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Q'ij Metaphysics: Vico's *Theologia Indorum* and the
Gods, Ancestors, and Idols of the 16th Century K'ichee' Mayas

by

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Dedication

In memory of my good friend and mentor Ignacio “Nacho” Gaona.

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Abstract

Domingo de Vico completed the *Theologia Indorum*, a K'iche' Christian manuscript, in Guatemala in 1554. In the manuscript, Vico distinguishes between the idols, ancestors, and gods of the K'iche's. This paper shows that Vico believed the idols to be inanimate objects, ancestors to be the older generations that have passed away, and gods to be demons. This paper then develops a theory of animist ontology for the K'iche's. Using that ontological theory, this paper argues that, for the K'iche's, their idols and gods were indistinguishable and that their ancestors were still alive, present, and active among them.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
A Brief History of the K'iche's	2
Domingo de Vico and the Dominican Order of Spain	4
The Theologia Indorum as Manuscript	9
The Theologia Indorum as Message	14
Why the Theologia Indorum Matters	18
Chapter 1: Literature Review of Ontological Theories and Other Concepts	22
An Amerindian Cosmopolitical Theory	23
The Naturalism of 16 th Century Europe	27
Language, Writing, and Colonialism	33
Chapter 2: Methodology	41
Application of Viveiros' Theory	41
New Philology and Indigenous Language Sources	43
The Western Canon	47
The Ethnography of Modern Highland Mayas	48
Chapter 3: The Use of Western Categories in Vico	50
Categorizing the Physical and the Metaphysical	52
The Nonpermeable Separation between Categories	54
The Categories of Human and Non-human	57
Two Exceptions to the Non-permeability of Categories	64
Conclusion	68

Chapter 4: Vico on K'iche'an Idols, Ancestors, and Gods	70
The Bane of Idolatry	70
The Theologia Indorum and the Idols	73
The Theologia Indorum and the Ancestors	78
The Theologia Indorum and the Gods	82
Conclusion	88
Chapter 5: The Animist Ontology of the 16th Century K'iche's	90
The Nagualism of the Nahuas	90
The Case for a K'iche'an Animist Theory	94
The K'iche'an Gods, Ancestors, and Idols	110
Conclusion	124
Chapter 6: Conclusions	126
References	131

Introduction

K'iche' is the most widely spoken indigenous language in North America and currently boasts around two million speakers. While many K'iche' speakers have migrated to countries such as the United States, they predominantly live in Guatemala's highlands. Christenson describes the region as "some of the most beautiful country in the world, dominated by a range of high mountains, volcanoes, and steep-walled plateaus, wrapped in green pine forest, and watered by numerous rivers and waterfalls" (2007:26). For the purposes of this thesis, I will borrow Sparks' (2010) definitions of *Maya* and *K'iche'*. Thus in this paper, *Maya* can either refer to (1) a distinct linguistic macrofamily or (2) indigenous speech communities who mostly dwell in present-day Guatemala and Yucatán and who speak a language within that family. *K'iche'* meanwhile can either refer to (1) a specific language within the K'iche'an Branch of the Mayan language family or (2) the speech communities in Guatemala's highlands who speak K'iche'.

The purpose of this section is to provide context to the *Theologia Indorum*, which is the subject of this study. Due to the relatively obscure status of both the manuscript and its author, Domingo de Vico, the introduction covers various areas pertinent to understanding the manuscript. The primary sources for this section include Garry Sparks (2014; 2017; 2019), who is the premier scholar on the manuscript, and also William Hanks (2010), who is an expert on colonial Mayan manuscripts. This section will explain the pre-colonial and colonial history of the K'iche's, then Domingo de Vico, and finally the *Theologia Indorum* itself.

Ultimately, the argument of this paper is fairly simple. I address two primary questions: First, how does Domingo de Vico perceive K'iche'an gods, ancestors, and idols? Second, how do the K'iche's view them? To answer these two questions, I review the ontological schematization of being that informs Vico (Chapters 3) and the K'iche's (Chapter 5). I also

analyze the *Theologia Indorum* to interpret Vico's understanding of idols, gods and ancestors (Chapter 4). After that, I analyze indigenous writings, especially the *Popol Wuuuj* and *Rab'inah Achi*, to attempt an understanding of the K'iche'an perspective (Chapter 5). Essentially, I argue that Vico sees the gods as demons, the ancestors as souls sent to Hell, and idols as dead rock and wood. On the other hand, I argue that the K'iche's perceive the gods and idols as the same type of divine being, a *k'ab'awil*, and they view their ancestors as more than disembodied spirits who have departed to the unreachable metaphysical dimension.

A Brief History of The K'iche's

Before the arrival of the Spanish, the K'iche's were the most powerful group in the Guatemalan highland region. According to Fox, the K'iche's "were descended from Epigonal Toltec warriors who migrated into the highlands following the collapse of Chichen Itza" (1978:2). It is important to note that the Toltec "Conquest" theory, which is still advocated by scholars such as Coe (2015) and Sparks (2019:41), has largely been refuted in favor of a trade-based model involving mutual networks of cultural and material exchange (Hoggarth 2016; Ringle 2017; Tejero-Andrade et al. 2018).¹ In other words, the Chichen Itza population was genetically Maya, not conquering Toltec implants. Still, Fox attributes the collapse of Chichen Itza as the catalyst of Lowland Maya migration into the highland regions. Hoggarth attributes the political collapse of Chichen Itza, which occurred around 1000 A.D., to "the longest and most severe drought recorded in regional climate records between AD 1000 and 1100" (2016:2). Fox states that the Lowland Mayan migration into the highlands occurred in the early 1200s A.D. and "was simply the last of at least three separate lowland to highland movements during the Postclassic Period" (1978:270). Fox adds that the Lowland Mayas migrated as small groups,

¹ A former professor of mine, Dr. Kenneth L. Brown, was particularly adamant about this point.

“[taking] local highland women as wives and soon lost their Gulf Coast language” (1978:2). Among their descendants were the K’iche’s.

The K’iche’s became militarily dominant in the highlands. According to Fox, by 1470 the “[K’iche’an] state became too large in area for effective administration, and a number of subject groups...revolted and initiated rival systems” (1978:4). These conflicts progressed into “a series of protracted wars between the [K’iche’s], the newly independent [Kaqchikel], the [Tz’utujil], and the Pipil” that occurred half a century before the arrival of the Spanish (Fox 1978:302). Fox concludes that by the time the Spanish arrived, the Kaqchikel “were clearly on the ascendency” (1978:302). By the time the Spanish arrived to the region, the K’iche’s were no longer the dominant power in the highlands.

The Spanish arrived in the highlands in 1524. According to Christenson, three years after Hernán Cortés successfully razed the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521, he “sent his principle captain, Pedro de Alvarado, to invade the Maya lands southeast of the Aztec Empire in early 1524” (2016:110). According to Fox, the Spanish “chose to side with the [Kaqchikel], and establish their first capital, Santiago de los Caballeros, at Iximche itself,” which was the Kaqchikel political center at the time (1978:302). With the Kaqchikel as allies, Alvarado focused his military campaign on the K’iche’an presence in the region. Significant battles were waged against the K’iche’s in late March, and the K’iche’an capital of Q’umarkaj finally fell on March 27, which was Easter Sunday that year (Christenson 2016:113, 114). Then Alvarado executed the K’iche’an rulers, burned Q’umarkaj to ruins, renamed the city “Santa Cruz” in commemoration of the Easter holiday, and left on April 11 to return to Santiago de los Caballeros (Christenson 2016:113). The Kaqchikel would assist the Spanish in other military ventures. For instance, 300 canoes of Kaqchikel warriors would later assist the Spanish in defeating another Maya group, the

Tz'utujil (Christenson 2016:129). By this period, the Kaqchikel were the most dominant Mayan group. Sachse states that Kaqchikel became the *lingua franca* of the highlands, and the Spanish called Kaqchikel the *lengua de Guatemala* and the *lengua metropolitana* while referring to K'iche' as the *lengua utlateca*, taken from *Utatlan*, the Nahuatl name for Q'umarkaj (2018:69). In other words, the K'iche' language was considered a "regional" language, secondary in both influence and utility to Kaqchikel. Nevertheless, Christenson concludes that while the Tz'utujil "capitulated to the Spaniards...and never rebelled openly against Spanish political authority once it was established," the descendants of both the K'iche's and the Kaqchikel maintained a long and active resistance to the Spanish newcomers (2016:3). In fact, Alvarado faced so much resistance from highland Maya groups such as the Achi, Q'eqchi', Ch'ol, and Poqomchi' that he called the region the "Land of Eternal War" (Sparks 2019:98). Mayan resistance did not exclusively involve military action. According to Hanks, resistance "took a variety of forms," including armed rebellion but also fleeing to nearby towns, outright exodus away from Spanish-controlled regions, litigation, or simple refusal to follow the Crown or the subsequent missionaries (2010:50). In present day Guatemala, which is nicknamed the "Land of Eternal Spring," this spirit of resistance persists among the Mayas against colonial systems of oppression, especially in schools and education.

Domingo de Vico and the Dominican Order of Spain

Once the Spanish military subjugated the Mayan centers of leadership and established the Spanish Crown as the political authority of the New World, the missionaries naturally followed the trails of burning towns and bloodshed to convert the Crown's new citizens with the gift of the cross. Hanks notes that the missionaries were often critical of the Spanish military, believing that "the violence and havoc [that the soldiers] wreaked in military conquest and extractions of the

colonial regime...impeded the saving of souls” (2010:3). Yet the missionaries also clashed with each other. Sparks is exceptionally keen on this, noting the “notable diversity” of Christian theologies of Iberia. These diverse “Catholicisms” and “Christianities” were not only influenced by the migration of Visigoths, Suevis, Vandals, and Arlan Arian Christians from central Europe but also by the Muslim caliphates and emirates who had entered across the Strait of Gibraltar and through Spain’s southern border (Sparks 2019:53, 55). These theological variations spawned various Catholic orders throughout Spain, and their differences became extremely apparent in the New World, where the linguistic diversity of the Maya region “caused Dominican and Franciscan mission territories to overlap, resulting in intense competition and discord among the various mendicant orders and their competing semiotic ideologies” (2019:269). The Franciscans (*Ordo Fratrum Minorum*,² O.F.M.) and Dominicans (*Ordo Praedicatorum*,³ O.P.) represented the vast majority of the Christian missionary presence among the Maya. According to Sparks, the highland region was divided into separate Franciscan and Dominican domains in order to “limit frictions among the clergy,” with the Franciscans operating primarily with Kaqchikel and some K’iche’ speakers, and with the Dominicans operating primarily with K’iche’ speakers but also Q’eqchi’ and Poqom and a “limited” number of Kaqchikel (2019:50). Despite the rivalry between the two orders, Hanks clearly states that the Franciscans “dominated the missions for the first century,” and meanwhile the Dominicans failed to compete with Franciscan influence (2010:10). Quiroa echoes as much, stating that by a Dominican chronicler’s own admission: “the Dominican order never accomplished an effective conversion of the Maya-K’iche’ population as envisioned by the early missionaries” (2013:75). Simultaneous, Sparks admits that the Franciscans were not just the first to arrive to the Maya world but were also the most numerous

² “Order of Friars Minor,” founded Francis of Assisi, patron saint of Italy and the Franciscan Order

³ “Order of Preachers,” founded by Dominic de Guzmán, patron saint of astronomers

of any Catholic order (2019:76). Nevertheless, the Dominicans still represented a significant portion of the missionary population in the New World.

The two orders differed not only in theological nuances but also in other significant ways. For instance, the Franciscans emphasized vows of poverty and living as nomadic friars and “beggars,” while the Dominicans emphasized preaching (Hanks 2010:9, 61; Sparks 2019:57, 59). Perhaps most significantly, the two orders differed in approaches to evangelization. Hanks, who devotes much of his book to Franciscan writings specifically, states that the Franciscans prized “simplicity,” preferring “simple, transparent statement over elaborate metaphors,” an aspect that is a crucial device in Mayan rhetoric (2010:9). Furthermore, the Franciscans often favored introducing Castilian theological terms to the Maya languages because translation “was fraught with danger, since the entire evangelization was to be conducted in Maya: false equivalents would yield false beliefs” (2010:117). Sparks echoes the same notion, commenting that the Franciscans favored the use of Castilian or Latin over using indigenous vocabulary to convey Christian theological concepts (2019:163). The Franciscan evangelization effort was completely founded on the notion that all languages merely attach arbitrary sounds (i.e. words) to an objective reality that all people experience in the same way, an assumption that Sapir famously critiqued (Hill and Mannheim 1992:385). This approach to language reflects a general trend of Franciscans attempting to utterly divorce the Maya religion from their own. As Sparks notes, the Franciscans adamantly avoided using an indigenous word for God, simply preferring the “Mayanized” *Tyox*,⁴ and considered any Mayan cosmology a form of pagan “demonology” (2019:164, 295). In general, the Franciscan approach was harsh and unforgiving towards the

⁴ It seems even *Tyox* could develop pagan associations, since one Tz’utujil dictionary lists “*Tyoox*” to mean “*imagen, idolo*” while *Dios* is listed as “*Dyooos*” (Mendoza 1996:437, 621).

Mayan religion and hoped to destroy it at its root (*prius evellant, de inde plantent*) from the Mayan mind.

The Franciscan approach of evangelization completely differs with that of the Dominicans. On a more general level, the Dominicans had a more sympathetic disposition towards the Mayas, often praising them, comparing them to the Greeks and Romans, and even attempting to restore “some indigenous royal privileges” by recognizing land claims and “some limited sovereignty” for certain elite Mayan lineages (Christenson 2016:68, 84). In line with this disposition, the Dominicans tended “toward valuing non-Christian cultural sources and thought in general” (2019:58). Shapiro describes this notion well, namely as “a belief that the elements of indigenous culture chosen for translation into Christian terms were, in reality, adumbrations of the Christian message, seeds of the Gospel planted by God so that peoples all over the world should recognize and accept the true religion when they were fortunate enough to encounter it” (1987:126). This disposition led to the Dominicans attempting to use indigenous vocabulary rather than introducing Castilian or Latin words into the language. For instance, the Dominicans initially attempted to use the K’iche’ word *k’ab’awil*, which the K’iche’ used to refer to their stone and clay deity images, to signify “God.” The backlash from the Franciscans was so severe that the Dominicans relented and adapted *k’ab’awil* to signify “idol” instead of “God” (Sparks 2019:164). Yet rather than referring to God exclusively as *Tyox* or *Dios* like the Franciscans, the Dominicans also referred to God by using new K’iche’ constructions such as *Tz’aqol B’itol* (“Framer Former”), *Nima Ajaw* (“Great Lord”), and *Alom K’ajolm* (“Bearer Begetter”) (Sparks 2019:162, 163). In fact, the Dominicans not only favored the use of indigenous vocabulary to express Christian theological concepts but even favored the use of indigenous rhetorical conventions and style over mere “simplicity” (Sparks 2019:162). Walker explains the divergence

in Dominican and Franciscan thought well: the Dominicans believe that “in so far as these other religions differ from the one true religion (i.e. Christianity), they are superstitious, but they all contain some spark of truth,” whereas the Franciscans believe that “all pagan religion is diabolic; what gains of truth it contains are stolen from Moses; it is the same as, or indissolubly mixed with, black magic” (2003:93, 94, 146, 147). Domingo de Vico, author of the *Theologia Indorum*, was a Dominican, whose sentiments are echoed in Athanasius: “Everything is filled with the knowledge of God,” for “he had not hidden himself invisibly from human beings, nor given them knowledge of himself in one way only, but had unfolded it to them in manifold ways and through many forms” (2011:61, 66).⁵ This Dominican attitude no doubt inspired Vico’s comparatively sympathetic treatment of the K’iche’ in his writings.

Domingo de Vico’s exact birthdate is unknown. Sparks approximates it sometime between 1485 and 1519 “in the province of Jaén, in or around the towns of either Úbeda or Huelma, when the area was still also an Arabic- and Ladino- (Sephardic Castilian) speaking region of southern Iberia” (2019:95). Virtually nothing is known about Vico’s early life, and Sparks notes that “little is mentioned of him in the surviving written records” (2019:23). But some biographical data has been recovered. At some point, Vico eventually entered the Dominican convent and studied at the convent’s Colegio de San Andrés in the town of Úbeda. From there he pursued further education from University of Salamanca and its Dominican Colegio de San Estaban (Sparks 2019:95). During this same time, the Dominican Order was conducting ambitious missionary projects in present-day Yucatán and Guatemala, but their missionary envoys struggled to cope with the various Mayan languages. The Dominican Order

⁵ This Dominican attitude was not permanent. By the late 1600s, Dominicans such as Francisco Ximénez separated any connections between the *Tz’aqol B’itol* and God, arguing that the Mayan language was inadequate in conveying God’s magnificence, and furthermore considered any reference to Mayan religion as “dangerous” and “evil” (Quiroa 2013:76-79).

began scouting for the “best and brightest” linguistic talent within their own universities (Sparks 2019:97; Sachse 2018:70). The Dominican Order observed Vico’s linguist aptitude at Salamanca and recruited him, along with his cohort, to travel to the Maya-speaking regions of the New World and to help with the proselytization effort. In fact, Christenson notes that it was the famous Bartolomé de las Casas, “Protector of the Indians” and author of *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, who personally convinced Vico to travel to Guatemala (2016:81). Vico and his cohort left Salamanca on January 12, 1544. Their ship stopped several times, many in the cohort disbanded, and those who remained were eventually shipwrecked; however, Vico and a small remainder of his cohort did arrive in present-day Chiapas, Mexico on March 12, 1545, well over a year after their departure (Sparks 2019:98). Vico would die eleven years later in late 1555. Vico had been bedridden and “deathly ill,” and during his sickness Ch’ol-speaking Acalá Mayas ambushed Vico and shot him full of many arrows, then sacked the Dominican mission house (Sparks 2019:103). Vico reportedly died at 7 A.M. on Friday, November 30, 1555 (Sparks 2019:103). Although Vico would ultimately only spend eleven years ministering to the Mayas, he spent that small remainder of his life in vigorous and productive work.

Linguistic skills were highly prized among the Spanish missionaries. As Hanks notes, a missionary working in New Spain often needed to master “three or more different languages in order to communicate with local people,” especially since the missionary schools often failed to teach the Mayas to speak Castilian and, with utterly abysmal result, Latin (2010:10, 75). He later adds that “it is costly to train friars in Maya, all of whom come from Castilla. It takes years, and half of them never learn” (2010:89). Vico, who was noted for a work ethic unmatched by his missionary peers, learned at least seven Maya languages, including K’iche’, Kaqchikel, Tz’utujil, Ch’ol, Poqomam, Q’eqchi’, and Poqomchi’ (Sparks 2019:94, 95; Sachse 2018:70, 72). He

demonstrated his linguistic skill in his books and catechisms, most famous of which is the *Theologia Indorum*.

