as our current understanding. The point in this regard is that if one learns to assume an identity, a certain kind of personhood, one gains rootedness. For example, in the *Hueheutlatolli*, the *Discourses of the Elders*, one finds a congratulatory speech in which the elders discourse with the new bride and groom, new owners of a face and heart. The groom, for example, responds to the elders, stating,

Ye have shown me favor, ye have inclined your hearts [*amoiollotzin*]; on my behalf ye have suffered affliction. I shall inflict sickness on you, on your face [*temuxtli*].⁴⁷

In this case the face (*ixtli*) and heart (*yollotl*) together indicate the whole person, one's character. The groom's responses address both facets of the elder's personality. In marriage, likewise, the elders bind the couple together as a new identity, by tying the man's cape to the woman's skirt, and speak both to their faces and their hearts. The suggestion is that in such a way they gain personhood, a way by which they will stand here on the slippery place. Character virtues, then, primarily find their place at this level in facilitating the acquisition and maintenance of one's "face and heart," one's character.

Yet, these points already slide over into rootedness in the community, the third level of rootedness. For the bride and groom are not only bound together, but bound within and before the community. Participation in one's community, then, was carried out in festivals and social rites of various

sorts. In the marriage ceremony described, for example, the fathers, mothers, grandparents, and related family members all have specific roles to play. It was, moreover, the role of the *tlamatinimê*, the philosophers, to foster the acquisition of a face through counseling, and the goal of education to teach young Nahua children the dispositions that would sustain healthy judgment. One's character, then, enabled one to execute the offices of one's social role well, but these not only had more specific demands, they also served the purpose of training or habituating one into that character.

A final way to achieve rootedness was in *teotl* directly. The three dimensions of rootedness just discussed are, of course, ways to be rooted in *teotl*, but in an indirect sort of way. The Nahuas appeared to have held that there were also a few other, more direct, ways to be rooted in *teotl*. In the above quoted passage from "Flower and Song," the specific answer given to achieve rootedness is to compose philosophic poetry. This is not too distant from Aristotle's insistence on the life of the mind. In some of the more mystical passages, it appears that some thought the use of hallucinogenic substances was perhaps another way. Any of these ways, though, were thought to be ways to make something of beauty of our short time on *tlatlcpac*.

At this point, one might wonder how the Nahuas are not saddled with the same sort of difficulty that faces Aristotle. Rootedness appears to have both a comprehensive meaning, and an intellectualist one, reserved for those who can compose flower and song. In response, I think the problem is at least not so acute among the Nahuas. A *bios*, to recall, has two important features. First, it is a characteristic way of choosing among our goals and ordering them in the telic hierarchy of our life's plan. This is the sense in which it sits atop that hierarchy. Second, it is a form of life that is chosen above and beyond the necessities of *zoê*. While the Nahuas did have various social roles, which in the case of a philosopher, or physician, might be counted as a characteristic way of choosing among ends, they did not distinguish such ways as something distinct from the necessities of mere living. All people, then, were to aim for rootedness at the levels of mind, psyche, and community. It just turns out that for some people, participation in the community also afforded the possibility for a more direct rootedness. The philosophers, for example, found rootedness in their communities, in part, by composing "flower and song," which just happened to be a direct way of finding rootedness on *tlatlcpac*. The ways are complementary among the Nahuas, then, rather than exclusionary, as they appear to be in Aristotle.

5. MORAL MOTIVATION

While the discussion concerning ways of life (*bioi*) highlights one difference between Aristotle and the Nahuas on the good life that might count in favor of the Nahuas' view, another related topic might pose a challenge for it. That topic concerns the role of pleasure, *hêdonê*, or elevated emotional states for the good life. The specific difficulty is that by retaining a connection between pleasure and the good life, Aristotle also solves an important problem for moral motivation. To the question, why should we be good? Aristotle can answer: because it is more enjoyable than not

being good. If the Nahuas do not retain this connection, then it would appear that they lose this advantage.