The Theologia Indorum as Manuscript

The *Theologia Indorum* is the single longest text written in an indigenous Amerindian language. Sparks states that the manuscript's title can either be translated as "Theology of the Indians" or "Theology for the Indians" (Sparks 2019:93, 2017:25, 2014:401). I disagree with Sparks' second translation, which implies an indirect affect onto the indigenous by the theology. "*Indorum*" is a second declension plural noun in the genitive case, and so the name should only be translated as "Theology of the Indians," with *Indorum* serving as a noun modifier for *Theologia*. Simpson shows that *Indi* (from *Ἰνδοί*) has historically always been treated as masculine rather than neuter (1968:299). Therefore the closest approximation to "for the Indians" would be the dative *Indis*, not *Indorum*. It could be that the name *Theologia Indorum* reflects the Dominican notion that all pagan religions contain a partial amount of objective Truth attained through natural revelation, as articulated so well by Walker (2003). But based on the extremely orthodox and simplistic content of Vico's book, this does not seem likely. Rather, it seems Vico named his book the *Theologia Indorum* simply because it is a theology written in an Indian language with an Indian audience in mind. The Indian audience, moreover, is expected to not dynamically engage with it but rather absorb it. Hanks distinguishes between dialogic and monologic work; the *Theologia Indorum* is clearly monologic, meaning that the audience is expected to "receive it and...follow its urgings but do not speak" (2010:266, 275). Sparks argues that the *Theologia Indorum* was intended to be read by literate Maya, noting how the manuscript frequently address its audience with *ix* ("y'all") and *numi'al, nuk'ajol* ("my daughters, my sons") (2019:120). Sparks' assessment certainly might be the case. But the *Theologia Indorum* might

also be intended to serve as one of the various *sermones*, *pláticas*, or *discursos* used by the missionaries to address an indigenous audience during mass (Hanks 2010:271). Hanks adds that these sermons were essentially scripts designed “to be performed aloud,” in some cases by a single individual (2010:112). To put it simply, the *Theologia Indorum* may have served as a script or sermon outline for missionaries in the highlands. Sparks even notes that highland missionaries as far as the eighteenth century formally acknowledged using the *Theologia Indorum* “*en especial*” when ministering (2019:113, 114). Thus it appears fairly certain that Vico wrote the *Theologia Indorum* for the purpose of it being read aloud to a K’iche’an audience.

The *Theologia Indorum* is written entirely in K’iche’, employing a highly formalized rhetorical register that is distinctly K’iche’an. Vico completed his composition of the manuscript “as late as November” of 1554, a year before his death in November 1555 (Sparks 2019:102, 117). It is clear the Vico was extremely talented at acquiring languages, a sentiment that Christenson echoes (2016:82). But whether Vico is exclusively the author remains unclear. Sparks, it should be noted, makes no suggestion of additional authorship, instead praising Vico for his “ability to convey complex ideas of the Christian [G]od not by merely translating European catechisms, sermons, or *questio* into Mesoamerican languages, but rather by negotiating in, through, and with Mayan concepts, style, and rules” (2014:407). But Christensen astutely observes: “The title pages of printed texts propose Spanish ecclesiastics as the sole authors. Yet upon closer examination of the historical record and the texts themselves, the contributions of [indigenous] as assistants, scribes, ghost writers, and authors become increasingly apparent” (2014:7). In other words, just because an indigenous name does not appear on a manuscript’s title page does not mean that no indigenous helped in writing it. In fact, many Maya were trained not only to speak Castilian but also to read and write in both Castilian

and Latin (Hanks 2010:76, 81; Christensen 2014:7-9). And while it is possible that Vico wrote without indigenous assistance, it certainly should not be ruled out. Christensen makes a strong case that indigenous assistance was necessary, stating “the eloquence and native rhetoric of many sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century texts betray the contributions of native assistants” (2014:9). The First Mexican Provincial Council of 1555 did ban indigenous involvement in the creation of manuscripts, but this occurred a full year after the *Theologia Indorum* was complete in 1554. Moreover, Christenson explains that after 1555, indigenous involvement became less prevalent, and texts became “increasingly shortened and simplified,” plainly demonstrating that without indigenous assistance, the supposed masters of Mayan languages were not so gifted after all (2010:358; 2014:9). Nevertheless, in 1554 Vico would have been well within legal bounds to rely on indigenous assistance.

Vico, along with the other missionaries, had to cope with various challenges in the Mayan world, and these challenges directly influenced the creation and preservation of the *Theologia Indorum*. For instance, missionaries often lacked not just valuable reinforcement from the Catholic orders in Europe but even critical resources. Sparks states: “Due to its difficult terrain and lack of valuable materials like gold, the region attracted fewer clergy and resources than central Mexico or the Andes” (2019:84, 269). The resource crisis was so severe that the missionaries in the Yucatán did not receive their first printing press until 1813, whereas the missionaries in Mexico began printing as early as 1539 (Christensen 2014:5). It is for this reason that Vico composed the *Theologia Indorum* entirely by hand. Anandasivam states that Vico wrote the *Theologia Indorum* as two separate volumes, which together comprised 215 chapters spanning over one thousand pages (2019:2). Others disagree with these proposed numbers. Sparks states there are 216 chapters, not 215, and both he and Sachse agree that there were over

700 folios, not a thousand (Sparks 2014:404; Sachse 2018:70). At the time, missionaries had already been using an orthographic adaption of the Latin characters for writing in Mayan languages. Due to the Moorish presence in Spain, many of the missionaries had at least encountered and become acquainted with the Arabic abjad, and so they often adapted certain Arabic characters to represent Mayan morphemes not present in Castilian, though Latin orthography remained the foundational template (Sparks 2019:71, 100). These writing conventions were by no means standardized to the same extent as Latin or Castilian, but Hanks does note a “single emergent standard” between various colonial works (2010:113, 124, 167). Nevertheless, the Latinized Mayan orthography was relatively consistent in its logic if not its execution, and when Vico wrote, he used the orthographic conventions that were fairly well-established in the region.

A final challenge for the missionaries was their nomadic tendencies in a varied and difficult terrain. As Hanks notes, travel was common among various members of the Catholic orders (2010:121, 166). Part of the the missionary’s journeys included transporting manuscripts. Christensen notes that due to the lack of a printing press, missionaries in the Maya regions relied heavily on drafting hand-written texts and circulating them (2014:6). Hanks states that without the convenience of small bound printed books, missionaries had to carry “stacks of manuscripts between hard covers” (2010:113). For this reason, it would have been extremely impractical for a missionary to carry 700 folios of the *Theologia Indorum* from mission to mission. To accommodate frequent travel, the missionaries created a type of manuscript called the *vade mecum* (“go with me”), which were smaller and more portable than normal manuscripts (Sparks 2019:61). Christensen describes these manuscripts as “small in size, brief, and typically housed between a makeshift leather cover” (2010:360). Such a manuscript would have only included

selections of the *Theologia Indorum* to allow for greater mobility. Sachse affirms that many colonial writers “reproduced and reconfigured” “entire passages” of the *Theologia Indorum* (2018:70). Sparks reasonably attributes the *vade mecum* for the seeming lack of complete copies of the *Theologia Indorum* known today, stating “it seems to have been broken up into smaller works that were continuously copied and used by [missionaries] over the course of the next centuries and misidentified and wrongly catalogued in European and US colonial manuscript collections” (2019:4). The manuscript was never published, leaving all the copies hand-written. Anandasivam states that there are twelve known surviving manuscripts of the *Theologia Indorum* (2019:2). Sparks states otherwise. In 2014 he had counted seventeen extant versions, and in 2019 he seems to have uncovered an additional copy, raising the total count to eighteen (2014:404; 2019:245). He notes that all of the copies seem to be “at-least [sic] second generation copies” (2019:127). Although the location of the original manuscript is unknown, the *Theologia Indorum* is by no means “lost.” But due to its limited access and length, no one has yet translated the entire document into any other language.

The Theologia Indorum as Message

Finally, while the content of the *Theologia Indorum* was extremely thorough, it was also extremely simple. Within the manuscript, Vico states the purpose of the *Theologia Indorum* as follows: “*Chitzukuj ta iwetamab’al, chupam wa’e wuj k’o wi nima etamab’al chetamax wi Dios nim Ajaw iwumal*” (“*Que sepan buscar sus conocimientos, en este libro hay grandes conocimientos en donde ustedes pueden saber de Dios gran Señor*”) (2017:24). The content is extremely orthodox and explains biblical stories, the difference between virtues and vices, basic tenants of Christian theology, and the importance of God, among other things. Sparks particularly enjoys linking Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* to the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas

Aquinas (2014:399, 403, 404, 407, 408; 2017: 30; 2019:60, 102, 131, 147). Certainly the canonized theologian influenced Vico. As Sparks points out, Vico studied at the University of Salamanca, where Aquinas became the “curricular standard” of the school (2019:131). Yet in addition to Aquinas, and whom Sparks does little more than acknowledge, Erasmus and Averroës also became extremely popular figures at Salamanca. According to Sparks, “Erasmus’s popularity reached its apex at Iberian universities in Salamanca and Alcalá in the late 1520s,” while Averroës became one of the “essential sources for Thomas Aquinas’s theological scholasticism” and particularly influenced “Dominican thought in general but especially in northern Iberia by the 1530s” (2019:54-59). These two figures critically influenced Vico and the approach to writing the *Theologia Indorum*.

It is possible that Averroës influenced Vico as much as Aquinas. Abu'l-Walīd Ibn Rushd, better known as Averroës, was one of the two greatest Aristotelians of the thirteenth century, the other being Aquinas (Fakhry 2008: *preface*). One of Averroës’ most important contributions to Vico was the idea of stratifications of intellect. In his *Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between Law and Wisdom*, Averroës states that “it is obligatory to reflect upon existing things by means of the intellect, and to consider them; and consideration is nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known” (2008:2). To put it simply, the purpose of humanity is to use reason to obtain Truth. But while it is required that humans use reason, not all people are capable of it. Averroës also states that people fail in philosophical reflection “either due to a deficiency in his innate disposition, poor ordering of his reflection, being overwhelmed by his passions, not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of what is in them, or because of a combination of all or more than one of these reasons” (2008:7). Essentially, humans fail to learn by means of reason primarily due to their “passions” (i.e.

hedonism, or in Christian terms, succumbing to the sinful nature of the “flesh”), lack of education, or a frank lack of capability. The first two can be amended, but the third cannot. This is why the Dominicans created schools and advocated so adamantly against Maya following their sinful natures. Christenson notes that even Vico himself taught elite Maya children as an instructor, possibly with Averroës’ warning in mind that “anyone who prevents someone suited to reflect upon the books of wisdom from doing so...is like one who prevents thirsty people from drinking cool, fresh water until they die of thirst” (Christenson 2016:82; Averroës 2008:7). But Averroës amends that not all can be trained to reason philosophically.

Rather, there are three types of intellectual dispositions (or “natures”) according to Averroës. There are people who may ascend in knowledge and wisdom either through “demonstration,” which is the highest and rarest intellect, or else through “dialectical statements,” or lastly through “rhetoric,” which is the lowliest and most common. This supposed stratification promotes an elitist attitude towards “the masses,” who would have been the majority of the indigenous in the New World. According to Averroës, the “masses” are characterized as “not adept in knowledge of [philosophy] nor capable of understanding it” (2008:11). Such people can only learn through preaching without interactive engagement. They are not permitted to study on their own at risk of “heretical innovation on their part” and should in fact be kept ignorant that philosophy exists at all (2008:11, 19). In fact, Averroës goes as far to say that “the duty of those within the multitude who are not capable of rhetorical statements is to let them stand in their apparent sense, and it is not permissible to know that interpretation at all” (2008:26). Simply put, it is the obligation of the “multitude” to listen to an instructor, which contradicts his initial and most basic premise that the purpose of humanity is to use reason to learn. The influential priest Ficino echoes as much, stating that good knowledge such as

astrology becomes “bad” when in the hands of the “plebians” (Walker 2003:54). Even Gregory of Nazianzus states that “For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun’s brightness” (2002:27). In truly elitist fashion, “learned men” like Vico are expected to bar the majority of people from access to knowledge, and if Vico does try to teach the “masses” anything beyond the mundane sermon, then he is “an unbeliever [of God]” (2008:27). By threatening the likes of Vico with accusatory labels of infidelity against God, Averroës ensured that elitist stratifications of power remained in place in Europe and beyond.

This very same elitism can also be found in Erasmus, another titanic Western figure whom Vico likely read at Salamanca. In one of Erasmus’ best-known works *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus begins by stressing that philosophy, which he defines as that which “frees the mind from the false opinions of the multitude and from wrong desires and demonstrates the principles of right government by reference to the example set by the eternal powers” (2010:2). Immediately Erasmus separates the great “thinkers” from the lowly “masses.” Erasmus states that “for the most part the nature of man inclines towards evil,” confirming the Christian notion that the masses, especially without philosophy, are naturally wicked and deserving of correction (2010:8). This notion manifested grotesquely in the New World. Hanks states that “to re-form the habits of the indigenous people,” “the use of punishment was an integral part of missionary teaching, justified on the grounds that the Indios were like children,” and even adds that “the friars were insistent on the necessity of punishment in transformative pedagogy” (2010:64, 180). No doubt the perception of adult Maya as children stems directly from Averroës’ view that the masses are, to put it bluntly, stupid. In his commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, Averroës even advocates this “transformative pedagogy.” He describes a method of

instruction called the “affective argument,” which “is the way applied to enemies, foes, and him whose way it is not to be aroused to the virtues that are desired of him” (1974:11). Averroës not only states that the “sinful masses” should be treated like “enemies” and “foes,” but even states that this type of “argument” serves to “move them toward the [good] qualities” (1974:11, brackets original). Even Erasmus relents that it is better to be a slave to another human than “to be a slave to vice and shameful desires” (2010:24). It is this European “wisdom” that led the brutal treatment of indigenous across two continents.

Erasmus is equally accountable for this sense of European superiority, and a common theme in his work is the belittlement of the “masses.” In addition to accusing people of their sinful nature, he adds that “a large section of the masses are swayed by false opinions, just like those people trussed up in Plato’s cave, who regarded the empty shadows of things as the things themselves” (2010:13). For Erasmus, as is the case for Averroës, there is a stratification of intellect that brands the majority of people as insipid and incapable of discerning Truth from lies. Thus Erasmus characterizes the “masses” as people who “hate the unknown” while preferring their familiar ignorance (2010:67). Meanwhile the “learned” philosopher should not just “avoid the degrading opinions and interests of the common folk” but even “avoid the dress and life-style of the lower classes” (2010:15). Finally, Erasmus affirms that “priests and bishops are admittedly an important factor here,” since the “common people imitate nothing with more pleasure than what they see their prince do” (2010:21). In other words, the majority of people are sheep who will gleefully and unquestioningly follow whoever holds power. Sparks is certainly correct that Aquinas inspired Vico, but he neglects these other important sources. The key difference between Aquinas and Vico is that Aquinas wrote for an educated audience of fellow theologians, whereas Vico wrote for the lowly, naked *salvaje*.

Why the Theologia Indorum Matters

To the Spanish missionaries living in 16th century Guatemala, it is without exaggeration that their chief and most unifying purpose was to save souls. In their eyes, they were rescuing the uneducated Maya from ignorance by providing the Truth. This self-identified altruism was grounded in good intention. After all, were the missionaries not risking harm and, in Vico's case, death for the sake of the pagan? Were they not a moral and intellectual people obligated to elevate the lowly savage? This lack of self-awareness coupled with dogmatic loyalty to their own oligarchic intelligentsia led to the creation of unforgiving indoctrination programs. Vico was among the missionaries who taught Mayan children in these programs and even had his own school (Christenson 2016:82). The schools emphasized the teaching of children, who were not only indoctrinated to be Catholic but also to perform the duties of the missionary so they could serve the missionaries as aides in the future (Christensen 2014:8, 2010:359). The children education programs succeeded in producing adults who enforced the organizing, teaching, and monitoring of other Mayas (Hanks 2010:75). The missionaries did not need to understand the Mayas, for there was nothing worth understanding. The Mayas on the other hand were expected to not only understand the Spaniards but to become Spaniard. This meant abandoning ignorance for education and paganism for Truth.

Vico was a part of this systemized colonization project, and he contributed to it by writing the *Theologia Indorum*, a "Theology of the Indians." After he completed his book, copies were produced and disseminated to missions across the highlands. At those missions, Vico's words words came alive straight from Spanish mouths to Mayan ears. Vico's manuscript was a central component of a relentless indoctrination machine. Despite the best intentions, Vico and the rest of the missionaries inflicted terrible harm to the people they intended to help.

The Spanish were unable to understand the Mayas, nor did they desire to try. Instead, they burned the bad ideas in book bonfires, forbade the Mayas from writing anything outside the Christian genre, then in 1555 forbade them from even doing that, and tasked the Mayas with purposeful labor (Christensen 2014:9, Hanks 2010:91). Christenson says that disease, massacre, and labor reduced the Mayan population by 85% (2007:32). Sparks estimates the number closer to 90%, and says the K'iche' population plummeted from 60,000-150,000 in 1520 to 11,500-15,000 by 1672, and then continued to drop to 7,500-8,000 by 1689 (2019:34, 88). The Mayas were also enslaved and tortured. If a Maya had more than one wife, for instance, the Spanish would brand the number "4" onto their forehead and dispossess them of half their goods (Hanks 2010:37). If the Mayas rebelled, they were subdued, enslaved, and hanged (Christenson 2016:130). Just following the rules was not enough either. With the transformation of the highlands and lowlands into a Spanish province, the Spanish forced the Mayas to leave their homes and relocate to Spanish towns (Hanks 2010:48). There, they were forced to memorize and recite prayers, perform in scripted group readings, and sing, because the Spanish believed that forced routinization would induce belief (Hanks 2010:95, 113). To enforce this routinization, those who didn't attend mass or failed to reform their habits were punished (Hanks 2010:64, 180).

Finally there was forced enslavement and labor. The Spanish forced the Mayas to build convents, churches, and roads, as well as to provide the materials for construction as a mandatory taxes (Hanks 2010:49). Even from the beginning of European exploration, men like Vespucci enslaved indigenous people, claiming that they ate other humans, or attacked them, or committed some other heinous, ungodly act (Vespucci 2012:53, 71). Vespucci himself describes a battle against the indigenous in which "we routed and slaughtered them," killing "fifteen or twenty of

them,” wounding an untold number of others, and capturing five indigenous people, including two girls (2012:46). From its outset in 1492, the colonization project supported itself with the fruit of human labor, and Vico was a part of that project.

In this way, the Spanish assigned labor that was meaningless to the Mayas, and they punished those who resisted. They then attempted to control the thoughts of the Mayas, demanding they speak, sing, and pray European ideas in Castilian and Latin. Mayan ideas on the other hand were not only pagan but those of a child (Hanks 2010:64, 180). Through forced church attendance and labor, the Spanish ensured that the Mayas allocated every waking hour towards productivity that benefited the missionaries. Unable to spend their time as they wished, and forced to regurgitate thoughts they did not agree with, many Mayas lost joy, hope, and sense of meaning. Over fifty percent of the Mayas stopped attending mass (Hanks 2010:60, 72). As Diego de Landa reported, “two or three Mayas hanged themselves ‘in order not to give up their idols nor abandon their evil ways’” (Christenson 2016:22). Domingo de Vico claimed to bring a message of hope, but he and the rest of the clergy only brought despair, and like a wild horse trapped in a pen, many Mayas stopped bucking and surrendered to the saddle.

Chapter 1

Literature Review of Ontological Theories and Other Concepts

In this chapter, I explain my theoretical framework and other relevant concepts to this study. My theory will build on the basic foundations provided by Philippe Descola in *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2014), in which he outlines four types of ontological schemas. These schemas, which Descolas commonly refers to as “types of ontologies,” “modes of identification,” and “schematizations of experience,” include totemism, naturalism, analogism, and animism (2014:172, 232). I specifically focus on animism, which I argue is the ontology of the K’iche’ Mayas. Yet animism is a broad ontological framework that prominently ranges across the world, especially in North Asia and South America. Moreover, Descola admits to only providing a basic “tour” through the various ontologies, offering generalized microschema within each of the four macroschema, and using specific case studies to demonstrate those microschema (2014:233). Therefore, this paper uses the work of Viveiros de Castro and his Amerindian cosmopolitical theory, which is a theory tailored specifically for the Amerindian rather than for a generalized, global population of animists. This theory is explained in the first section of this chapter.

In the second section of this chapter, I explain how a naturalist ontology influenced the colonial experiment of the Spanish in the Mayan world. In this ontology, living beings are categorized as either “human” or “non-human,” and humans are differentiated by their religion and state of their soul. This section will serve as context for Chapters 3 and 4, in which I examine how Domingo de Vico perceived and addressed K’iche’an idols, ancestors, and gods.

In the third section, I explain the contexts of colonial Christian manuscript production, as well as concepts of *reducción*, genre, and *lengua reducida*. I also examine the Spanish

missionaries' methods and theories of translation. Finally, I compare those theories to modern translation theory. Like the second section, this section will also serve as context for Chapters 3 and 4 of this paper.

An Amerindian Cosmopolitical Theory

To develop a theory of K'iche'an animist ontology, I will build on the of Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, namely for his theoretical framework of Amerindian cosmopolitical theory. This theory is outlined in his book *Cannibal Metaphysics*, which focuses on the colonial Tupinambá of coastal Brazil. Complementing this invaluable text is another touchstone work by Viveiros entitled *The Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th Century Brazil*. This paper will treat the two books as complementary to each other in articulating this theoretical framework. The theory he proposes, an Amerindian cosmopolitical theory, is a post-structuralist theory of relationality that seeks to enable "Anthropology...to finally assume its new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought," namely by "[putting] indigenous ideas on the same plane as anthropological ideas" (2017:40, 77, 170, 189). The theory is therefore a counter-argument to Lévi-Strauss's structuralist method. In his analysis of Gê-speaking groups in Central and Eastern Brazil, Lévi-Strauss applies his structuralist method to social organization. Lévi-Strauss provides a "dialectical interpenetration of opposites" wherein he reinterprets the data on Gê dual organizations "in terms of his theory of elementary structures of kinship and the various kinds of exchange generated by certain rules of marriage" (Maybury-Lewis 2009:902, 915). Lévi-Strauss concludes that "the dual organizations of Brazil were partial expressions of a more complex reality, shared with Andean societies, and that they...[concealed] from themselves the asymmetry and hierarchy which represented the true nature of their societies" (Maybury-Lewis

2009:905). Viveiros de Castro shifts away from this structuralist framework in favor of a post-structuralist approach. Maybury-Lewis attributes this departure from “flaws” in Lévi-Strauss, namely that he is “too formal” and “relied too much on reasoning from the alliance theory he had put forward in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*” (2009:919). Rather than apply structuralist models of Southeast Asia, Africa, or New Guinea, Viveiros de Castro developed a model tailored specifically for the South American lowlands. This counter-argument to Lévi-Strauss became foundational to current understandings of animist ontology.

Viveiros de Castro incorporates two primary concepts into his theoretical framework: *perspectivism* and *multinaturalism*. These two concepts serve as a bedrock for a contemporary philosophical metaphysics of animism. While Viveiros departs from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Viveiros also uses him as a stepping stone or, perhaps more aptly, as the shoulders of a giant. Viveiros states that Lévi-Strauss “unexpectedly confirmed the importance of an economy of *corporeality* at the very heart of those ontologies recently redefined...as animist” (Viveiros 2017:54). What Lévi-Strauss unintentionally showed, and what Viveiros expounds, is that the animist’s body is not merely conceived as “the specific physiology or characteristic anatomy of something but [rather as] an ensemble of ways or modes of being that constitutes a *habitus*, ethos, or ethnogram” (Viveiros 2017:72). In other words, the animist views the body as a gamut of differences while simultaneously seeing all interiority as the same. Descola frequently cites Viveiros in his summation of animist ontologies, although he admits that he does “scant justice” to the Brazilian scholar (2013:140). Nevertheless, he still provides useful expository on Viveiros’ ideas, reiterating that “it is not through their souls that humans and nonhumans differ but through their bodies” (2013:129). Therefore, in an animist ontology all living beings share the same interiority, which involves conscious and experience, but beings are distinguishable by different

physicalities, such as jaguar print, feathers, scales, or bark. This makes animism the most opposite ontology to naturalism, which perceives a shared physicality distinguished by a multiplicity of interiorities (e.g. a hierarchy of sentience). Moreover, Viveiros states that “each kind of being appears to itself – as human – even as it already acts by manifesting its distinct and definitive animal, plant, or spirit nature” (2017:68). In other words, post-structuralism breaks the naturalist’s categorizations of spirit, animal, plant, and human. This naturally leads to the development of Viveiros’s first concept of *perspectivism*. Viveiros first defines *perspective* as “the capacity to occupy a point of view” and then defines *perspectivism* as a “conception of the world as composed of a multiplicity of points of view” (2017:55, 58). Viveiros adds that, within such a conception, “every existent is a center of intentionality apprehending other existents” (2017:55). While Lévi-Strauss contributed to this revelation, it is not his only contribution to this Amerindian cosmopolitical theory.

The second contribution of Lévi-Strauss involves his assisting of Amazonianists to perceive “certain theoretical implications of this non-marked or generic status of the virtual dimension or ‘soul’ of existents” (Viveiros 2017:55). This not only implies *perspectivism* but also *multinaturalism*. According to Viveiros, *multinaturalism* implies “an objective universality of bodies and substances” (2017:56). Like naturalists, animists also believe in an objective reality, only this objective reality is based in the universality of the interiority rather than physicality. Because interiority is universal, there is no fixed point of view or one “true” and “objective” perspective (Viveiros 2017:157). Viveiros adds that this metaphysics “reaches its highest expression in the strong speculative yield of those indigenous categories denoting matrimonial alliance, phenomena that I translated with yet another connect: *virtual affinity*” (2014:50). While much can be said about affinity along with kinship and marriage alliances, at

the theory's core, relationality is central to understanding animism and, more specifically, the animist shamanic figure. As Viveiros notes, "this intensive affinity crosses the borders between species: animals, plants, spirits, and other tribes whose humanity is uncertain are all found to be implicated in such synthetic-disjunctive relations with humans" (2017:175). Just because one has the ability to "occupy" the point of view of another being, this does mean any individual has the capacity to do so. Rather, this requires the enlightenment of the shaman, who has the ability to assume and experience the perspective of a being through transformations. These figures are thus "'commuters' or conductors of perspective, the first operating in a zone of inter-specificity and the second in an interhuman and intersocietal one" (Viveiros 2017:151). Descola adds that such a transformation is not a metamorphosis involving "an unveiling or a disguise" but is rather an anamorphosis that "constitutes the ultimate phase in a relationship in which each party, by modifying the viewpoint imposed upon him by his original physicality, endeavors to coincide with the perspective...[of] the other party" (2013:138). Thus, within the framework of Amerindian cosmopolitical theory, the world is composed of a multiplicity of perspectives that are not categorically separated but rather united in a system of affinity grounded in relationality. Further, all species experience other species as human. Viveiros explains this well when he states: "If everything and everyone can be human, then nothing and no one is human in a clear and distinct fashion" (2017:70). This is perhaps one of the most decolonizing thoughts in his book, completely demolishing all Western (i.e. naturalist) assumptions of *humanity* and *being*. Ultimately, when missionaries like Vico came to the highlands of Guatemala, they failed to grasp the animist ontology of the K'iche' and other Maya. Tragically, this failure on the part of the European aliens led to brutal colonization, religious conversion, and even enslavement.

The Naturalism of 16th Century Europe

In order to properly interpret the *Theologia Indorum* and other Spanish Christian manuscripts of the New World, such manuscripts must first be contextualized within the ontology of naturalism. Descola devotes the least space of his book to this ontology because this ontology is markedly Western and has shaped and filtered Western theology, philosophy, and literature, a corpus commonly called the Western Canon. Thus Descola states: “[Naturalism] is the simplest of all to define and the most intuitive, for it corresponds to the sense of self-evidence that modern *doxa* has instilled in us. It is the formula that we learn at school, that the various media transmit” (2014:256). Additionally, Descola points out that naturalism is the most opposite ontological schematization to animism: “The counterpart of animism is not totemism, as I had earlier supposed, but naturalism” (2014:172). In animism, living beings all have an unmarked interiority, which is to say that no one’s conscious and experiences are different from another’s. While all living beings have identical interiorities, they on the other hand have a multiplicity of different physicalities. Therefore, even though all interiorities are the same, one being can easily distinguish itself from another being by physicalities alone. Because animism is the ontology most opposite to naturalism, it serves as a useful contrastive tool to better understand what is so familiar to Westerners, or as the late David Foster Wallace put it, animism allows us to solve the question “What the hell is water?”

Like animism, naturalism also organizes the identifications of beings into categories based on systematic relationships. As Descola states, these systematic relationships “make it possible to throw light on not only the properties of its constituent parts but also those of the totality that results from their combination” (2014:172). Yet the difference between animism and naturalism is that while animism perceives a single interiority among a multiplicity of

physicalities, naturalism perceives the opposite. Specifically, naturalism perceives “a discontinuity of interiorities and a continuity of physicalities” (2014:172). That is to say, the naturalist perceives that all physicalities are the same, since all living beings share certain physiological attributes and characteristics in common, but perceives a multiplicity of interiorities. Simply put, a living being is not unique because of their bodies but because of their minds, conscious, or “soul,” depending on how the interiority is conceived. The second major difference between naturalism and animism is that naturalism reverses the “hierarchical order” of interiority and physicality, “with the universal laws of matter and life providing naturalism with a paradigm for conceptualizing the place and role of the diversity of the cultural expressions of humanity” (2014:172). The naturalist emphasizes “science” and “objectivity” and uses these concepts to analyze the continuity of physicality shared between all living beings. This method for distinguishing between living beings bears significant ramifications on not just how a naturalist perceives reality but how they interact and engage with reality. Viveiros astutely observes how this engagement manifests as “objectivist epistemology encouraged by Western modernity,” and this epistemology is namely “objectification; what has not been objectified simply remains abstract and unreal” (2017:60). By objectifying another living being as an object, it can thereby be deconstructed into its constituent parts. Viveiros notes how this leads to “a systematic and deliberate abduction of agency,” concluding: “An exhaustive scientific explanation of the world, it is thought, should be capable of reducing every object to a chain of causal events, and these, in turn, to materially dense interactions” (2017:61, 62). This notion is nothing modern though, as its roots can be traced back to Aristotle’s Four Causes. Yet even these Causes included a “Final Cause,” which is the *purpose* of a thing. Newtonian physics removed this by stating that everything in the universe can be described mathematically. The naturalist

ontology of the West removes purpose and, by extension, meaning from “objects,” reducing them to lifeless atoms forming molecules forming proteins, and so on. In this way, naturalism renders the physicality of living beings as homogenous, meaningless, and systematically ordered.

Rather, in naturalism it is the interiority that distinguishes living beings from each other. Oakdale summarizes the implications of this well and succinctly: “The ontology of ‘the West’ or of ‘modern,’ in contrast, is based on an understanding that all living things have a shared biological nature, but are divided according to the categories of nature and culture, and within the human domain, between different culture” (2018:58). First there is the naturalist’s categorizations of beings by their respective nature and culture. This fosters distinctions between “human” and “non-human.” Descola describes this distinction as follows: “Humans...make rules..., and create conventions...; they transform their environment, they share out tasks..., they create signs and values..., they consent to some form of authority, and they assemble to deliberate.... In short, they do all the things that animals do not do.” (2014:257). The chief distinction between “human” and “non-human” almost exclusively pertains to animals. As Descola points out, “vegetative life” is considered a minimal form of life and often excluded even from the “non-human” category of animals (2014:176). Significantly, these two categories imply that “humans” are the most central and important category, since all other living beings are not categorized by their own traits but according to the absence of the human traits. There are humans, and there is everything else, lumped together in a single category of beings that is only marked as exclusive to humans. Descola concludes, “Even if humans and animals do possess comparable faculties of feeling and thinking, the souls from which those faculties stem are not comparable: a human’s soul is immortal; an animal’s soul is mortal” (2014:177). These categories of “human” and “non-human,” coupled with the ever-surging global rise of Western

influence and power, has led to the indifferent destruction of environmental habitats, permanent eradication of animal species, and casual push of indigenous languages into forgotten oblivion. De la Cadena describes this as the separation of “Humanity” from “Nature,” something that led to a “hegemonic biopower” that ultimately “declared the gradual extinction of other-than-human beings and the worlds in which they existed” (2010:342-345). In this framework, humans are the most important type of being, and all non-humans are expendable so long as their loss benefits humans. The two categories themselves imply an anthropocentric cosmos.

Finally, while naturalism separates all humans from non-humans, it also distinguishes between humans based on interiority. Thus Descola states: “humans are what they are because they have a physicality *plus* an interiority; and nonhumans are what they are because they have a physicality *minus* an interiority” (2014:243). Yet even among humans, there is a wide range of interiorities, and these interiorities are the only way to distinguish one human from another. During the colonial period of Vico, Westerners defined interiority in terms of religiosity and the “state of the soul” (i.e. saved or damned), and so religion became the primary means of distinguishing between other people. Sparks defines religion as “a community’s articulation of its meanings and values, manifested through speech, symbols, and practices.... Religion also entails discernment of what community members understand by the ‘proper’ selection and ordering of those meanings and values” (2019:6). The importance of religion as a social marker is clearly demonstrated by Hans Staden, a 16th century German navigator who lived among the Tupinambá in South America as a captive. Nowhere else is he so overt in his aversion to the Tupinambá than when he states: “[The Tupinambá] are a skilled people, expert in every kind of wickedness” (Staden 2008:107). Staden frames his statement around a religious argument by calling the Tupinambá “wicked,” strongly implying that it was the damned and spiritually

corrupt interiority of the indigenous that he detested above all else. Amerigo Vespucci's attitude is similar. In his letters, he refers to the indigenous as a "faithless and ill-conditioned people," adding that "they cannot be called Moors or Jews, but worse than Gentiles. For we did not see that they offered any sacrifices, nor have they any place of worship" (2012:42, 56).⁶ Within the naturalist framework, animals do not have an interiority, or in this case a religiosity. Within naturalist logic, if a human lacks any religion, that human is more akin to the animal "non-humans" than to humans. Vespucci affirms this logic by referring to the indigenous as a "people worse than animals" (2012:69). This condemnation is clearly based on religious interiority and not any physicality. He is certainly sensational in his physical descriptions of the land and the people, but these descriptions are never associated with condemnation from Vespucci (2012:40, 50, 69). Rather, it is specifically the the lack of religion (i.e. a lack of interiority) that makes the indigenous "worse than Gentiles" and "worse than animals."

The same applies to the inverse relationship, namely between Christians and Christians. Because Christians are saved souls, they share a commonality in interiority that becomes its own type of classification. For instance, when a Frenchman refuses to rescue Hans Staden, Staden later refers to him as "godless" and, when he met the Frenchman again, rebuked the Frenchman by saying "I asked whether he...had a Christian heart beating in his body" (Staden 2008:72, 102). Moreover, Vespucci frequently refers to his fellow sailors collectively as "our Christians" and even refers to one individual sailor as simply "Christian" rather than by the sailor's name (2012:48, 70, 71). In 16th century Europe, religion is the primary mode of identification between humans. Fishman is particular astute of this point, stating:

⁶ Vespucci's letters are extremely untrustworthy, replete with vague descriptions and blatantly fabricated places, people, and events. But it is his *sentiments* of the indigenous that are relevant here, even if the veracity of his accounts are highly dubious.

But theories of white racial superiority, which played so important a part in nineteenth-century imperialism, did not serve as a basis for, or justification of, European expansion in the early modern era. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religious issues preoccupied society. The European experience in the New World cannot be understood apart from a mentality that was primarily non-secular. Spiritual concerns were surely a higher priority for some individuals than for others, but the reality of the supernatural was a central component of the early modern worldview. (2002:30)

Religion, or the interiority of humans, was therefore the primary means of distinguishing between people, not physicality. De la Cadena affirms this, stating that notions of “race” are a “modern tool to rank ‘Humanity’ along a ‘Civilization’” compared to the much older, interiority-based distinctions between “Nature” and “Human” (2010:344). What determined the superiority and inferiority of humans was solely based on the interior. In fact, the slavery of non-whites by European whites originates from religion, not race itself. Cannon states that slavery resulted from the religious wars between Christian Europe and the Muslim Middle East and North Africa (2008:127). Looking for a way to halt Islamic expansion, the Europeans looked towards the shores of Africa. With the backing of papal bulls, Christians sailed down the African coast beyond Muslim territory, evangelizing to the African people in order to impede Islam from spreading down the continent (Cannon 2008:127). Many Africans rejected Christianity, and so to force the African peoples to convert to Christianity, the European voyagers enslaved them. Europeans considered “conversion and enslavement as interchangeable terms,” resulting in the launch of “globalized imperialist voyages of captivity” (Cannon 2008:128). Moreover, in medieval Spain specifically, the *Reconquista* and its battles against the Muslim Moors “provided a continual source of captives that could be sold as slaves,” and even though “the church was

unhappy about [slavery] in the case of other Christian nations, this was not so where Islamic or pagan peoples were concerned” (Whitehead 1984:72). Ultimately slavery became a lucrative trade and so became institutionalized, globalized, and one of the hallmark evils of the West. But this was not merely an issue of Islamophobia specifically. On March 31, 1492, the Spanish crown issued the Alhambra Decree, which ordered all Jews living in Spain to either convert to Christianity or face forced exile within four months (Lewis 2015:5). Racism, or prejudice on the basis of physicality, has its historical roots in a prejudice and even hatred against non-Christians.