In response, one might begin by recalling the grounds for Aristotle's argument in the N.E.⁴⁸ For Aristotle, pleasure perfects, in the sense of completes, the performance of *eudaimonia* as an "end which supervenes like the bloom of youth to those in the prime of their lives."⁴⁹ If it is not a constitutive or essential component of *eudaimonia*, then it is internally related as its completed form. The reason for this is that *eudaimonia* spells out what it means to lead a life as a human, as opposed to the life of a beast or angel. This life must make use of *logos* in some way, and it is ultimately led in the company of others (as the arguments in Aristotle's *Politics* makes clear). The pleasure that follows for this life, as a result, is a properly *human* pleasure, and this is the only way to achieve it. While misfortune may intervene, as Aristotle's discussion of Priam suggests, even in those tragic cases "the beautiful shines through."⁵⁰ Only by living well could Priam have had *human* happiness anyway. Should fortune favor us, moreover, then our lives enjoy not only happiness, *eudaimonia*, but blessedness, *makaria*.⁵¹

For the Nahuas, life of *tlatlcpac* has no similar perfection. The good life, understood as *neltiliztli*, bears only an accidental relation to elevated emotional states, to one sense of *hêdonê*. Composing flower-song, or uniting one's face and heart, makes for a better and more beautiful, if still transient existence. It is better and more beautiful, finally, because it is ultimately one rooted in *teotl*, in the way things are through their changes.

While it is too much for the Nahuas to think that pleasure is more than an incidental feature of our life's performance, one nevertheless has reasons to act for it that are distinct from prudential or dutiful considerations. This is why the rooted life ought to be considered a conception of "the good life," and why the Nahuas do not face a problem concerning moral motivation. The argument so far has reviewed some of the many roles and rites at work in Nahua culture. What one sees in these descriptions is that the feather-worker acts out of a passion for his craft. The philosopher acts for a love of wisdom. And mothers and fathers act out of love for their children. These reasons—namely, passions and loves—are neither prudential nor dutiful, and yet they provide us with reasons for acting. They are, moreover, some of the more common motivations that we have for undertaking action. Seeking to leading a rooted life, then, ultimately means that one is seeking to lead a worthwhile life. Even if pleasure is incidental to this way of life, one still has the greater bulk of reasons to pursue it.

6. CLARIFICATIONS

The present argument has so far established a number of points of agreement and noted a few differences between Aristotle's conception of the good life and that of the Nahuas. Yet, I must now pause to clarify two points regarding the analysis of Nahua understanding of *neltiliztli* specifically. I pose these points as objections and supply responses in order to clarify the nature of the claims so far made.

A first concern might run as follows. Does the present analysis of *neltiliztli* cohere with broader Nahua conceptions? For example, in the popular religious beliefs of the Nahuas, mothers who died in childbirth went to the heavens of the afterlife. Their understanding of rewards and punishments, then, seems to be rather fatalistic. How is this religious understanding compatible with the account so far outlined, in which deliberation about ends, or at least highest ends, seems to play so central a role?

Two distinctions could aid in answering this question. One concerns the difference between *neltiliztli*, which is a conception of the good life here on *tlalticpac*, and whatever rewards were thought to follow in the afterlife. It is true that in common religious belief, warriors who fell in battle (in specific ways) and women who died in childbirth were both thought to go to Tamoanchan. But they would not, then, be leading lives on *tlalticpac*. There is nothing incompatible between the idea of leading a rooted life on *tlalticpac*, and that of receiving rewards in the afterlife on account of a very specific occurrence. What seems to be at stake in the question is a broader sense of justice that would obtain between actions performed in this life and rewards in the afterlife. Yet it is not clear to me that the Nahuas held to such a (Christian) view. In broaching religious beliefs, however, one is led to a second pertinent distinction.