Language, Writing, and Colonialism

To convert the Mayas of the New World, the Spanish missionaries had to learn Mayan languages and use those languages as a tool for their overall objective of turning the indigenous into good Christian citizens who respected the authority of the Pope in the Vatican and the crown in Spain. This colonization project is the core of Hanks’ book *Converting Words*, in which he states: “The colonizing process was guided by a surprisingly systematic logic, even though it was implemented under sometimes chaotic circumstance” (2010:xiii). Hanks calls the colonization efforts *reducción*, “which may be glossed ‘pacification, conversion, ordering,’ according to context,” and states that it “was a total project, aimed at coordinated transformations of space, conduct, and language. [...] The new language spread faster and penetrated deeper and more tenaciously into Maya culture than any other aspect of *reducción*” (2010:xiv). While Hanks primarily focuses on the lowland Yucatán region, the Spanish implemented *reducción* in the highlands as well. As Sachse points out, “The Highland Maya language K’iche’ has one of the longest written traditions in the Americas,” including not just Christian manuscripts and documents but also manuscripts by indigenous authors, including *títulos*, notarial and quasi-notarial documents, autochthonous calendars, dance dramas like the *Rab’inal Achi*, and of course

the *Popol Wuj* (2014:1). Meanwhile, the Spanish missionaries “set about learning Maya language, producing the grammars, dictionaries, and other descriptions [which] made it possible to translate Christian doctrine, prayers, sermons, and parts of the sacraments into Maya language” (Hanks 2010:7). The longest of any these documents, not just in the Mayan world but in the Americas, was the *Theologia Indorum*. Historically scholars have stated that this led to syncretism in the Christian missionary documents. For instance, while Iverson notes the “highly unequal power structures” between Spanish and indigenous relations, she explicitly makes reference to syncretism and concludes her article by stating that “Still, in spite of and because of the violence of the Spanish evangelization campaigns...[and] the friars’ Utopian ambitions, [syncretism] created a fundamentally new Christianity in the process” (2019:268, 278). Hanks disagrees with this long-held assumption of syncretism, stating “Christian practices done in Maya appear indigenous, whereas the meanings are in fact Christian – the opposite of the syncretism model” (2010:8). *Reducción* was extremely methodical and organized at least in theory and logic, and this meticulous scrutiny of its own manuscript productions ensured that even when Mayan languages were used, European Christian signs were conveyed. This church made this absolutely clear when, during the First Mexican Provincial Council of 1555, they banned all indigenous involvement in the writing process to ensure no subversive meanings crept in and “tainted” their production of manuscripts.

The corpus of manuscripts produced during the Conquest were extremely varied. Roughly, the Spanish missionary genres can be divided into three categories, or what Sparks refers to as “fields.” This first category is theological; these include “common genres” such as “collections of sermons (*sermonarios*), lectures or lessons (*pláticas*), songbooks (*cantos, coplas*, and *psalmodias cristianas*), booklets of prayers (*cartillas*), confession manuals (*manuales* or

confesorios), and catechisms (*catecismos* or *doctrinas cristianas*)” (Sparks 2019:73). The second category is linguistic; these include “dictionaries, vocabularies, *artes* (practical grammars), grammars, lexicons, in short a whole range of linguistic studies” (Hanks 2010:10). The third category is ethnographic; these included the histories and chronicles of Spaniards like Bartolomé de las Casas and Diego de Landa. While the missionaries managed the majority of manuscript production, the indigenous also produced their own documents outside of the Christian missionary context. These documents included notarial genres such as the *carta* (letter), *deslinde* (land survey), *título* (land title), *acuerdo* (accord), *testamento* (will), *petición* (petition), and election records, as well as “forbidden genres” such as the Books of Chilam Balam (of which nine are extant) and the Ritual of the Bacabs (Hanks 2010:19). The *Popol Wuuj* of the highland K’iche’s would also especially fall within the “forbidden” category. The *Theologia Indorum*, on the other hand, was a theological work and one of the most important products of *reducción* in the highlands.

Dictionaries held a particularly significant role in the *reducción* of the New World. Leavitt notes that despite threats of the new Protestantism and a few “activists in France and Italy [but not Spain],” the Catholic church “maintained a monopoly on sacred texts” (2015:264). In light of rising resistance against the church from the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin as well as indigenous resistance in the New World, the missionaries in the Mayan region became protective of their knowledge. They became especially protective of dictionaries which were “closely guarded textual emblems of an esoteric knowledge” (Hanks 2010:122). Hanks adds the dictionaries also lack “deictic centering,” which is to say that the dictionaries provide neither an author nor a date, they do not reflect any specific regional dialect of a language due to the constant travelling of the missionaries, and they often include recycled entries from other

dictionaries (2010:120, 121). These are not the only complications. Sachse notes that some dictionaries “are exact copies, other were amended, modified and expanded upon,” and other dictionaries served “as templates and sources, from which lexical data were mined for other compilations” (2018:69). In a specific instance in Ximénez’s multilingual *Tesoro*, Ximénez does not copy entries from Domingo de Vico’s dictionary *Vocabulario copioso de las lenguas cakchikel y qiche* but instead “excerpt only the relevant key terms” and includes citations of Vico at the end of the entries (Sachse 2018:88). To further murk the issue, Sachse does not believe Vico was actually the author of the dictionary but that a Franciscan like produced the dictionary 150 years after Vico’s death (Sachse 2018:89, 90). Such ambiguities in the dictionaries make the tracing of textual genealogy extremely challenging. Yet the dictionaries were one of the most important tools in *reducción*. As part of a systematic effort to convert and subserviate the indigenous, the dictionaries maintain “a surprising amount of agreement regarding the graphic representation and meaning of Maya expressions. The commonalities across the dictionaries reflect a trend toward standardization in missionary Maya” (Hanks 2010:125). Hanks notes that generally the orthographic spellings of Mayan words are the same across various dictionaries with the exception of the glottalized affricates such as [tʰ] and [tsʰ] (2010:124). Dictionaries varied on how to represent these morphemes not found in Castilian, and so they often diverge in this singular aspect with little other incongruity elsewhere.

The importance of these dictionaries is a matter of intertextuality between all Christian manuscripts, whether linguistic or theological. Sachse states that the bilingual dictionaries “were not simply collections of native vocabulary; lexicographers were moreover concerned with finding and defining the vernacular words and neologisms to express the complex concepts of the Christian faith. The lexical compilations are thus records of the creation of Christian

discourse” (2018:68). These dictionaries complimented the grammars, which were based in understandings of Latin. Hanks states that the missionaries “sought to *reducer* the Indian languages...by describing them in terms of rules and patterns,” leading to the production of grammars, “or a set of rules that specify the structure and regularity of the language” (2010:4). That is to say, the Spanish attempted to superimpose grammatical terminology and methodology derived from Latin (as well as Greek) and superimpose it onto Mayan languages. Sparks also affirms this point, stating that “missionary grammars of Mayan languages relied largely on a Latin grammatical framework, and most often used Antonio de Nebrija’s 1481 Latin grammar as a template” (2019:71). Such templates describe languages “in a certain order, using many tables and listing exceptions to proposed rules” (Hanks 2010:111). The Spanish were so proud and confident in their Latin-based dictionaries that one Spaniard named Beltrán de Santa Rosa María said that the Mayas needed to read his grammar or else they would speak without knowing what they are saying (Hanks 2010:11). The grammars and bilingual dictionaries functioned in tandem with the theological works that the missionaries produced. Hanks refers to this as “a proliferation of intertextuality across genres” and states: “The *doctrina* uses the language as it is described in the grammars and dictionaries, and the latter describe and presuppose the language as used in the *doctrina*” (2010:116. 117). This circularity of intertextuality became the basis for production of all genres of Christian missionary documents.

The Spanish production of Christian manuscripts involved European theories of translation. According to Mannheim, translation in the 16th century was based in the religious contexts of the church and specifically “traditions for denotational equivalence” (2015:205). That is to say, translation starts with bilingual dictionaries and the identifying of synonymous words between two languages. Additionally, the Spanish did not attempt to find genuine equivalents but

instead altered the Mayan languages in their dictionary entries, which affected their use in the theological manuscripts. Hanks refers to these reconfigured Mayan languages as *lengua reducida*, stating: “The language of the missions was a new sign system, in which Maya forms were joined to Spanish meanings, a process that would inevitably alter both” (2010:128). That is not to say there was universal agreement on this process, particularly between the Franciscans and the Dominicans. According to Sparks, the Franciscans had a Scotist and voluntaristic nominalist theory of translation in which “a sign could not be readily separated from its referent, and thus a word in one language could never truly substitute for a word in another language” (2019:12). Within this theoretical framework, Mayan terms were deemed inherently inadequate to express Christian ideas and would ultimately only lead to miscommunication and even heresy. Because of this theory of translation, the Franciscans embraced neologisms, which involved either using Castilian loanwords or creating new word compounds that functioned within the rules of Mayan grammar (Sparks 2019:12, 13; Sachse 2014:2). The Dominicans on the other hand embraced a thomist theory of translation, which was founded in the humanism of Thomas Aquinas and believed that “a sign, including words, was less natural or essentially connected to what it referenced and thus was increasingly arbitrary, established as it was by human convention or culture” (Sparks 2019:63). This theory encouraged the Dominicans to use Mayan words and repurpose them to convey Christian meanings.

The clearest instance of disagreement between Franciscans and Dominicans involves their treatment of the word for “God.” The Franciscans preferred to use the Spanish loan *Tyox* or *Dyos*, whereas Dominicans such as Vico used *Tz’aqol B’itol*, the name for the creator deity in the *Popol Wuj*. In general though, Sparks outlines three general translation strategies. These include the introduction of Castilian loan words especially for biblical names and religious terminology

(*Jesús, Espíritu Santo, ángel, sacramento, &c.*), the use of Mayan terms with loan Castilian translations (*k'axtok* "bringer of pain" for "*el diablo*"), or finally to use the Mayan terms through circumlocutions without intentionally altering the meaning (Sparks 2019:70). Finally, the missionaries desired their manuscript productions to be aesthetically pleasing. This was especially important since the manuscripts were intended to be read and performed aloud (Hanks 2010:112). Thus Hanks states, "The language of indoctrination was to be beautiful. Translations of doctrinal material, including sermons, prayers, and catechisms, were to be made aesthetically pleasing, to draw the Indo into the text and move the soul toward things of God" (2010:66). The importance of aesthetic in translation was popular in Europe during the 16th century. According to Leavitt, various European thinkers such as the French poet Joachim du Bellay (c.1502-1560), the Italian mathematician and philosopher Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576), the Italian Dominican friar and philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), and the Florentine intellectual Giambattista Gelli (1498-1563) all emphasized the *forze e bellezza* ("force and beauty") of languages and believed that even when translations succeeded in conveying the original meaning, the beauty of the original text was lost (2015:266, 267). This is likely why so many of the colonial Christian manuscripts written in a Mayan language, including the *Theologia Indorum*, use a highly formalized rhetorical style.

While these were the popular translation theories of 16th century Europe, today's understand of translation is much different. Paraphrasing *traduttore traditore* ("translator [is] traitor"), Hanks and Severi bluntly state that "fully accurate translation is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible" (2015:2). Mannheim takes this view further and refers to *appropriative transduction*, stating: "Transduction can encompass a translation more narrowly understood, evoking the contextualizations of one culture-and-language in another, or it can recontextualize it

so thoroughly that it is no longer recognizable, but serves the social, political, or cultural interests of the other” (2015:203). For Mannheim, the former is an *analytic transduction*, and the latter is *appropriative transduction*. It is this latter type, which Mannheim also calls “radical translation,” that describes the *lengua reducida* project in the Mayan region. Mannheim cites two examples of this type of translation. The first is the Quechua *puriy*, “which usually appears in translation manuals (R3) with the gloss ‘to travel’” (2015:211). Mannheim states that the gloss “is utterly unhelpful in understanding the range of uses of the word in even [a] small set of examples,” noting that *puriy* has a “privative semantic relationship with another verb, *tiyay* ‘to be in a single place’” (2015:212, 213). Rather, an analytic transduction should be the method as opposed to the simple and forced method of identifying a single lexical equivalent. The second example he cites is *wak’a*, “which is customarily translated as (R3) ‘sacred object’ or ‘shrine,’ with an emphasis on sacrality” (2015:214). Again, the gloss is pitifully small and strips the word of its true semantic range. And even then, Mannheim concludes that “For an ethnography, all translation is radical translation” (2015:215). In other words, translation isn’t just traitor, it’s damage.

Chapter 2

Methodology

While Viveiros and Descola provide a rich literature on Amerindian animist ontology, I was unable to find any readings that attempted to analyze K'iche'an or Mayan animist ontology in depth. To fill this gap, my methodology for this paper includes an application of Amerindian cosmopolitical theory as the basis for carefully developing a distinct K'iche' Mayan animist theory. I will establish this theory in Chapter 5. Additionally, I use the well-established methods of New Philology, which include intertextual analysis of colonial Christian manuscripts written in indigenous languages, as well as intertextual analysis between colonial dictionaries. Finally, I incorporate the Western Canon into my data as well as limited amounts of ethnographic data. The Western Canon will be used in Chapters 3 and 4, which focus on Vico's naturalist ontology.

Application of Viveiros

In Chapter 5, I argue that the K'iche's of the 16th century had an animist ontology for perceiving and discerning between living beings. Westerners have historically considered animism to be the most primitive stage in the an evolutionary development of complex region. Radin states: "The earliest stage, it seemed, was to be found among primitive peoples. There we find a religion characterized by a faith innumerable, often indefinite, spirits, a belief in the general animation of nature: animism in short" (1992:220). This evolutionary view of religion and animism originates with Darwin, but Westerners have viewed animist ontologies as a primitive spirituality or paganism since colonial times. This is especially true of the Spanish in Guatemala and the Yucatán. But no two animist ontologies are the same, nor are they simple. I therefore use the Amerindian cosmopolitical theory proposed by Viveiros de Castro (2017, 2011) to analyze the animist ontology of the K'iche's of Guatemala's highlands. His theory is highly

specific and provides an extremely complex and nuanced view of indigenous Amazonian animist ontology, specifically that of the Tupinambá and other Tupí groups of lowland Amazonia.

But Viveiros only serves as a guiding framework for analyzing the ontology of the K'iche's, rather than an exact formula. The dangers of generalizing the animisms of the New World come not from anthropology but from archaeology: "There is a risk that the indiscriminate use of the term *animism* will serve, at best, as a replacement for the term *indigenous* and, at worst, a shorthand for *primitivity* and, in the end, will not move the ontological project forward" (Harrison-Buck 2012:65). In the case of this study, there is a risk in relying too heavily on Viveiros and unintentionally equivocating the animist ontologies of K'iche's and Tupinambá. Harrison-Buck advises: "To avoid homogenizing the 'animist society,' the concept of animism must be further defined as it pertains to the local context on a case-by-case basis" (2012:65). I take this warning to heart, both in the research and analysis of this paper. That is to say, while I use Viveiros' Amerindian cosmopolitical theory to analyze K'iche'an ontology, I argue for a uniquely K'iche'an animist ontology.

In Chapter 5, I use Viveiros' Amerindian cosmopolitical theory to analyze the K'iche'an ontology of the 16th century, and I also use Descola's broader and more general analysis of animist ontologies as a supplemental theory. Because Descola is more generalized, he provides a broader scope of animism, with a various number of microschema and other concepts that distinguish different animist ontologies from each other. He also provides real examples of various animist ontologies as means to distinguish between varieties while also observing the core similarities that make them animist as opposed to naturalist, totemist, or analogist. I will use these two sources in tandem to analyze the ontology of the K'iche's. My approach will incorporate a comparative and contrastive analysis of K'iche'an animism against Nahua

analogism and Tupinambá animism. Descola treats the Mayas as analogist and frequently includes them in his analysis of Nahua analogist ontology. Therefore the Nahua analogist ontology will serve as a contrastive tool to argue for a K'iche'an animism rather than an analogism similar to that of central Mexico. Additionally, the Tupinambá will serve as both comparative and contrastive. On the one hand, I will argue that the K'iche's are animist, and so I will use the Tupinambá animist ontology as a comparative tool, especially to contrast against the Nahuas, to show that the K'iche's much more resemble the general animist tendencies of the Tupinambá than the analogism of the Nahuas. On the other hand, I will also treat the Tupinambá ontology contrastively in order to demonstrate a uniquely Mayan animist ontology, one that is distinctly unique in the world.

New Philology and Indigenous Language Sources

In conjunction with the Amerindian cosmopolitical theory of Viveiros, this paper will also be based in the New Philology method that is well-established especially in research of Nahuatl and Maya language colonial manuscripts. A number of this paper's primary sources use this New Philological method, including Christensen (2016, 2014, 2010), Sparks (2019, 2017, 2014), Hanks (2015, 2010), and León-Portilla (1990, 1980). Restall, who self-identifies as a New Philologist, describes New Philology as a school, model, and method wherein the ethnohistory of colonial Mesoamerica involves a historical-linguistic (or philological) analysis of native-language sources "with the view that the study of native-language sources is crucial to understanding indigenous societies" (2003:114). As Restall observes, while philology is itself nothing new as a model of analysis, New Philology adds the innovations of "emphasizing native roles in colonial history through the study of native-language sources (the model) and of

analyzing those sources philologically (the method)” (2003:114). This method will be prevalent in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

In all three chapters of primary analysis (3, 4, and 5), this paper draws heavily from indigenous language sources. Chapters 3 and 4 specifically draw from sources in the Christian missionary genres. The primary source is Domingo de Vico’s *Theologia Indorum*, which is written in K’iche’. I will be analyzing three volumes of transcriptions and translations made by Saqijix López (2017, 2012, 2011 [Tome 1], and 2011 [Tome 2]). These transcriptions include Vol. 1 Ch. 1-23 and Vol. 2 Ch. 1-31 of Vico’s manuscript (*so far*). I will provide her Spanish translations alongside her transcriptions. In addition to the work of López, I also analyze Vol. 1 Ch. 25, which is provided as an English translation in Sparks’ book *The Americas’ First Theologies* (2017). Sparks does not provide a K’iche’ transcription, but Vol. 1 Ch. 25 has helpful content and so is mentioned briefly.

I will not be analyzing the *Theologia Indorum* in isolation. Rather, Hanks (2010) and Sparks (2019) both emphasize the intertextuality of colonial Christian manuscripts and state that such manuscripts cannot be understood without a comprehensive knowledge of the whole corpus and intertextual analysis between individual documents. Sparks explicitly states, “Texts, mendicant or Maya, [cannot] be fully understood and appreciated simply on its own terms and its own respective ‘indigenous’ sources’...but rather also via their various relations to each other” (2019:21). Colonial missionary documents do not exist in isolation to themselves. Rather, the missionaries founded their documents on the same source materials. Additionally, these documents all exist in conversation with each other and relay the same themes and messages with a near-uniform consistency. But this conversation was an echo chamber that actively excluded indigenous thought. While indigenous thought certainly impacted these colonial

documents, this happened despite a power imbalance wherein missionaries controlled most manuscript production. For the purposes of this paper, “intertextuality” is treated as an echo chamber of thought involving colonial documents, the Bible, and Western canon works. In this paper specifically, I analyze Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* with an intertextual, comparative analysis of other colonial Christian manuscripts written in indigenous languages. These include the Yukatek Mayan *Teabo Manuscript*, the “Nahuatl Bible,” Yukatek Mayan Christian tales, as well as baptismal texts, catechisms, and confessional manuals in both Yukatek and Nahuatl. Translations of these various documents are provided by Christensen in his two books *The Teabo Manuscript* and *Translated Christianities* (2016, 2014). Kellogg praises Christensen’s work for “show[ing] that the introduction of Christianity led to diverse, multifaceted processes of evangelization. This process was one in which official texts, unofficial texts, and daily life and practices...reflected and promoted local customs, needs, and political economies, and reinforced differences” (2014:788). She is absolutely correct in her observation, but I will break from traditional analysis of Christensen’s translations and instead emphasize the similarities that reflect the singular, systematic colonization project of the Spanish. I will accomplish this through intertextual analysis between these various documents and the *Theologia Indorum*. Through this intertextual analysis, I will show that the *Theologia Indorum* was not unique in its general content, nor in its approach to addressing indigenous “paganism.”