The second distinction concerns the character of the present study. My goal, unlike that of anthropologists, has not been to reconstruct the general understanding of the good life among ordinary Nahuas. Philosophers of classical antiquity look to understand specific philosophic claims among the Greeks and Romans, and so they do not try to make their arguments consistent with wider cultural notions like miasmatic contamination. I do likewise here, and so have prescind from a consideration of the broader Nahua understanding of *tlazolli*, which is remarkably like the Greek *miasma* in certain respects.

We have evidence that the elders and *tlamatinimê* (plural of *tlamatini*, i.e., "philosopher") often did break with ordinary understandings. Nezahualcoyotl, for example, openly wonders whether there is an afterlife, or if it is only a comforting fable. 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,
 Tezozomocztin, and that one Cuacuahtzin.
 Do they truly live,
 There Where-in-Someway-One-Exists?⁵²

Nezahualcoyotl is in these lines clearly expressing doubt about life in a place after death. It must 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. In brief, the philosophers and elders⁵³ broke with established religious beliefs in their recorded writings, and so it would seem unreasonable to criticize

the present philosophic study for not conforming to the religious beliefs of other segments of the population.

An additional concern is that in presenting *neltiliztli* in relation to Aristotelian eudaimonism, I have shaped the Nahua claims in a way that is too "individualist," especially in my focus on action guidance and the search for the good life. How does that square with the broader, more sociocentric, understanding of the Nahua culture that anthropologists have described?

In response, one notes that "individualism" and "sociocentrism" are slippery terms. What I hope to have shown is that the Nahuas were in two specific ways more "sociocentric" than Aristotle. This is the case, first, in the multi-leveled way in which one achieves rootedness. While I believe that Aristotle is often misunderstood in contemporary scholarship as focusing exclusively on the individual pursuit of happiness, the Nahua emphasis on finding rootedness through one's specific social role in the community adds a social dimension that is not present in Aristotle's account. Indeed, a greater part of action guidance for the Nahuas turns on how well one executes the offices of one's social role, and this is strikingly different from Aristotle's focus on excellences that any human should develop. Second, the way that social rites and practices were thought to be an essential part of character formation finds no parallel in Aristotle. He nowhere discusses character formation by way of participating in social rites, but the Nahuas do often rather elaborately. The above excerpts are taken from exhortations by elders for youths engaged in just these rites. In these two ways, then, I believe that the Nahuas were more community oriented, or "sociocentric," than was Aristotle.

There is *another* sense, however, in which it might be thought that the Nahuas were more "sociocentric" than Aristotle. They might be thought to have held to a sense of ethical life that is socio-holist. On such an understanding, the Nahuas would have held that the fundamental unit of moral concern was the community and not the individual. If this is right, then the present development of *neltiliztli*, especially in those sections concerning action guidance, would be true, but rather misleading.

In response, I do not think it accurate to claim that the Nahuas held that the fundamental unit of moral concern was the community, rather than the individual. In the texts reviewed above, various agents are criticized for harming other people directly, and not for harming the community by way of harming individual people. The texts themselves, then, conflict with this interpretation. Moreover, socio-holism is problematic from a philosophic point of view,⁵⁴ and so I think it counts toward the greater cogency of their position that the *tlamatinimê* were not inclined to support it.

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The present essay hopes to have taken a first step toward serious philosophic reflection on the ethical understanding of the good life, *neltiliztli*, among the Nahuas. Their conception is in many ways like Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia*. What one seeks in life, they held, is a response

to the basic conditions of life on *tlatlcpac* is rootedness. What one seeks in choosing ends that are above mere necessities, Aristotle held, is *eudaimonia*. For the Nahuas philosophical poetry provides the best kind of answer, the best rootedness, in response to the slipperiness of *tlatlcpac*, since flower and song outlast and are more beautiful than other transient creations. For Aristotle, the life of theoretical contemplation is that which is best suited to an animal which leads its life by means of *logos*. For both, however, this best way of life is related to the broader aim of living well in other activities, which require excellent qualities of character (i.e., virtues) to achieve. Finally, in both cases, right action is assessed by appealing to a conception of what is good, how one flourishes, which is thus justificational prior to a conception of the right.

At the end of these reflections, then, one is presented with two different articulations of the good life. Most of us, I would venture, would like to believe that pleasure is somehow internally connected to the best performance of our life's act on the world's stage. Yet we also recognize that perhaps this may be but much hopeful thinking. Nor is it clear, moreover, that this sort of difference is one that can be resolved simply by an analysis of concepts. Aristotle and the Aztecs each have a different preferred sense of "pleasure," and so different understandings of its relation to the good life. Which sense is better for ethical purposes is not a matter which could be resolved only by looking to the meanings of the terms under consideration. Rather, it must take its measure from the broader coherence of the ethical theories as a whole, and their respective abilities to illuminate our moral lives. The present reflection on the Aztecs, as a result, highlights less a problem for resolution than a problem of the human condition. It challenges us, moreover, to question the received (Western) wisdom about the good life. And we should be better for it, whether, as Aristotle contends, because it will bring us pleasure in perfecting our activities as beings possessing *logos*, or whether, as the Nahuas held, that it makes a more beautiful pattern of our activities on the slippery earth.

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NOTES

1. Winner of the 2016 APA Prize in Latin American Thought. Versions of this essay were presented at the Trans-American Experience conference at the University of Oregon in Eugene (2015), and the Latinx Philosophy conference at Columbia University in New York City (2016). I would like to thank many members of both audiences, as well as the anonymous reviewers for the *Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, for the helpful feedback on the ideas developed here.
2. Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia*, or "happiness," with the highest aim in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), at 1095a15–20. As a note, translations of Aristotle are my own.
3. I have in mind especially James Maffie's *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder: Colorado University Press, 2014). Maffie has, in his entry "Aztec Philosophy" for the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/> (last accessed September 30, 2016), provided what is

likely the most philosophic overview of Aztec ethics. His purpose there, however, was much broader.

4. In this respect, I have in mind especially Miguel León-Portilla's *La filosofía náhuatl: Estudiada en sus fuentes con un nuevo apéndice*, new ed., prologue by Angel María Garibay K. (Mexico City: UNAM, 2001 [1956]). The present essay is much indebted to some of the remarks León-Portilla makes in this book. I have also profited greatly from his *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).
5. Of course, anthropologists and art historians have long been interested in Nahuatl ethics, but their concern is rather with what might be called an analysis of cultural mores. Two pieces in English that have been particularly influential for the present essay are Louise M. Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989) and Pete Sigal's *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). In the former case, one learns to be cautious of Castilian influences and interpolations, even in the construction of Sahagun's *Florentine Codex*, on which much of the present essay relies. In the latter, one comes to recognize the rather tendentious approach to (especially) sexual ethics one finds presented in almost any recorded work, including the *Florentine Codex*. Alfredo López Austin's *Cuerpo humano e ideología: Las concepciones de los antiguos Nahuas*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Mexico City, UNAM, 1984), has also proven helpful for understanding the general Nahua worldview, though the implications of his study are more immediate, I think, for Nahua metaphysics.
6. N.E., 1094a.
7. *Ibid.*, 1235b.
8. *Ibid.*, 1145b.
9. Richard Kraut has a fine review and assessment of Aristotle's method in ethics in "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut, 76–95 (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
10. Technically, it cannot be that at which *all* things aim, since inanimate things do not aim at anything. The sense seems to be restricted to human agents. This portion of the argument is taken from (and developed) in my essay "Natural Goodness and the Normativity Challenge: Happiness Across Cultures," *American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87 (2013): 183–94.
11. N.E., 1095a.
12. C.D.C. Reeve, for example, has a line-by-line analysis of the opening passages of the N.E. and comes to just this conclusion. See especially chapter seven of his *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness: An Essay on Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Daniel Russell comes to a similar conclusion in his *Happiness for Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
13. N.E., 1099a.
14. *Ibid.*, 1098a.
15. I have explored this metaphysical backdrop at length in my "Natural Goodness and the Normativity Challenge: Happiness Across Cultures."
16. Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, ed. and trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, 12 vols. (New Mexico: University of Santa Fe, 1969), Vol. 6, 228. Translation modified.
17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, 228.
18. For a fuller development of the practical syllogism for Aristotle, see Paula Gottlieb's "The Practical Syllogism," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut, 218–33 (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2006).
19. One may find the Nahuatl transcription in *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los señores de Nueva España*, transcription and translation by John Bierhorst (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), fols. 3v–4r. The translation quoted, however, is Miguel León-Portilla's in *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 92. León-Portilla's text also includes the Nahuatl to accompany each translation. Bierhorst's interpretation of Aztec culture is rather