In Chapter 5, I break away from the Christian genres and focus instead on various “forbidden” genres and non-Christian writings. Restall states: “Much of this work [in *New Philology*] does more than just present the ‘Indian’ view. It analyzes indigenous perspectives with all their complexities and contradictions, often – but by no means exclusively – using native-language sources” (2012:156). That is to say, the goal of analyzing these indigenous-

language documents is to try to understand them to their fullest and richest extent, not just creating a superficial “Indian” perspective. For this paper, I will primarily incorporate the *Popol Wuuj* and the performative drama *Rab’inal Achi*, both of which are in K’iche’. Thanks to the work of Mondloch and Carmack (2018), I am able to analyze the original K’iche’, though their Spanish translations will be included alongside the transcriptions. In the case of the *Rab’inal Achi*, Tedlock (2003) only provides a translation without transcription, and so I can only analyze the drama based on the English provided. Nevertheless, these two will have the most emphasis since they are both in K’iche’ specifically. I will also incorporate translated lowland Mayan glyphs into the research. While they pertain to the Mayas of the lowlands rather than the Mayas of the highlands, I use them in only two instances as a secondary, corroborative source of evidence. The glyphs are visually recreated and translated in Tedlock’s *2000 Years of Mayan Literature* (2011) as well as in Houston’s article “Symbolic Sweatbaths of the Maya” (1996). Additionally, whenever I explain or reference the analogism of the Nahuas, I will briefly mention the Nahuatl *in xóchitl in cuicatl* (poems, “flower and song”) provided by León Portilla (1990, 1980). Ultimately, I will incorporate all of these sources into my argument that the K’iche’s were animists.

Finally, I will incorporate various colonial Spanish bilingual dictionaries into my paper. These dictionaries will include *El Vocabulario en lengua qiche otlatecas* (also called *Diccionario k’iche’ de Berlín*) (Sachse and Dürr [ed.] 2017), the *Thesavrvs Verborv* (Acuña [ed.] 1983), and the *Manuscrito Américain 59* (also called the *Vocabulario de lengua Quiché*) from the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (Acuña [ed.] 2005). Additionally, this paper will include Edmonson’s *Quiche-English Dictionary* (1965), which bases its entries on a survey of forty-one other dictionaries, at least twelve of which were produced in the 16th century specifically but in

general range from the 1500s to the 1900s. I will also refer to a modern K'iche' dictionary, but only as reference (Ajpacaja et al. 1996). And lastly, I will refer to Christenson's K'iche'-English dictionary (n.d.). In addition to these various K'iche' dictionaries, I also incorporate two Kaqchikel dictionaries. These include the *Diccionario Cakchiquel-Español* (Saenz de Santa María [recopilador] 1940) and the *Diccionario Cakchiquel Central y Español* (Munson [compiladora] 1991). Finally, I use the *Diccionario Tz'utujil* (Mendoza and Mendoza 1996). All three languages are closely related sister languages within the K'iche'an language branch of the Mayan language family. Additionally, the speech communities of all three respective languages lived in neighboring vicinity to each other and were three of the first major groups targeted by the Spanish during the Conquest of the highlands (Christenson 2016:3). Through intertextual analysis between these dictionaries, and with a special focus on the colonial K'iche' dictionaries, I analyze the meanings of specific K'iche' words and how Vico uses them in the *Theologia Indorum*. These dictionaries are especially used in Chapter 4.

The Western Canon

In my analysis of Vico and the *Theologia Indorum*, I also incorporate the Western Canon. Both Hanks (2010) and Sparks (2019) argue for the importance of intertextual analysis between Christian manuscripts and documents of all genres. However, Hanks does not mention the Western writers and thinkers whose works are the intellectual foundation of Vico and the other missionary manuscripts. Sparks at least acknowledges their influence, but even he chooses to focus on intertextuality rather than the Western intellectual tradition undergirding Vico. Sparks even states that there was never even one Christianity in Spain but rather many competing Christianities (2019:32). While he is correct that there were many competing ideas within the Catholic church, he overfocuses on the theological debates at the expense of ignoring the

significant agreement on the vast majority of theology and doctrine that the “Universal Church” held, not just among themselves but even with the Protestants. Sparks allows nuance to eclipse the larger picture, which is a theology founded on the Western canon.

Therefore, I include various key texts from the Western canon, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4. These sources primarily include Averroës, Aquinas, and Athanasius, all of whom greatly influence the Catholic church, as well as Aristotle, Gregory of Nazianzus, and D. P. Walker’s titular work *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* (2000), which analyzes Renaissance-period thought regarding magic among European Catholics. Most importantly, I will incorporate Scripture from both the Old and New Testament. Even Sparks, who at least acknowledges the importance and influence of Western thinkers, never explains the influence that the Bible had on these missionary documents at all. Neither does Hanks (2010) or Christensen (2016, 2014, 2010). Yet the Bible is the single most important document that influenced 16th century Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant. Therefore, in Chapters 3 and 4 I include key verses that directly relate to certain passages in the *Theologia Indorum*. According to Sparks, the missionaries tried to teach elite Mayan children both Latin and Greek (2019:82). It is certain that Vico knew Latin, and it is very possible he also knew Greek, which Leavitt points out had long been the two languages of “scientific and biblical truth” in Europe under Catholic dominance (2015:263, 264). Therefore, I cite Old Testament verses from the Latin Vulgate and New Testament verses from the Koine Greek, which was the original language of the New Testament. All translations of biblical verses are mine.

The Ethnography of Modern Highland Mayas

I will briefly mention my use of anthropological ethnographic data. Sparks rightfully warns against overreliance of ethnographies of modern Mayas to study 16th century Mayas

(2019:32, 33). While it is true that societies are never stagnant but are always changing, since at least the Conquest (though likely before that) the highland Mayas have greatly emphasized the importance of following their ancestors and the traditions and lifestyles of those ancestors. MacKenzie, for instance, uses colonial ethnohistoric data in conjunction with modern ethnographic data, stating that “While these varied data do not offer an absolutely unified vision of Mayan religion through time, scholars (including contemporary Maya themselves) have identified certain continuities and themes that continue to animate the tradition” (2018:917). To indifferently dismiss the modern Mayas as irrelevant in studies of colonial Maya is to blatantly disregard their resilience against surmounting colonial pressures and active resistance to overcome those hegemonic systems. Therefore, I incorporate a limited amount of data from four ethnographies: Christenson’s *The Burden of the Ancients* (2016), Watanabe’s *Maya Saints & Souls* (1992), Tedlock’s *Time and the Highland Mayas* (1993), and Vogt’s *Tortillas for the Gods* (1976). All four of these ethnographies pertain specifically to highland Mayan groups. However, I never use them as sole evidence. Rather, I use them as secondary, corroborative evidence to a point already being made based on primary data taken from either a colonial indigenous language source or colonial account. Finally, I only incorporate these ethnographies sparingly, and always try to mention at least two ethnographies together to prevent any cherry-picking of convenient data. It should be noted that Christenson’s book is only half ethnography, with the other half devoted to records of the highland Mayas during the Conquest and colonial period. With the exception of Christenson, these ethnographic sources are used exclusively in Chapter 5, though the colonial sources remain the focus of the chapter and take vast precedence.

Chapter 3

The Use of Western Categories in Vico

Vico was neither exceptional nor unusual in his Western assumptions and biases. One such bias, one which greatly affected his interaction and communication with the K'iche', was the assumption that knowledge is most optimized when it is categorized. Viveiros echoes as much in *Cannibal Metaphysics*, stating that Westerners strove to make knowledge “authentic,” treating Amerindian thought as the “savage mind” and taking any non-Western thought “hostage each time it threatens to slip free of the modest, reassuring limits of encyclopedic organization” (2017:78). This Western thinking dates as far back as Aristotle, who states in his *Physics* regarding the principles of nature: “In any subject which has principles, causes, and elements, scientific knowledge and understanding stem from a grasp of these....” (2008:9). In other words, for Westerners, scientific progress can only be achieved when subjects are deconstructed into their most basic elements and then organized neatly. Averroës, who was one of Vico’s primary influencers at Salamanca, argued the same, stating that “scientific or certain knowledge of any entity consists in knowing its primary causes, followed by its proximate causes and the elements or components making it up” (Fakhry 2001:43). The distinctions between categories must be explicit, and no categorical boundaries can blur. Thus Western thought is deeply rooted in the understanding that knowledge must be categorized in order to be understood. Western categorization also influenced the Catholic theologians of Europe. Thomas Aquinas, who was another significant source material at Salamanca, states in his *Summa Theologica*: “Sacred doctrine is a science [that] depend[s] on principles known through a higher science, namely the science of God and the blessed. Just as music accepts the principles given to it by arithmetic, so does sacred doctrine accept the principles revealed to it by God” (1954:37, 38). Aquinas

therefore equates sacred doctrine with science. He later states that not only is sacred doctrine a science, but it even “transcends all other sciences, whether practical or speculative,” because even the smallest amount of knowledge about the divine “is worth more than the most certain knowledge of lesser things” (1954:40, 41). According to Thomas Aquinas, theology is not merely a science but the most important of the sciences. As a science, theology embraced the logical structures and categorizations of Western philosophy. As the most superior of the sciences, it was the science that made Europeans the most “superior” to the indigenous of the New World. The importance of categorizations in the *Theologia Indorum* therefore must not be underemphasized.

The *Theologia Indorum* is replete with examples of wholly Western categorizations. As Vico himself states: “*Keje k’ut cholmayjinaq wi chi rib’il rib’ ub’anoj Dios ri’ . Are k’u retal xa jun Dios cholmay rech ub’anoj, xucholmayij xuchokonisaj puch ronojel ub’anoj*” (“*De esta manera, la obra de Dios está ordenada de forma especial entre sí. Esa es la señal de que hay un solo Dios, el que ordena su propia creación. Toda su creación la ordenó y la hizo útil*”) (2017:86). Here, Vico uses *ub’anoj*, which literally translates “His (God’s) work,” though here it may also be translated as “His (God’s) creation.” The word contains the verb root *ban*, which *El Vocabulario en lengua ȝiche otlatecas*, a colonial K’iche’ dictionary, defines as “*hazer [hacer] algo*” (Sachse and Dürr 2017:82). Vico describes God’s interaction with His *ub’anoj* using three words: *cholmayjinaq*, *cholmay*, and *xucholmayij*. All three words contain the base verb root *chol*, which the same colonial dictionary defines as “*por contar días; poner en ringlera; repartir por orden, uno por uno*” (Sachse and Dürr 2017:205). Essentially, Vico is emphasizing how God created the universe with order and reason. In addition, Vico uses a second verb *xuchokonisaj*. This verb contains the verb root *chok*, which means “*encargar*,” though in the passive form the

verb's meaning shifts to "to be useful" (Ajpacaja et al. 1996:53; Christenson n.d.). Such a universe would naturally lend itself to being categorized, as God Himself has already established an intentional order to His creation's design. This understanding serves as a justification for Vico to categorize all of Creation using Western categories.

Categorizing the Physical and the Metaphysical

The first of these categorizations is between the metaphysical and physical. In Chapter 12 of Part 2, Vico describes Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as the following: "*Xa ral xnimar wi, xoqojawar wi, ri xoqojawil wi kaj ulew, ri xoqajawalil kaj ulew, ri xoqojawalil angeles, ri xoqojawil winaq ronojel xuxik, xa rumal ral....*" ("La grandeza la tuvo por el hijo, por eso se convirtió en reina, es la reina del Cielo y la Tierra, es la reina de los ángeles, es la reina de toda la humanidad, y esto es por el hijo....") (2011:53). Here Mary is described as the queen of both the metaphysical and the physical. These two categories are presented in pairs; the first pair is *kaj ulew*. Literally, the word pairing translates as "sky, earth" and is an extremely common couplet in K'iche', even appearing in the *Popol Wuj*. Yet Christenson demonstrates that *kaj* may also mean "heaven" (n.d.). Thus, *kaj ulew* could be rendered "heaven, earth," which is a common pairing in Christian literature. This option seems more likely when the second pair is considered: *ri xoqajawalil angeles, ri xoqojawil winaq ronojel*. Here *ángeles* is set adjacent to *winaq ronojel*, which translates as literally "the people all of them." It may be more clearly rendered as "all the people" or even "all of humanity." This second pairing implies the existence of two types of beings, the physical humans and the metaphysical beings called *ángeles*. Vico describes Mary as queen of the metaphysical category, which includes Heaven and the angels, and also the physical category, which includes earth and humanity.

The distinction between metaphysical and physical in Western conceptions of the universe can be seen again in Part 1. Vico states in Chapter 21: “*We ta ronojel winaq, ronojel ta pu chikop we ta pu ronojel Angeles k’o chi kaj, ronojel ta pu diablos k’o chi xib’alb’a chiyoq’ore, chich’akatin ta re, chilab’alin pu re, xma chutzin wi chich’akatajik chiyoq’otaj pu rumal, xma yoq’otajel wi xma ch’akatajel wi*” (“*Si fueran todas las personas, todas los animales, si fueran todos los ángeles que están en el cielo, todos los demonios que están en el infierno los que quieren vencerlo, los que quieren hacerle la guerra, no será posible vencerlo, Él es invencible*”) (2017:146). Here, Vico distinguishes between *winaq* (“humanity”), *chikop* (“animals”), *Angeles* (“angels”), and *diablos* (“demons”). The first two types of beings are humans and animals; these are terrestrial and thus physical. The second two types are angels and demons; these are metaphysical. Vico further distinguishes between angels and demons by stating that the angels “*k’o chi kaj*” and that the demons “*k’o chi xib’alb’a*.” *Xib’alb’a* is the K’iche’ word for the underworld, which is described in detail in the K’iche’an text of the *Popol Wuj*. Vico has adapted the word to signify the Christian Hell, which Vico describes as a place “*pa rapa⁷ k’ax, pa q’aq’, pa itzel*” (“in pain [from the] whip, in fire, in evil”) (2017:132). Vico attempts to override the K’iche’an cosmology of *Xib’alb’a* with the Christian cosmology of Hell, which is a place of fire and punishment. Whereas the demons are from *Xib’alb’a*, the angels are “*k’o chi kaj*” (“they are in heaven”). Again, we encounter *kaj*. Here, *kaj* likely signifies “Heaven” as it did in the previously analyzed passage in Part 2 Chapter 12. This is especially likely when juxtaposed with the demons of Hell. Vico explicitly places the angels and demons in locative opposition: “*We Angeles e k’o chi kaj, we xib’alb’a e pu diablos k’o chi xib’alb’a*” (“*Ya sean ángeles que están en el cielo, ya sean demonios que están en el infierno*”) (2017:122). Heaven and Hell are

⁷ Lopez Ixcoy notes: “La forma *rapuxel*...significa ser azotado, *rapa* entonces se deriva de la raíz *rap-*, azotar” (2017:133).

opposites and are the places of dwelling for morally, militarily, eternally opposed metaphysical beings.

The Nonpermeable Separation between Categories

Vico's categories appear to be utterly segregated without any potential for an item to belong to more than one category. This certainly appears to be the case between the metaphysical and physical. In Part 2 Chapter 24, Vico recounts the biblical narrative of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. When Jesus rises from the water, the Holy Spirit in the form of an *ut* ("*paloma montés*") descends upon Christ and rests on him (Sachse and Dürr 2017:309). To the K'iche', this might have seemed to be a transformation. Vico is clear to state that the Holy Spirit's appearance in the form of a dove was not a transformation, as this would defy the distinct boundaries between the metaphysical and physical. Vico states: "*ma nab'e ut ta ri Spíritu Santo, ma pu xa ta keje uk'oje'ik, xa uk'utb'al rib' chi kiwach winaq*" ("*no es que el Espíritu Santo sea una paloma, sino es el símbolo, la señal para presentarse ante las personas*") (2011:293). In other words, the Holy Spirit's descent in the form of a dove was a symbol or a sign, not the product of a metaphysical-to-physical transformation. It should be noted that this can be found in the language of the original biblical text. The event of the Holy Spirit's descent in the form of a dove is related in all four Gospels. For instance, Matthew 3:16 states: "*καὶ εἶδεν πνεῦμα θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν*" ("And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him"). *Ὡσεὶ* ("as, like, about") is the key word, as it clearly implies that the *πνεῦμα θεοῦ* ("Holy Spirit," literally "Spirit of God") descended "as, like" a *περιστερὰν* ("pigeon, dove"), not by transforming into one. Furthermore Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32 all confirm this by stating that the Holy Spirit descended *ὡς περιστερὰν* ("like a dove or pigeon"); all three of these Gospels use this exact phrase. The distinction is therefore one

of simile, not metaphor, and so Vico is able to retain the distinctions between the metaphysical and physical despite the Holy Spirit's appearance in the form of a physically visible animal.

Just as Vico distinguishes between the metaphysical and physical as irreconcilably separate, he also distinguishes between various physical things. To do this, he frequently provides lists of seemingly-related things that exist physically (i.e. not metaphysically). For instance, he occasionally provides lists of precious material wealth in order to emphasize a point. In Part 2 Chapter 34, he states that God does not ask his followers for wealth, listing them as follows: “*Ma nab’ek q’anapwaq saqipwaq taj chiraj Dios chi qe, ma nay puch xit taj ab’aj q’oq’ol xtekok taj chutz’onoj*” (“*Dios no nos pide oro y plata, nos nos pide jade y piedras preciosas, no es lo que Él nos pide*”) (2012:155). Vico provides a list of treasures, including *q’anapwaq saqipwaq* (“oro y plata,” lit. “dinero amarillo” and “dinero blanco”), and also *xtekok* (“*piedra preciosa*”) (Acuña 1983:384, 419, 421). In Part 1 Chapter 22, Vico describes the eternal riches of the kingdom of God, stating: “*Junelik xit junelik pwaq, q’anapwaq saqipwaq, junelik q’oq’ol xtekok, junelik k’wa’l yamanik, junelik q’uq’ raxon*” (“*Por siempre habrá jade, plata, oro, piedras preciosas; por siempre habrán perlas preciosas, como plumas azules del quetzal*”) (2017:150). Here Vico again lists the riches of earth as *q’anapwaq saqipwaq* (“gold and silver”) and *xtekok* (“precious stones”), but here he provides additional items such as *q’uq’ raxon* (“green [quetzal] feathers”) and *k’wa’l yamanik* (“precious emeralds”)⁸ (Sachse and Dürr 2017:322, 244; Acuña 1983:422, 423). While the lists have items that would have appeared familiar to Westerners as icons of wealth, such as gold and silver and precious stones, the lists are tailored to the K’iche’. As Coe notes, the Maya elite valued many material goods, “above all jade [and]

⁸ Lopéz Ixcoy wrongfully translates *k’wa’l* as “*perlas*.” According to *El Vocabulario en lengua q’iche otlatecas*, *k’wa’l* is identified as “*esmeralda*” (Sachse and Dürr 2017:244). Meanwhile, the *Thesaurus Vervory* states that *perla* “no tienen nombre propio. [...] *El Vocabulario pone: ru qux çaz [lit. ‘corazón de la langosta’]*” (Acuña 1983:412).

quetzal feathers” (2015:23). This is further demonstrated by the K’iche’ play the *Rab’inal Achi*, which lists the following: “shaded by quetzal feathers / shaded by glistening green / under the golden pataxte / under the golden cacao / under the golden money / under the silver money” (Tedlock 2003:49). The list is not much different from the one included by Vico, who ensures to include these items in his lists of material riches so that it resonates with the K’iche’s.