widely disputed, and his translations tendentiously support his position, so that I have entirely avoided using his translations and, when necessary, have translated the texts myself. For a review of the difficulties with Bierhorst's "ghost songs" hypothesis, see León-Portilla's response in the "Introduction" to his *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*, especially pages 41–44.

20. For the Nahuatl transcription, see *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain*, fols. 21 r.—22 v. The translation is from *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*, 91.
21. Angel María Garibay, *Llave del Náhuatl, Colección de Torzos Clásicos con Gramática y Vocabulario, para utilidad de los Principiantes* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Press, 1981), 112.
22. One may find the original Nahuatl in *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*, transcription and translation by John Bierhorst (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), fol. 9v. The translation, for the above noted reason, is substantially modified.
23. An important implication of this point, but which I cannot develop at length here, is that the Nahuatl sense of "truth" is rather different from a correspondence theory of truth—something which I've often thought to be Aristotle's stance on truth. For the Nahuas, one not only comes to know the truth, but most fundamentally comes to live the truth.
24. Rémi Siméon's *Diccionario de lengua Nahuatl o Mexicana*, 2nd ed., trans. Josefina Oliva De Coll (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1981) reads: "nelhuayo adj. Provisto de raíces, que tiene raíces. R. nelhuayotl."
25. *Florentine Codex*, vol. 10, 11. Translation modified.
26. This topic has long been the subject of study among classicists. While Werner Jaeger develops this thesis to some extent, I have in mind the patient argument which A. W. H. Adkins develops in his *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972). The whole of the book is devoted to supporting the points just made.
27. For the specifics on the Confucian tradition on virtue as *de* and *ren*, see chapter one of Jiyuan Yu's *The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle: Mirrors of Virtue* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007).
28. Following Lopez Austin, in *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, trans B. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 189, another possible candidate would be the "upright man," *tlacamelahuac*. This term derives from *tlaacatl*, meaning human, and *melaucayotl*, meaning rectitude or making something straight. The term, however, likely had a more specific sense. I tend to think it a closer candidate for Aristotle's *phronimos*. Another possible candidate is *tlaçoyotl*, which is sometimes translated as "excellence." Yet this term derives from *tlaçotli*, which means valuable or expensive, and so is more likely a term for inherent worth, or (better) highest worth.
29. In what follows, it may be helpful to bear in mind that Nahuatl does not have a standard orthography, though current scholarship tends to use a modified Franciscan lexigraphy. The F.C. in particular tends to make non-standard use even from one line to the next. One should bear in mind, then, that "i" and "y" are often substitutes, and "j" and "i" are as well. In the F.C., the existence of glottal stops and breathers is most commonly indicated with an "h."
30. In fact, the "-ness," indicating an abstractive substantive in English, is not present in the Nahuatl. I added it for the purposes of readability.
31. *Florentine Codex*, vol. 10, 2. These translations are my own. Dibble and Anderson render the entire phrase as "the good daughter."
32. To be fair to Dibble and Anderson, one purpose of their translation was to stay in contact with the insights that informed the Spanish which Sahagun rendered in his original transcription, but without translating through Spanish to English. If Sahagún interpreted the Nahuatl in a specific way, then their task was to make that known in English as well. My goals are different ones.
33. *Florentine Codex*, vol. 10, 2. Translation is my own.
34. Of all the authors that make this contrast, John Rawls is likely the clearest. For his account of the categorical imperative procedure and its difference from the categorical imperative itself, see his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), especially chapter ten on the categorical imperative. He makes the contrast between orders of justification in *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed., 24–30 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
35. N.E., 1094a.
36. "ta men gar eisin energiai, ta de par' autas erga tina" (1094a2-3).
37. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (New York: Hackett Press, 2001), 2.
38. *Florentine Codex*, vol. 10, 29-30. Translation modified.
39. N.E., 1098a.
40. *Ibid.*, 1095b.
41. This approach to the organization of our preferences, so that (1) *eudaimonia* is the skillful (i.e., excellent) management of our telic hierarchy, and (2) a way of life is what sits atop the hierarchy would appear to enable Aristotle to avoid the sorts of concern Larry Temkin raises in *Rethinking the Good: Moral Ideals and the Nature of Practical Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). A key objection Temkin raises is that our preferences cannot be demonstrated to be strictly transitive, so that preference orders (and so equivalence relations) cannot be said to obtain for our preferences. This spells trouble for informed preference consequentialists and anyone who agrees broadly with John Rawls' descriptive account of the good in part three of *A Theory of Justice*. Aristotle's conception of the good, if the above is correct, would appear to allow him to avoid this sort of concern, since a *bios* requires only a characteristic way of putting goals in relation to each other, and not anything like even a partial preference order. The matter, clearly, is more complex than can be addressed here, but I thought it worth noting that Aristotle's approach may avoid a number of modern headaches concerning the good.
42. This is Aristotle's argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a10-178a10.
43. Aristotle, *Aristotelis Politica*, ed. W. D. Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).
44. *Ibid.*, 1252b.
45. For a taste of the controversy, see Thomas Nagel's criticism in "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 7–14 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), and J. L. Ackrill's tentative reply in "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*" in the same volume *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, 15–33.
46. These points have been made at length in Lopez Austin's work as well as David Carrasco's *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmivision and Ceremonial Centers* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990).
47. *Florentine Codex*, vol. 6, 127. Translation modified. Incidentally, this phrase, which looks to be an insult, is a compliment in Nahua culture. One "balances" one's wishes of good fortune with bad fortune in order to wish another well. The section ends, for example, by welcoming the new couple into the society by telling them that they are abandoned. The statements read: "for it is our way of doing things on earth (*in tlaticpac*); for no one is concerned with anyone; for we have already abandoned thee. Take heed of this," 132–33. Translation modified.
48. The present discussion makes use of points that Aristotle develops in books 1 and 10 of the N.E., but for the sake of clarity, I have omitted Aristotle's distinct discussion of pleasure in book 7. I do not think the present argument turns on the difference between pleasure understood as an uninterrupted activity, as one largely finds it in book 7, and pleasure as a sort of perfection of our other activities. See Julia Annas' essay, "Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 285–99 for an account that reconciles Aristotle's various statements on this topic.
49. N.E., 1174b.
50. *Ibid.*, 1100b.
51. *Ibid.*, 1099b.

52. *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.
53. I write "philosophers and elders" to indicate the possibility that these were distinct groups, though they likely were not.
54. I think the problems are well-known. Yet, to be a little more specific, a principle problem facing any morally "holist" account of action guidance is that forms of fascism come to be readily supportable. If the community is the ultimate unit of moral concern, then the sacrifice of an individual is of no more consequence than the sacrifice of a gangrenous finger to save the life of the individual (maybe even less so).

Tsotsil Epistemology: An Intangible Inheritance

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When we think that reality is constructed, what we are doing is considering a space needing of conquest.