Vico categorizes other physical (i.e. non-metaphysical) items into lists, and these lists might have resonated with the K’iche’ less than the lists of precious goods. In Part 2 Chapter 33, Vico states: “*Xa wi junelik chiqanab’aj unimaloq’ob’al Dios nim Ajaw chi qe ta xub’an kaj ulew, xub’an pu ik’ ch’umil xub’an nay pu ronojel juyub’ taq’aj, che’ ab’aj, chikop, tz’ikin, kar, tap, kej umul, koj, b’alam*” (“*Por eso recordemos siempre el gran amor de Dios gran Señor a nosotros, al haber creado el cielo y la Tierra, al crear la Luna y las estrellas, al crear los cerros y los campos, los árboles, las rocas, los animales, los pájaros, los pescados, los cangrejos, los venados, los conejos, los leones, los tigres*”) (2012:131). This list is unique because of its scope of entries. He states that the K’iche’ must always remember the great love of God, who *xub’an*⁹ *kaj ulew* (“created the sky and earth”). Here *kaj* most likely means “sky” as opposed to “Heaven,” since the entries that follow are celestial features such as *ik’* (“moon”) and *ch’umil* (“star”), which are then contrasted with terrestrial features such as *juyub’* (“hill”), *taq’aj* (“field”), *che’* (“tree”), and *ab’aj* (“stone”). Thus Vico begins his list with a sweeping encapsulation of the physical world, which is comprised of sky and earth. Vico then transitions from the earth and sky to the life that inhabits the world. First, he lists three categories of animals: *chikop* (“animals”) *tz’ikin*, (“birds”), and *kar* (“fish”). After listing these three categories of animals, he lists specific animals: specifically the *tap* (“crab”), *kej* (“deer”), *umul*,

⁹ x-Ø-u-b’an
COMPL-3sA-3sE-VT:to do, make

("rabbit"), *koj* ("mountain lion"), and *b'alam* ("jaguar"). Thus the list begins with the largest and most general of God's creation, namely earth and sky, and gradually narrows onto specific animals. Significantly, Vico's list appears to follow the patterns of the six days of God's creation, a narrative related in the book of Genesis. For instance, God creates the sky on the second day, and He creates the earth on the third day (Genesis 1:7-10). God also creates vegetation on the third day, and He created the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day (Genesis 1:12-18). God creates the fish and the birds on the fifth day (Genesis 1:20-23). Finally, God creates the animals on the sixth day (Genesis 1:24-25). These creation days mirror Vico's list with near exactitude.

The Categories of Human and Non-human

Vico categorizes life within the categories of "human" and "non-human." These two categories are intrinsic to naturalism, which Descola lists as a type of ontology, which he also refers to as a "schematization of experience," and "mode of identification" (2014:172, 232). According to Descola, identification of life within an ontology is "organized in accordance with systematic relationships that make it possible to throw light on not only the properties of its constituent parts but also those of the totality that results from their combination" (2014:172). Yet because there are various other types of ontologies, such as analogism, totemism, and animism, these ontologies differ in how they schematize those relationships. One of these relationships is between physicality and interiority. Vico embodies the naturalist ontology, which observes a continuity of physicalities while also distinguishing the discontinuity of interiorities. Descola states that naturalists try to distinguish themselves from animals (2014:174). This is one of the central axioms of naturalism and is the basis for its categories of "human" and "non-human." Yet naturalism does not distinguish between the physicalities of life. All of life is

physical and so is considered temporal (i.e. not eternal) and therefore doomed to fade away. Moreover, the external faculties are essentially identical, wherein humans and animals share the same basic anatomical features (muscles, bones, eyes, internal organs, skin, blood) and wherein humans, animals, and plants share the same physical needs (water, relatively temperate climate) and all are bound by the same laws of physics (gravity). The physicalities of “humans” and “non-humans” are the same. Rather, the difference lies in the interiority. As Descola poignantly states, “humans are what they are because they have a physicality *plus* an interiority; and non-humans are what they are because they have a physicality *minus* an interiority” (2014:243). To put it bluntly, within the naturalist schema humans have souls while the rest of life does not.

Vico embodies the naturalist ontology and so relies on naturalist categories of “human” and “non-human.” As has already been shown in Part 2 Chapter 33 of the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico divides non-human life into three general categories. These three categories include *chikop* (“animals”), *tz’ikin* (“birds”), and *kar* (“fish”). The categories are almost certainly influenced by the Genesis story, wherein fish are relegated to the seas, birds to the air, and animals to the earth. In Western thought, these three categories could be considered as the three major categories of non-human life, each of which are relegated to the three major realms of the cosmos, namely ocean, sky, and earth. These categories appear elsewhere in Vico’s *Theologia Indorum*. For instance, in Part 1 Chapter 13 Vico describes the great wisdom of God, who alone brought about “*ub’anik kaj ulew. Ub’anik puch winaq, ub’anik nay puch chikop, tz’ikin, kar, tap. Ub’anik k’ut juyub’ taq’aj, cho palo, ub’anik puch ronojel q’alaj chi qawach*” (“*la creación del cielo y la tierra, al pensar en la creación de la persona, al crear a los animales, a los pájaros, a los peces, a los cangrejos; al crear los cerros, los campos, los lagos, los mares; al crear todo lo que está a nuestra vista*”) (2017:108). Here Vico provides some different items, such as *cho palo* (“the

lakes and seas”). But most significantly, Vico includes *winaq* (“people, humanity”), along with the already familiar categories of *chikop* (“animal”), *tz’ikin* (“bird”), *kar* (“fish”). In Part 1 Chapter 9, Vico states: “*We ta nimawinaq, we ta nimachikop nimatz’ikin, we ta nimakar ch’utikar, xax uk’oje’ik wi ronojel k’o chuwach ulew*” (“*Sea persona mayor, sea animal grande, sea pájaro grande, sea pez grande, sea pez pequeño, esa es la existencia de todo lo que hay sobre la faz de la tierra*”) (2017:84). Again, Vico lists *winaq* (“humans”) with *chikop*, *tz’ikin*, and *kar*, affirming that these three categories include *ronojel* (“all”) of *uk’oje’ik* (“existence”) *k’o chuwach ulew* (“on the face of the earth”). Here Vico lists all “earthly” life, which all share the same physicality and therefore can be coherently listed together.

This list in Part 2 Chapter 33 is not only useful because it shows “human” and “non-human” life; it also demonstrates the difference between general “life” and “non-life.” Vico does not consider mountains, stars, the moon, or rocks to be alive and so he relegates them to the category of things that are “lifeless.” He even includes the *che’* (“trees”) with the “lifeless” objects of the universe. Even though plants share some aspects of physicality with other life, such as the ability to grow and the need for water, they share enough differences from humans and animals (bones, muscles, blood) to be considered “non-life.” Averroës, for instance, distinguishes between plants and animals since plants are incapable of “abstracting in particular forms, such as colors and sounds, from their material substrata and raising them to a higher level of immateriality” (Fakhry 2001:59). Walker notes that, for Catholics, “vegetable forms” cannot have any spiritual significance (2003:157). This is why Vico lists trees with other “lifeless” objects. Humans on the other hand are unique because they have an interiority, which Averroës defines as the capacity to reason. This capacity for reason sets humans apart from “non-life.” In Part 2 Chapter 12, Vico lists humanity together with the angels as both being subjects of Mary

(2011:53). Because humans have the capacity to reason (i.e. an interiority), they share with the metaphysical, eternal category of angels, whereas animals lack an interiority altogether. These categorizations of life create a hierarchical value of life. Essentially, Western naturalism situates plants as the lowest level of life, more than “dead” rocks but less than “soulless” animals .

Meanwhile the animals, fish, and birds have a more complex cognitive faculty than plants, but they are soulless and unable to reason like humans. Humans are the apex of life and superior to all “non-human” life. This conception of life has precedent that long predates Vico. For instance, in Aristotle’s *De anima (On the soul)*, the philosopher states that there is a hierarchy of sentience. Within this hierarchy, plants are the lowliest soul because they are incapable of perceiving the physical world around them. Meanwhile, humans are the apex of the hierarchy of sentience because they have the ability to reason (1984:659-660). Averroës also argues for a hierarchy of interiority. According to Fakhry, Averroës states that humans, animals, and plants all share the “nutritive faculty,” which is the “primary faculty” for life and is “common to all living organisms” (2001:57). The nutritive faculty “exist[s] in the animal for the sake of its survival” and is based in the appetitive desire for procreation as well as growth and instinct (Fakhry 2001:57, 67). Averroës therefore acknowledges the sameness of the physicality of life. Yet he also argues that all life shares “nature’s urge to rise higher and higher from the lowest to the highest faculties of the soul in a hierarchical manner” (Fakhry 2001:57). Here Averöes defines the soul as reason that seeks “the perfection of the natural body,” and while animals and plants only seek survival, “the rational faculty [i.e. interiority] has been placed in mankind for the sake of their perfection” (Fakhry 2001:57, 67). Thus humans have interiority, which situates them as not only unique but superior to all other life.

The ontological hierarchy allows for the assumption that humans have the capacity and authority to rule over non-humans. Vico echoes this notion in Part 1 Chapter 5, where he states: “*Nim upatan nim uchak kaj ulew. Xa tzuqb'al qe xa kob'al qe, ronojel chikop ronojel tz'ikin, ronojel kar ronojel saq'ul, ronojel ki' ronojel wa, ronojel ja' k'o chuwach ulew. Xa loq'ob'al re ronojel winaq rumal Dios*” (“*El cielo y la tierra es [son] de gran importancia. Es [son] el [los] que nos da[n] de comer, el [los] que nos sustenta[n]. Todo animal, todo pájaro, todo pez, toda fruta, todo lo dulce, todo lo que es comida, toda el agua que hay sobre la faz de la tierra, es la muestra del amor de Dios hacia la persona*”) (2017:62). In other words, God created life for the sake of humanity. This is much more acutely expressed in the *Teabo Manuscript*, a Yucatec-Maya Christian manuscript, which states that God created humans “to have dominion over the fishes that exist in the ocean and the birds that exist in the air, and the animals that exist on the face of the earth,” and in which God later tells man “All these things that I have created are yours” and even calls him “the lord of [M]y creations on the earth” (Christensen 2019:69-71, 77, 81). According to the *Teabo Manuscript*, this exaltation of humans is justified because “man is not like this [i.e. non-humans], [because] he is erect and raised high, his gaze is marvelous, it examines his soul and what he sees” (Christensen 2019:71). Western writers affirm as much. In *Politics*, Aristotle goes as far as to assert that forms of life lower in the hierarchy only exist to serve higher forms of life (1998:5). Even Thomas Aquinas argues for the superiority of humanity, stating that before the Fall in Eden, animals followed the commands of humans “of their own accord” (*Summa Theologica*, I, Quaest. 91. Art. 1-5). This is also articulated in the *Teabo Manuscript*, in which God tells Adam: “All these [animals] I created here on earth are very tame for your, and they love you also so that whichever of any of them you desire to eat, when you call their names they will come also, when you choose whichever of them you want to

eat, because they truly love you” (Christensen 2019:87). Not only are non-humans inferior to humans, but they are meant to be servants for humans. Herein lies the significance of this naturalist categorization in Vico: his thought was utterly anthropocentric, creating a hierarchy of value on life. This hierarchy prizes humanity above all.

Complementing Vico’s hierarchy of categories is a strict rule stipulating that human and non-human categories can never merge. In Part 2 Chapter 27, Vico explains how there are four Evangelists (“*kajib’ chik evangelista*”), named “*San Matheo*,” “*San Marcos*,” “*San Lucas*,” and “*San Juan*” respectively, all of whom wrote one of the four canon Gospel accounts of Christ (2012:43). Vico explains how the Evangelists are each associated with one of four symbols, three of which are animals. He states that Matthew is associated with a “*winaq*” (“person”), Mark with a “*koj*” (“lion”),¹⁰ Luke with a “*waca*” (“cow”),¹¹ and John with a “*kot*” (“eagle”) (2012:43). Vico is quick to explain that although three of the Evangelists are associated with animals, they are not literal animals. He states: “*Ma nab’e e ta chikop kik’oje’ik ri evangelista, xa kiketaxik, retaxik puch kiloq’olaj tz’ib*” (“*No es que ellos eran animales en su existencia, sino fue una forma de compararlos, de comparar su sagrado escrito*”) (2012:43). Essentially, humans and animals are categorically different and therefore emphatically unequal. A human cannot become an animal, nor can an animal become a human. This further establishes the assumption that categories cannot blend, nor can their boundaries blur.

Physical beings and metaphysical beings are also incapable of changing between “spirit” and “material” due to the extreme rigidity of categories. As Vico insinuated in Part 2 Chapter 24 regarding the Holy Spirit’s appearance in the form of a dove, nothing can be both physical

¹⁰ *Koj* actually signifies a “mountain lion” which is endemic to the highlands. The missionaries use it since it is the closest analog to the African *león*.

¹¹ Since domesticated cows were not native to the Americas, Vico uses the Castilian *vaca*. K’iche’ does not have the phoneme [v], and so Vico uses the phoneme [w].

and metaphysical. Vico devotes much of Part 1 in explaining the difference between God and His creation (2017:26-32, 40, 78, 80, 82, 90, 102). In general though, one of the chief differences between metaphysical beings such as angels and physical beings such as animals is their eternal (or mortal) state of being. Vico explains this clearly in Part 1 Chapter 5: “*Are k’u rumal k’ax chikina’o kekamik kesachik, ronojel ub’anoj Dios maja b’i chik uk’olem. E junamatajinaq e pu k’exwachitajinaq ruk’ uk’olem Dios junelik k’olik, maja b’i chik utaqem uterenib’em puch uk’aslem uk’olem pu Dios*” (“*Pero ellos sienten tristeza porque tienen que morir, tienen que desaparecer, toda la creación de Dios ya no tendrá existencia. Son comparados, son diferenciados con la existencia de Dios quien existe para siempre, no hay quien sea eterno como lo es la existencia de Dios*”) (2017:62). In other words, all physical beings are doomed to perish, whereas metaphysical beings will exist forever. Vico reiterates this in Part 1’s Proemium, stating that all physical beings and materials “*xma k’isinaq wi, xma tane’inaq wi, xma chisach wi xma chik’is wi*” (“*se termina, se suspende, todo va a desaparecer, todo se va a acabar*”) (2017:22). Because all physical beings share their fate with a world doomed to perish, they by extension cannot interact with the metaphysical world. And perhaps most emphatic of all, Vico asserts in Part 1 Chapter 11: “*Ma wi ilel Dios chub’aq’ uwach winaq, xma chutzin wi chiril winaq uwach Dios k’a k’as loq waral chuwach ulew, rumal xa ti’ojilal wach qawach oj winaq*” (“*Dios no se deja ver a los ojos de la persona, no es posible que la persona vea a Dios mientras esté viva aquí en la tierra, porque nosotras las personas somos corporales*”) (2017:90). Not only are humans not metaphysical, but they cannot even perceive the metaphysical. Thus the physical and metaphysical are utterly separated categories.

Two Exceptions to the Non-permeability of Categories

Finally, there are two exceptions to the rigid separation between the physical and metaphysical that must be addressed. The first, which is apparent in the *Theologia Indorum*, is the amphibious nature of humans, which seemingly allows them to be simultaneously physical and metaphysical. In Part 1 Chapter 10, Vico acknowledges that humans all have a unique “*ranima*” (“soul, heart, being”) that must be cherished and protected (2017:88, 90). In Part 1 Chapter 17, he goes as far as to say: “*Xuya qanima’ xuya qak’u’x, xuya quxlab’, ma wi oj keje chikop. [...] Oj k’ut oj winaq, ma wi oj keje k’olik, k’as chi pu qanima’ qak’u’x quxlab’, kaminaqa chik qati’ojil*” (“*Nos dio nuestro corazón, nos dio nuestro espíritu, nos dio aliento, no somos como los animals. [...] En cambio, la existencia de nosotras las personas no es así, nuestro espíritu está vivo, nuestro aliento está vivo*”) (2017:128). According to Vico, humans have an immortal interiority, whereas animals, because of a lack of an interiority, die and cease to exist completely and forever.

Logically, this would make humans categorically metaphysical rather than physical. Yet Vico contradicts this elsewhere. Vico clearly states in Part 2 Chapter 33: “*Are chiqak’uxla’aj qakamik qasachik rumal xax oj wi kamel xax oj pu sachel wi waral chuwach ulew, ma na oj ta junelik k’olik waral chuwach ulew*” (“*Recordemos nuestra muerte, nuestra desaparición, porque nuestro destino es morir en este mundo, no somos eternos en esta Tierra*”) (2012:143). Additionally, in Part 2 Chapter 15 he states: “*Oj k’o chuwach ulew rumal ma wi chi kaj oj petinaq wi, xa wi oj ulewal winaq*” (“*nosotras personas que estamos aquí en la Tierra, porque nosotros no venimos del cielo, nosotros somos de la Tierra*”) (2012:113). Vico clearly considers humans to be physical rather than metaphysical, going as far as to say that people are of the earth, not Heaven. Not only can humans not perceive or interact with the metaphysical, but

humans are also fated to die. By their nature, metaphysical beings cannot die. There is therefore, in the mind of Vico, an unbridgeable dichotomy between the body and the soul. Such notions can be found in the Pauline epistles. In Galatians 5:17 for instance, for author writes: “*ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκός: ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται*” (“For the flesh is against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for they are opposed to each other”). And in Romans 8:13: “*εἰ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆτε μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν, εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε ζήσεσθε*” (“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”). Both of these verses clearly establish a conflict between the human *σὰρξ* (“body, flesh”) and the human *πνεῦμα* (“spirit, breath, wind”). In Vico’s *Theologia Indorum*, the categories of physical and metaphysical are so intensely disparate that the human cannot be conceived of as both flesh and spirit conjoined. Rather, the naturalist Western mind conceives of the human as two parts so internally conflicted that humans should choose the spirited portion, which is deemed good and eternal, and utterly reject the physical portion, which is deemed utterly evil and perishable.

While this seems to imply that humans are simultaneously physical and metaphysical, this is not actually the case. Rather, in Western canon the “soul” is typically equated with the ability to reason. For instance, the highly influential Christian writer Athanasius writes: “It is the function of the soul to see by reasoning even what is outside its own body, without however acting outside its own body or to move things distant from the body by its presence” (2011:67). Meanwhile Averroës bluntly states, “‘Soul’ is also used for the rational part, the thinking part, of our consciousness. It...is not related to or bound up with matter [...] and it is the only part of our thinking soul that seems to possess eternity or be immortal” (2019:62). The soul is therefore the ability to reason and is limited within the physicality of the human body. In other

words, a human is not two distinct parts comprised of “soul” and “body,” but is rather a single whole of which reason is an aspect or component of the person’s interiority. Averroës affirms this, arguing: “However, the disposition to apprehend universal intelligibles [i.e. to reason] must subsist in a subject necessarily, which cannot be a body nor an intellect. Therefore, it must be a soul, or a power in the soul to apprehend universals” (Fakhry 2001:70). This ability to reason makes humans metaphysical rather than physical. This is why Walker states “Most demons have aerial [i.e. metaphysical] bodies, and they have, of course, souls” (2003:71). The difference between angels and demons is that the former use their reason to perfect themselves while the latter do not. Averroës states as much, asserting that reason “has been placed in mankind for the sake of their perfection” (Fakhry 2001:67). It is this ability to reason that perfects humans. This is why Vico in Part 2 Chapter 17 describes the Christian as follows: “*chi kajil winaq angelil winaq santo’il winaq puch uk’oje’ik ri xpiano ub’i*” (“*la existencia del que se llame cristiano será persona del cielo, ángel del cielo, será santo*”) (2011:162). A true Christian will be like the angels, not in the vague sense of simile, but in an actualized sense because their interiorities will have been “perfected.” Thus Athanasius concludes that “[Christ] was incarnate that we might be made god,...that we might inherit incorruptibility” (2011:107). Even though humans are both physical and metaphysical, Catholic Christian doctrine has ensured that they are not mutually exclusive categories in the same way that “humans” and “non-humans” are, allowing humans to exist within both categories without disrupting those categories.

The second exception to unreconcilable Western categories is the Incarnation of Christ. In the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico asserts the metaphysical ontology of God as utterly separated from the physical existence of His creation. In Part 1 Chapter 5 he states: “*ma wi yujtajinaq uk’oje’ik ruk’ uk’oje’ik ub’anoj, xa utukela’am uk’oje’ik xax jun wi chuk’oje’ik. Maja b’i chi rij*

chuwach xere wi uxenab'al utikerib'al ronojel k'olik" ("no está mezclada la existencia de Él con la existencia de su creación, sola es su existencia, es único en su existencia, no tiene ni adelante ni atrás, es solo el principio, el inicio de todo lo que existe") (2017:45). Here Vico clearly articulates that God's existence is not mixed with His creation. Yet almost immediately following this statement, Vico states how Christ took on corporeal form: "*Xa k'exewach uti'ojil chitz'ib'axik rumal winaq. Xa wi xere uk'exewach rumal qitzij wi xuluk'ama qati'ojil, winaq xuxik chupam Santa María rumal qaloq'oxik rumal*" ("La gente escribió sobre su ser corporal, esa sí es su representatividad porque en verdad vino a tomar nuestro cuerpo, se hizo persona en el vientre de santa María por amor a nosotros") (2017:45). Thus Christ is an exception to the clear distinctions between the metaphysical and physical categories. Vico reiterates this concept throughout his *Theologia Indorum*, though it is uncertain how the K'iche's would have initially received his descriptions on the divinity and corporeality of Christ. Nevertheless, in Part 2 Chapter 15 Vico clearly explains how Christ was in fact fully human, not only by assuming the form of a man but also *qakosik* ("our exhaustion"), *qarapaxik* ("our whip"), and *qakamik* ("our death") (2011:105). Christ is metaphysical because He is God, and He is also human and even physically died.

The issue is that Christ defies the categorical boundaries of the physical and the metaphysical. In this case, the Western conceptual framework of physical and metaphysical categorizations breaks down. This is demonstrated in the monastic literature. Athanasius writes in his *De Incarnatione* ("On the Incarnation"): "And thus it happened that both things occurred together in a paradoxical manner: the death of all was completed in the lordly body, and also death and corruption were destroyed by the Word in it" (2011:71). Gregory of Nazianzus echoes the same point, stating: "Man and God blended. They became a single whole, the stronger side

predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man” (2002:86). Gregory adds bluntly: “He [Christ] asks where Lazarus is laid – he was man; yet he raises Lazarus – he was God” (2002:88). Due to a Western framework, the Christian thinkers like Vico can only compensate with the conceptual challenge of the Incarnation by relinquishing it to an incomprehensible “paradox.” The Incarnation is generally accepted as a paradox; many attempts to reconcile this paradox to fit within a naturalist framework have resulted in Christological heresies including Arianism, Docetism, Apollinarism, and Monothelitism. Thus in Part 2 Chapter 12 of the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico states without any theological elaboration: “*Keje k’ut xa uti ’ojil wi ral Santa María ub’ixik, ma na are ral wi Santa María, udiosil xuxik, xax Dios wi, xax k’o wi, maja b’i oq, maja oqo chalaxoq, maja’ qo nay pu chik’oje’ oq Santa María waral chuwach ulew*” (“*Así que el cuerpo del hijo de Santa María es el de ella, por eso es hijo de Santa María, pero también tenía su divinidad, era Dios, ya estaba, ya existía aunque todavía no había nacido y aún no existía Santa María aquí en la Tierra*”) (2011:53). Vico does not attempt to fit Christ in either the metaphysical or the physical category because Christ’s Incarnation is a paradox and must be accepted as a paradox incomprehensible to humans.

Conclusion

As a naturalist of the West, Domingo de Vico relied heavily on categorization to interpret reality and systematize relationships. With extremely rare exception (such as the Incarnation of Christ, which is considered and accepted as paradox), categories are extremely rigid and do not allow for blurring or permeation. Examples of this include “human” and “non-human,” “life and non-life,” and “physical” and “metaphysical.” These categories stem from a naturalist ontology that recognizes the sameness of physicality while simultaneously identifying the multiplicity in interiority. This need for categorizations stems from Western philosophers and theologians,

many of whom were read by Vico during his time at Salamanca. Thus Averroës states that the purpose of reason is to identify objective universals in an objective reality (Fakhry 2001:66, 67). The problem is that by emphasizing these categories as objective, Vico attempted to apply these categories to K'iche'an ontology, which not only failed to understand the K'iche's but ultimately led to the Spanish missionaries punishing the Maya for not comprehending their objective reality. This is clearly demonstrable in Vico's depiction of K'iche'an "gods," "idols," and "ancestors," a topic that will be covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Vico on K'iche'an Idols, Ancestors, and Gods

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated how Vico heavily relied on the Western convention of categorizations in the *Theologia Indorum*. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Vico applied Western categorization to specifically “idols,” “ancestors,” and “gods.” By analyzing these “three” aspects of ceremonial Maya life with Vico’s categorical framework, I ultimately intend to demonstrate how not only were Vico’s categories wholly arbitrary but inevitably failed in understanding and accurately describing 16th century K'iche'an conceptions of their religiously-associated beings that occupied a central role in the cosmology and ritual.

The Bane of Idolatry

It seems that nearly every Amerindian group became associated with a European cliché. For the Indians of North America, the Anglos likened them to a “wild animal” occupying gargantuan swaths of virgin land (Deloria 1988:8). For the indigenous Brazilians of the Amazonian basin, the Portuguese likened them to “rude plants” that were inconstant, forgetful, and quick to happily return to the jungle soon after converting to Christianity (Viveiros 2011:2-5). For the Mayas of Central America, the Spanish considered them pagan “idolaters.” The Spanish characterized the Mayas as idolaters more than anything else, and in many ways, the *k'ab'awil* (“idol”) became emblematic of the Maya during the colonial period.

Idols were ubiquitous in the Maya region. According to Prufer (et al.), the Spanish Chroniclers, especially Diego de Landa, “were amazed by the incredible numbers of idols they witnessed everywhere they went,” including at temples, shrines, oratories, houses, roads, town entrances, and stairways (2003:227). Hanks adds that within the first two hundred years after Contact, the Spanish discovered over two dozen “idol houses” in the Yucatán alone (2010:53).

These idol houses were noted for their spacious size as well as the number of idols stored inside them. Christenson relates one particular account from Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who reported how the idol houses featured not just idols but also an altar and paintings on the walls of idols and serpents (2016:52). For these reasons, the Spanish began to associate the Mayas almost solely with their idols. In fact, in 1604 the king of Spain requested a report from fray Juan de Izquierdo exclusively on the “state of idolatry” alone (Hanks 2010:103). Lorenzen notes that idols were typically constructed of wood, stone, or ceramic (2005:26). According to one colonial Spanish description, the idols were made of stone, wood, clay, gold, or copper, and were adorned with rattles, feathers, woven coverings, and sea shells (Christenson 2016:126). The idols usually appeared in anatomical, anthropomorphic form. Prufer uncovered one such idol during an excavation in Xmuqlebal Xheton cave, in the Muklebal Tzul regional center of Belize. The idol had accumulated severe damage over time but still showed some basic anatomical form. Additionally, Prufer identified the idol’s material as cedar wood and traced remnants of colorant, namely a red earth pigment and a “dark-brown-black” pigment (2003:226). Prufer notes that colonial-era wooden idols usually would not have survived to the present day “except in the rarest of environmental conditions” (2003:226). Obviously, the missionaries did not approve of these idols.

The missionaries responded to the seeming superfluousness of the idols with aggressive and destructive tactics. In 1510, even Pope Innocent IV took a vocal stance against idolatry, calling it *contra naturam* (“against nature”) and deeming it more evil than murder or blasphemy (Whitehead 1984:72). In the highlands in 1555, Alonso de Zorita, the official *oidor* of Guatemala who represented “the legal interests of the governing tribunal in Mexico,” began traveling from town to town seizing idols, and he sent warnings ahead to each town that if the people did not

surrender their idols to him, then they would “suffer severe punishment” (Christenson 2016:77). Then in the 1560s the idolatry trials began in the Yucatán. During the idolatry trials, Diego de Landa aggressively sought idols. On July 12, 1562 alone, Landa burned more than 20,000 idols and forced hundreds of Mayan prisoners to watch and afterwards suffer further punishment (Chuchiak 2005:614). Landa also ordered his clergy to require the Maya to confess their idolatry and even report other “idolaters” whom they knew, including family who lived in their homes (Chuchiak 2005:617). This system of reporting spawned an inquisition on Maya “idolaters” who had to defend themselves in court. Hanks notes that many Mayas had to give testimonies under oath during these trials (2010:57). Landa was infamously ruthless to the Mayas. Christenson states that in the search for “idolaters” and their idols, Landa and the other missionaries “interrogated and tortured thousands of Mayan converts suspected of reverting to paganism” (2016:21). Popson notes that within three months alone, Landa arrested and tortured 4,500 Mayas from just a single village (2003:64). Christenson adds that their methods of torture included beating the witnesses until the ears and nose bled, holding them under water for extended periods, splashing boiling water on them, suspending them with ropes tied around their wrists and a heavy stone tied to their feet, forcing their mouths open with sticks and pouring water down their throats, and scorching them with wax tapers. These methods were only for those suspected of idolatry or else knowing an idolater; if found guilty, the Mayas would be lashed up to two hundred times or sold into slavery (2016:21). This inquisition continued unofficially for centuries. In the early 1600s, Sánchez de Aguilar reported his confiscation and destruction of many idols (Hanks 2010:54). In the late 1600s, Francisco Ximénez reported the need to tear away the presence of idols in the highlands, which “may appear as only a spark among them, [but] it is in fact a burning fire” (Quiroa 2013:77, translation Quiroa’s). Even as far

as the late 1790s, the fray José Perdomo in Teabo was actively imprisoning Mayas for idolatry (Christensen 2016:19). Idolatry had quickly become the most severe sin a Maya could commit and incited some of the most cruel savagery that the missionaries ever inflicted.

Despite the relentless and systematic cruelty of the missionaries, the Mayas remained resilient. As Prufer remarks about the idol found in Xmuqlebal Xheton cave, it is possible that Mayas hid their idols in caves such the one in Belize and kept their locations secret (2003:226). Furthermore, the existence of idols still exist to the present day. Centuries later, the renowned and pioneering Mayanist Barbara Tedlock relates that the Mayas of Chichicastenango still possess household idols, placing them at shrines and practicing rituals that involve the idols (1992:128). And in Santiago Atitlán, the Tz’utujil Mayas now use the images of saints as “social currency and prestige” in the same way that the idols did in the colonial period (Christenson 2016:154). In this way, the Mayas continue to demonstrate a remarkable spirit of resistance against the hegemonic colonial powers that arrived from across the sea on wooden ships.

The Theologia Indorum and the Idols

The *Theologia Indorum* is extremely orthodox in its content. It begins with a logical (i.e. philosophical) proof of the existence of God, which is based on Aquinas’ *Quinque viae* (“Five ways”) (Aquinas 1954:54-56). But because the *Theologia Indorum* is a theology for the Indians rather than fellow clergy, Vico instead provides a *theologia tenuis* that only includes the *Prima via* (2017:34) and *Secunda via* (2017:36). Christensen mentions how the *Prima via*, which is the logical proof of the Prime Mover (see Aristotle 2008:185-231, esp. 207, 210, 211), is included in many other colonial Christian manuscripts including the Teabo Manuscript (2016:31, 32). Moreover, the *Theologia Indorum* is replete with various topics which include: biblical stories that either demonstrate or overtly conclude with a moral lesson (2011[T2]:301), a declaration

that Mary is the Queen of the Universe (2011[T2]:53), how to be an *utzilaj xpiano* (“good Christian”) (2011[T2]:157, 165), a commentary on the three theological virtues and four cardinal virtues (2012:75-115 and 115-195), an explanation of the angels (2017:52), an explanation of the seven sacraments (2012:55), that Satan enslaves sinners (2011[T1]:45), the importance of confession and baptism (2011[T2]:169, 217), and finally how Christ has power and authority over Satan (2011[T2]:137). It cannot be stressed enough that every single one of these topics appear in other colonial Christian manuscripts, including the ones written in an indigenous language. Christensen demonstrates how each of the aforementioned topics has appeared not just in Maya manuscripts but also Nahuatl manuscripts from Mexico (2014:31, 32, 41, 46, 49, 54, 57, 78, 79, 104). Clearly then Vico’s *Theologia Indorum*, while long, is by no means unique in content. Vico’s treatment of idolatry is no different. Like the other missionaries, he too condemned it, and was even commissioned to write a treatise on idolatry. This treatise, which was intended “to serve as a moral and confessional primer or *summa consciencia*,” was never produced but instead inspired the creation of the *Theologia Indorum* itself (Sparks 2014:402). While extremely orthodox, the manuscript is thorough and, naturally, condemns the idolatry of the K’iche’s of the highlands.

The *Theologia Indorum* is replete with mentions of idolatry. The first time he references idolatry is in Part 1 Chapter 12 where he states: “*Naqi chi pa chiraj ik’u’x, ma kixq’ijilon chik che’ ab’aj, chi rij ri nim Ajaw Dios mi xnuv’ij chiwe. Ma utzijoxik che’ ab’aj, keje ri ma xch’awik ma xtzijon pa chiwech. Ma xuchol ri keje ri uk’oje’ik D. ni. mi xnucholo chiwech*” (“*Que el corazón de ustedes no desee otra cosa, por eso ya no adoren a los palos, a las piedras, es a Dios gran Señor, como se los he dicho. No hablen con los palos y las piedras, porque no les hablarán a ustedes, por eso Dios gran Señor relató su ser, es lo que yo les he relatado*”)

(2017:106). Here it is immediately evident how Vico perceives of the idols: as *che' ab'aj* (“wood and stone,”). The pairing of *che'* and *ab'aj* frequently recurs throughout the manuscript. This type of couplet represents a diphrastic kenning, which Hull defines as “the pairing of two distinct elements to produce a metaphorical, more abstract third concept” (2012:73). Hull continues that “parallelism defines poetic or ornate discourse in [Mayan languages],” adding that diphrastic kennings are “firmly entrenched in the parallelistic structuring” (2012:73, 74). By juxtaposing two specific words as a couplet, the Mayas use the associative connections shared between the two words to produce a third concept. In the *Theologia Indorum*, for instance, Vico pairs *rax* (“green”) and *q'an* (“yellow”) as a couplet in the phrase “*ronojel uraxal uq'anal Dios*” (“all of it / His greenness / His yellowness / God”) (2017:140). Both green and yellow have extremely strong connotations of rebirth and renewal. On the one hand, *rax* is strongly associated with jade, which in turn is strongly associated with the youthful corn god and, by extension, rejuvenation and rebirth (Taube 2005:28, 31; Miller 1992:160). On the other hand, *q'an* has strong associations with corn. This is articulated in the *Rab'inal Achi*, which mentions “yellow-colored, white ears of ripe corn / yellow sustenance / white sustenance” (Tedlock 2003:67). Corn, like the corn god, also has strong associations with cyclical rebirth (Christenson 2016: 286, 314, 327). When *rax* and *q'an* are paired together, the couplet *uraxal uq'anal* denotes a meaning: abundance. Thus *ronojel uraxal uq'anal Dios* translates as “all of God’s abundance.” Hull provides a number of other diphrastic kennings that frequently appear in Mayan language manuscripts. For instance, a common kenning is the pairing of *ulew* (“earth”) and *kaj* (“sky”), which together refers to “everywhere” or may else refer to “domain” or “the world” (Hull

2012:80-82). This exact kenning also appears throughout the *Theologia Indorum* and even the *Popol Wuj*.¹²

It is doubtful that the kenning *che' ab'aj* existed prior to Contact. Rather, it is likely a product of the colonial *lengua reducida*, which Hanks describes as “an objectification produced by translingual practices of missionaries and Mayas, but...at the same time a practical instrument used to form new missionaries and new Christians” (2010:96). This *lengua reducida* became a “hybrid at all levels” and entailed the superimposition of Castilian meanings onto Mayan grammatical and lexical forms (2010:128, 134). In some cases this involved adapting a Mayan word to signify a Western Christian concept; using the rules of Mayan grammar to create new words, kennings, and phrases; or else simply using the Castilian when the Mayan seemed inadequate. In the case of *che' ab'aj*, Vico uses the Mayan kenning convention to create a new meaning: namely “idol.” Most colonial K'iche' dictionaries list *che'* as meaning either *árbol*, *madera*, or *palo*. The possible translations in Edmonson's more modern dictionary are more varied and include “stick, pole, tree, wood, cudgel, wooden object, footstool” (1965). Furthermore, other highland languages in the K'iche'an Branch of the Mayan language family also use the word *che'*. Kaqchikel uses *che'* to signify “árbol, madera,” although a colonial dictionary lists *che ru* to signify “*madera, árbol, monte, bosque*” (Munson 1991; Saenz de Santa María 1940:84). Meanwhile in Tz'utujil, *chee* signifies “*palo, árbol, madera*” (Mendoza 1996:67). Since the word *che'* is present in K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Tz'utujil, it is likely that the word at least predates the Contact and has not undergone any dramatic semantic shift. The same applies to *ab'aj*, which is a general word for “rock, stone.” Like *che'*, the word *ab'aj* appears in

¹² It is worth mentioning that diphrastic kennings also appear in Nahuatl, a feature that León-Portilla refers to as *difrasismo*. One of the most famous examples is *in xóchitl in cuicatl* (“flower and song”), which León-Portilla says refers to poetry (1990:75).

both Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil. For Kaqchikel, Munson's dictionary lists *ab'ej*, *ab'ij*, *ab'oj* as a single entry meaning "*pedra*," while a colonial dictionary lists *abaj ru* with a larger semantic field of "*pedra, talismán, amuleto; los órganos de la reproducción*" (Munson 1991; Saenz de Santa María 1940:31). Meanwhile in Tz'utujil, the term *aab'aj* refers to "*pedra, testículos; huevos*" (Mendoza 1996:1) Like *che'*, *ab'aj* appears to have enjoyed a long use among Maya in the highlands that predates the arrival of the Spanish, since the same word appeared in other sister languages at the time of contact.