—Hugo Zemelman

INTRODUCTION

In what follows, I will reflect on originary peoples [*pueblos originarios*]. Specifically, my reflections will focus on the thought, cosmovision, and philosophy of the *Tsotsil* peoples of Huixtán, Chiapas. The main objective of this work is to propose arguments that will allow us to better understand the postures and forms of resistance that characterize the thought of these people, as well as their communal practices, their principles, enunciations, and sayings, so as to open up the possibility of reconsidering our own reality, especially in the realm of education.

Authors such as Leopoldo Zea, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, Edgardo Lander, Francisco López Segrera, Hugo Zemelman, Boaventura Sousa Santos y Daniel Carlos Gutiérrez Rohán share as a common theme the advent of a new Latin American thinking; however, it is not my objective to take up the critical apparatus of these authors, but rather, what interests us here is to show that there are other forms of thinking and other points of departure that can be found outside [established] theory and external to academic philosophies, namely, the philosophical practices of originary peoples.

In our study, we have decided to look at thought, experience, and knowledge from the standpoint of the specific philosophical practices of the *Tsotsil*, risking, of course, that we have involuntarily situated ourselves in the myopic vision of our own perspective. Affirming "our own perspective" means that we also accept the existence of "other" perspectives; even if it is just in the act of indicating this or that, we present ourselves with every judgment of comparison, and we make distinctions because there are certainly things about us that we recognize but would rather not. For this reason, we must distinguish, in the construction of knowledge, between thought and practice.

The study of thought requires vigilance and, simultaneously, the capacity to admire. Thus, we are allowed to contemplate the otherness of the indigenous given that the myth of homogeneity has been, finally, demolished. This is significant since in the past the problem has always been the negation of indigenous knowledge, brought about by the need to legitimate the paradigms of the great theorists, and has also made it so that other, more urgent things in relation to thought have to be kept out of consideration. Thus, in what follows we aim to see past a fissure, with critical eyes, toward the thought of originary peoples, namely, the thought of the *Tsotsil*.

With the *Tsotsil*, knowledge is constructed in accordance with certain categories that point to the profundity of their historical thinking in relation to practice. This means that practice has a lot to do with the construction of subjects; as such, the objective of this text will be to undertake an approximation of a *Tsotsil* philosophy in order to reflect on the different perspectives that this philosophy takes and, thus, broaden our own sociocultural historical horizon. For this reason, and as we go, we will introduce certain concepts that will allow us to reflect on diverse philosophical categories, such as *p'ij*, *p'ij o'ntonal*, *pasel*, *ich'el ta muk' o na'el*.

P'IJ

The concept of *p'ij* has several layers. We'll mention just a few in what follows. To begin with, we should mention that *p'ij* refers to something that is found in its fullness, complete, and mature [*íntegro, completo y maduro*]. In one linguistic variation, the peoples of San Juan Chamula call it *bij*; however, both roots can be traced specifically to a numerical root in the *tsetsal* language referring to things or objects which are circular. Moreover, *bij* is the capacity of the subject to fulfill himself as subject, or a subject that has the necessary qualities to live in the community.¹ This implies a moment in which the subject becomes complete, something that may not have much to do with the way in which this completeness comes about, but which is, rather, about an analogy between knowledge and the capacities of the subject, for instance, with dialogue, which has its beginning and its end, *slikeb* and *slajeb*,² referring to a circling around a conversation. These two elements have to do with Mayan numbering practices. Furthermore, the person who is *p'ij* has knowledge, is wise, manages wisdom [*sabiduría*]; we could say that this person is a person who knows about life, a person with common knowledge.

Outlines of what will eventually become knowledge are manifested in dreams (*vaech*); dreamers then project these outlines in conversation [*plática*] and coexistence as a form of sharing. Much of what these outlines become, these knowledges, are not going to be written in texts, but will remain at the level of dialogue, in the construction of possible worlds, in which dreams constitute a pre-comprehension and pre-construction of reality and of the world; moreover, this is knowledge that must be put into practice—elders say that words have *ch'ulel*, they contribute to the constitution of subjectivity.

Concepts for reality and constitution are but schemas or frameworks that subjects construct on an individual,