While Vico does not alter the meanings of *che'* and *ab'aj*, he does create a new meaning by juxtaposing them into a kenning that likely did not exist prior to Contact. As has already been established, the idols of the colonial period were generally made of wood, stone, or ceramic. However, it is doubtful that Vico and the other Catholic clergymen created the kenning *che' ab'aj* simply as a reference to the materiality of the idols. Rather, the Western logic of the kenning is founded on a long precedent established in the Western literary canon. The first and most relevant source in the Bible, which emphatically condemns idolatry. Even the First Commandment condemns idolatry, referring to idols as "*sculptile*" (lit. "a carved or sculpted thing") and "*omnem similitudinem quae est in caelo desuper et quae in terra deorsum nec eorum quae sunt in aquis sub terra*" ("any likeness of anything that in the sky above, or that is in the earth below, or of those things that are in the water under the earth") (Exodus 20:2-6). The importance of this command is echoed in other Christian manuscripts as well. As Christensen demonstrates, the Nahuatl *Catecismoob ti le Metodistaob* ("Catechism of the Methodists") lists the Ten Commandments in Section 7, although in Protestant fashion it distinguishes "you will not have other gods before me" and "[you] will not make images" as two separate commands, unlike the Catholics who view them as a single commandment (2014:90). The Bible generally

defines idols by their materiality and powerlessness. Psalm 115 describes idols first by their materiality, specifically silver and gold, and then characterizes them by their feebleness, which constitutes being unable to speak, hear, feel, walk, or smell. The prophet Habakkuk follows the same formulaic description of idols, first by describing the materiality as metal, and then by asserting that the idols cannot speak, with the implication being that idols are inanimate and by extension powerless and useless (Habakkuk 2:18). This formulaic description recurs throughout the Western canon. For instance, Athanasius employs this same formula, characterizing idols as “wood and stones” and elsewhere “stones and wood,” concluding that the “weakness of [pagan] idols” is “proved” by the Greeks (2011:61, 93, 104). Vico employs this same formulaic description. In Part 1 Chapter 25, Vico states: “With it then nothing moves, nor walks. It does not have legs that it may walk. It is only wood, only stone it was said” (Sparks 2017:118). In the Western framework, humans are superior to animals, and animals are superior to plants. Meanwhile wood and stones are not just considered “non-human” but are considered inanimate and devoid of any interiority at all (as defined by Descola 2014). Thus when Vico uses the diphrastric kenning *che’ ab’aj*, the couplet is not just referencing the materiality of the idols but also their impotency. To Vico, idols are objects made of wood or stone, and their materiality implies a lack of interiority and agency.

The Theologia Indorum and the Ancestors

There is no single, general word for “ancestor” in K’iche’. In the *Popol Wuj*, the phrase *ojer winaq* (“ancient people”) is used to refer to the ancestors (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:102). Likewise, the words *qamam* (“our grandfathers”) and *qaqajaw* (“our fathers”) also refer to ancestors in the *Popol Wuj* (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:158). During my own K’iche’ language program through Tulane University (2020), the Maya instructors of Nawalja’ (Nahualá)

used the kennings *qanaan qataat* (“our mothers, our fathers”) and *qati’t qamaam* (“our grandmothers, our grandfathers”) to refer to their ancestors. Tedlock states that the K’iche’s of Momostenango refer to their ancestors as simply “*Nantat*” (“mother, father”) (1992:61).

Generally though, the K’iche’s refer to ancestors by using the following morphological formula: the first person plural pronominal prefix (*qa-*) is appended to a couplet of kinship stems denoting a pair of older lineal relatives such as parents (*taat, naan*) or grandparents (*maam, ti’t*).

Ancestors are extremely important to the K’iche’s and to their sense of identity and obligation.

Tedlock mentions how many rituals in Momostenango involve the ancestors, and on four days of the ritual calendar (namely 1, 6, 8, and 9 K’at) “great stacks of offering are given in order to make up for any neglect of duties to...the ancestors” (1992:110). Vico would have easily observed the reverence that the K’iche’s held for their ancestors, but he clearly misunderstands how or why the ancestors held a position of such centrality. Thus he understands ancestors from both a lineal and a Christian perspective, specifically as the physical progenitors of subsequent generations of people and as the genetic carriers of original sin.

Vico understands ancestors from a temporal perspective; ancestors are the people who predate the present generation in time. This is most evident in Part 2 of his *Theologia Indorum*. For instance, in Chapter 2 he describes the ancestral lineage of the virgin mother Mary, stating:

Ronojel mi xqab’ij kanoq, xuwachinik wi q’alaj saqil rumal Dios ta xalaxik jun utzilaj winaq Joaquin xalax na xalax nay puch jun utzilaj ixoq ub’i’ Santa Ana. Are kichak chuk’u’x Dios nim Ajaw Are nay puch kokel wi chuchuch chuqajaw qaloq’olaj chuch Santa María. Are ri San Joaquin chupam ukaj chinamital elenaq wi ajawab’ chi rij nim ajaw David chinamitalim wi.

(Todo lo que dejamos dicho, fructificó en la luz en la claridad por Dios cuando nació una gran persona, Joaquín, nació también nació una gran mujer, llamada Santa Ana. El trabajo de ellos en el corazón de Dios, es ser los padres de nuestra sagrada madre Santa María. San Joaquín ha venido del cuarto linaje, venido de los reyes, descendiente del gran señor David.) (2011:45-59)

Here Vico provides an extremely plain ancestry that only includes Mary's two parents, *Santa Ana* ("Joachim"), *Santa Ana* ("Anne"), and her distant ancestor *nim ajaw David* ("the great lord [i.e. king] David"). This ancestry is also distinguishably European because it emphasizes specific names in a linear order, whereas K'iche's tend to refer to their ancestors as a general group existing within cyclical time. The Teabo Manuscript is even more extreme, providing the genealogy of Christ through his father Joseph's line. The ancestry begins with David, who is the father of the patriarch Abraham, and concludes with Christ, mentioning a total of forty-four names (2016:117-123) Thus for Vico, the ancestors are purely a matter of bloodline through time. Thus Vico emphasizes the *ukaj chinamital* ("fourth lineage") of Joachim. Because of the emphasis on linear progression and succession through time, Vico counts the number of lineages as well.¹³ Thus Vico conceives of ancestors as a matter of genetics continuing in linear time.

For Vico, with the passing of each generation also comes the passing of original sin to their descendants. Aquinas characterizes original sin as a "corrupt habit" and a "disorder in the disposition of the parts of the soul [and] privation of original justice" (1954:120). And so while sins themselves are not habits, the disposition of sinning is a habit. The Spanish missionaries attempted to articulate this concept to the Mayas, as demonstrated by the *Catecismoob ti le*

¹³ The Italian theologian Campanella emphasizes the importance of number in Western literature by "asserting that numbers alone can be physical causes," since God has designed the universe in such a way that it can be measured in a plethora of ways (Walker 2003:222).

Metodistaob. In Section 3 of its First Catechism, the dialogic script reads: “The first sin of our parents made ruin for all men by making them be born in sin. [...] All persons are born in sin because they are born prideful, they do not listen (obstinate), they are lovers of things on this earth and not of God” (Christensen 2014:86, 87). Vico also references original sin in Part 2 Chapter 9, stating: “*chi winaq chi rumal umak Adan nab’e qaqajaw*” (“*la gente ha estado en pleitos por el pecado de Adán, nuestro primer padre*”) (2011:137). In Chapter 24 Vico explicitly mentions “*ri pecado original ub’i*” (“*pecado, llamado original*”) (2011:297). When Vico places the blame (*rumal*, “because of it”) on Adam (*nab’e qaqajaw*, “our first father”) for passing sin (*umak*, “his fault, sin, error”) to humanity, he is implying that every human passes their “habit” for sin to their children in the linear movement of time. To this end, in Part 2 Chapter 10 Vico likens Christ to Adam, stating that both “*maja b’i uchuch, ma pu ja b’i uqajaw*” (“*no tenía madre, no tenía padre*”) (2011:178). This likening to Christ as the second Adam originates in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 21-22), but has also been touched by Athanasius, who states that Christ became man specifically in order to fulfill the role of second Adam (2011:60). Thus within Vico’s Western framework, the ancestors are genetic, temporal, and corrupted by a sinful nature.

Finally, Vico perceives of ancestry as an aspect unique to earthly life. In Part 1 Chapter 22 Vico states: “*Maja b’i me’alanik k’ajolanik, maja b’i ixoqilanik maja b’i achijilanik chub’an chik chi la’. Xa keje Angeles*” (“*No habrá engendración de hijos e hijas, no habrá para ser esposa o esposo ahí. Serán como ángeles*”) (2017:152). There will no longer be childbearing in Heaven. Moreover, this will render the institution of marriage useless, and so marriage will also cease to exist. All bloodlines and filial kinships will essentially be rendered defunct. Thus Vico states that “*oj ral oj uk’ajol*” (“*somos sus hijas, somos sus hijos*”) and meanwhile frequently

refers to God as “*qachuch qaqajaw*” (“*nuestra madre y nuestro padre*”) (2017:29, 68, 70, 102, 156). Not only does Vico render ancestry pointless after death, but he even condemns the K’iche’an ancestors to Hell. In Part 2 Chapter 33 he states: “*Ma wi keje xkil ichuch iqajaw mi xekamik mi xesachik, mi pu xeb’ek, xetzaqatajik chi xib’alb’a, kek’atik keporoxik chi la’ rumal kimak*” (“*Sus padres no vieron eso, por eso murieron, se perdieron, se fueron al infierno. Se quemaron, fueron quemados allí por causa de sus pecados*”) (2012:135). Vico condemns *ichuch iqajaw* (“your [PL] fathers and mothers”) to *xib’alb’a* (“Hell”) where they *keporoxik* (“they are burned”) (2012:135). Vico employs the familiar kenning *ichuch iqajaw* to denote ancestors, except here he uses the second person plural pronominal prefix *i-* to clarify that he is referring to the K’iche’an ancestors and not his own. But Vico affirms that their ancestors have no excuses for their fate. In Part 1 Chapter 7 he states: “*Keje ri qitzij chi ronojel k’o wi Dios, k’o chi kaj k’o chuwach ulew, k’o chi qaxe’ k’o chi qawi*” (“*Si es que en verdad Dios está en todo, está en el cielo, está en la tierra, está debajo de nosotros, está sobre nosotros*”) (2017:74). Vico here is referencing natural revelation. Thus we return to the Dominican attitude that all pagan religions embody some aspect of objective Truth due to natural revelation. This belief stipulates that God has revealed enough of Himself in nature so that divine revelation (i.e. direct revelation from God) is not necessary to obtain Truth about Him. Gregory of Nazianzus also argues for a natural revelation derived from observing animals, particularly the honey bee and the spider, as well as plants, the sea, the stars, and the sun (2002:56-62). As Paul famously writes: “*εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοῦς ἀναπολογήτους*” (“So they [all humans] are without excuse”) (Romans 1:20).

The Theologia Indorum and the Gods

Strangely, Vico gives very little mention of the K’iche’an gods. What makes this so peculiar is that the *Popol Wuj*, which devotes a large amount of its pages to the gods, “*escrito*

durante la década de 1550,” which was at most only 16 years after Vico completed his work in 1544 (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:16). The gods were still extremely relevant to the K’iche’s, and yet Vico does not mention them much at all. Vico does list the names of various gods in Part 1 Chapter 25: “Greatly you all were scared because, before you all is this Xib’alb’a, greatly before you all is Jun Ajpu and Xb’alankej, Tasul Juraqan and Q’eteb’ Pub’a’ix, Jun Junajpu and Wuqub’ Junajpu, Jun Kame and Wuqub’ Kame, Kik’ Re and Kik’ Rixk’aq, Mam and Iq’ Cho’a, Wok and Jun Ajpu” (Sparks 2017:104-105). Yet Vico does not build on his list with any rhetorical point beyond acknowledging the names of their gods. The reason for this seeming lack of K’iche’an gods is deceptive. Like many other European missionaries operating in the New World, Vico considered the gods to be either the devil or his demons. Thus whenever Vico references either, he is also addressing the K’iche’an gods as well.

The closest approximation to the K’iche’an word for the European notion of “god” is *k’ab’awil*. According to Lopéz Ixcoy, *k’ab’awil* in its original meaning signified “*divino, puro*” and not necessarily “god,” which is a Western category and concept (2017:xxii; 2011:4). Nevertheless the word is used frequently throughout the *Popol Wuj* in reference to the various divine beings that occupy the narrative and is most often translated as “*dioses*” in Spanish (Mondloch and Carmack 2018) and “gods” in English (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996). Because of its pagan associations, this word was immediately targeted by the missionaries in their efforts to create a *lengua reducida*. According to Hanks, the Franciscan missionaries in the Yucatán did not use the Yucatec root word *ku* (“god, precious”) to reference God because they “were quite aware that in using a preexisting Mayan term for ‘god,’ they ran the risk of encouraging syncretism and confusion between the Christian God and the diabolical idols they were seeking to extirpate” (2010:133, 153). Instead, they used Yucatec grammar to manipulate

the root *ku* into the form *kuulilantah* (“to god-revere it”) to signify the worshipping of false gods (2010:153). While the lowland missionaries adapted *ku* to mean “false gods,” the approach to *k’ab’awil* in the highlands was different. Rather than retain the meaning “god,” the missionaries applied the word to idols. The colonial dictionaries list “*ídolo*” as *k’ab’awil* in varying orthographies including *cabauil*, *qabovil*, and *gabovil* (Sachse and Dürr 2017:236; Acuña 2005:191, Acuña 1983). The missionaries adapted other forms of the word to signify actions related to idolatry. For instance, the colonial dictionary *El Vocabulario en lengua jíche otlatecas* lists “*idolatrar*” as the verb form *cabovilafj*, which is listed with the kenning *che, abafj* (“idols”; lit. “wood and stone”) (Sachse and Dürr 2017:236). The dictionaries list other forms as well, such as *ah cabauil* (*ajk’ab’awil*; “*idólatra*”) and *qabovilanic* (*k’ab’awilanik*; “*idolatría*”). Vico uses *kab’awil* (spelled by Vico as *cabauil*; transcribed by Lopéz Ixcoy as *kab’awil*) throughout the *Theologia Indorum*. López Ixcoy notes how the *k’ab’awil* “*moderno y malo*” is different from the *k’ab’awil* “*antiguo y auténtico*” and translates the word as “*ídolo*” whenever it appears in the *Theologia Indorum* (2011:4). This reflects the *lengua reducida*, in which the missionaries attempted to repurpose Mayan words to fit a Christian system of meanings. Nevertheless the K’iche’s were resilient, and the original meaning of *k’ab’awil* clearly remained in use, as is demonstrated in the *Popol Wuj*. But for the purposes of understanding Vico, *k’ab’awil* references idols, not gods.

Vico does not appear to mention idols because to him they are demons. In the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico refers to demons in Castilian as *diablos* and in K’iche’ as *k’axtok’* (spelled by Vico as *caxtoc*). Most colonial K’iche’ dictionaries use *k’axtok’* as not just a signifier for demons but also for Satan, though the orthographies vary usually between *caxtoc*, *qaxtoq*, and *gaxtoq*. According to Lopéz Ixcoy, the term originally signified “*la persona que miente*” prior to Contact

and Spanish *reducción* (2017:143). While the colonial dictionaries do not list this significance, a colonial Kaqchikel dictionary also includes the word *qaxtoq*, defining it as “*mentiroso, engañoso*” (Saenz de Santa María 1940: 201). The same dictionary also includes the entry *qaxtoq ajtsai* and defines it as “*demonio, engañador,*” which provides some evidence that they adapted the word *k’axtok’* to mean “demon” for the K’iche’s as well. Satan is strongly associated with deceit in the Bible, especially in John 8:44 which states: “ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ” (“for [a] liar he [Satan] is and the father of it [lies]”). The missionaries sought to emphasize this characteristic of the devil and his demons by applying the K’iche’an word for a “liar” to them. Lopéz Ixcoy mentions that “*es más usual la forma itzel malvado, demonio, diablo, y todas las formas con las que se denomina al demonio*” (2017:143). *El Vocabulario en lengua qiche otlatecas* does mention *itzeel* (written *ytzel*), but it states that the word is “*p{or} cosa suçia. o mala, o maldad. | o ruin, o ruindad*” (Sachse and Dürr 2017:116). The dictionary does not attribute the meaning “demon” or “devil” to it. The word also appears in a Tz’utujil dictionary as *itzeel*, “*feo, malo, mal*” (Mendoza 1996:124). But *itzeel* does appear in at least one of the Kaqchikel dictionaries. The dictionary lists *itzel-winek* (lit. “bad person”) to mean “*diablo; Satanás*” (Munson 1991). Additionally, during my K’iche’ language program through Tulane University in 2020, I was researching the *Quema del Diablo* tradition in Guatemala. During private sessions, I asked various instructors for the word for “*diablo*” in K’iche’. All responded that K’iche’s today simply say “*diablo,*” but one instructor said that some speakers also use *itzeel*, and another said that some use *k’axtok’* (2020, private recorded audio). Nevertheless, Vico generally uses *diablos* and *k’axtok’* to describe demons.

Vico equates demons to the K'iche'an gods. He refers to Satan as “*xax tz'aqol tzij wi*” (“él es un mentiroso”),¹⁴ adding that Satan claims “*in tz'aqol in b'itol*” (“yo soy el creador, el formador”) (2017:116). Here Satan claims to be a god, and Vico even gives Satan dialogue using the first person singular pronoun *in*. This notion of demons pretending to be gods is extremely common in Western Christian literature. Athanasius states: “They [non-believers] were so impious that they even thereafter worshipped demons and called them gods” (2011:61). To Vico and his fellow clergy, the demons and the K'iche'an gods were the same beings, only referred to by different names. Hanks affirms as much, stating that demons and the Devil were “equated by missionaries with the Maya gods” (2010:273). This notion is echoed in a Nahuatl Christian manuscript called the “Nahuatl Bible,” in which an angel tells Paul: “Look upon the evil demons with fear! [...] Get rid of those whom you served and venerated as gods, before you bled yourself..., the evil demons” (Christensen 2014:21). Moreover, Fray Geónimo de Mendieta lamented that the Mayas were honoring demons as gods (Christenson 2016:149). Not only does Vico associate the demons with the K'iche'an gods, but he also believes that the demons inhabit the dead *che' ab'aj* (“wood and stone”) of idols. This does not appear to be universal for all demons, since Vico states “*pu diablos k'o chi xib'alb'a*” (“ya sean demonios que están en el infierno”) (2017:122). Nevertheless, Vico does imply an association between demons and idols. For instance, in Part 2 Chapter 14 he describes a “*rochoch k'axtok' ojer chi la' Roma*” (“*casa del demonio que estaba desde hace tiempo allá en Roma*”) (2011:73). Here he is clearly referencing a Roman temple. In the next sentence he states “*xere pu...kab'awil xuchax iwumal*” (“*estaba...el ídolo, así lo llamaron ustedes*”) (2011:73). Here he states that the Roman temple contained demons, which the K'iche's call *k'ab'awil*, or “idols” in the *lengua reducida*. Vico's connection

¹⁴ *El Vocabulario en lengua q'iche otlatecas* lists “*tzakal tzih*” to mean “*mentiroso*” specifically (Sachse and Dürr 2017:305).

of demons and idols is most evident a bit further in the chapter where he states: “*Retal qitzij chi are rajawal ronojel k’axtok’, ronojel puch kab’awil, retal puch, are sachol re ronojel k’axtok’ xsik’ix rumal ronojel winaq chuwach ulew*” (“*Es la señal de que su Reino está sobre el demonio, sobre todo ídolo, es el aniquilador de todo demonio que fue invocado por toda la gente aquí en la Tierra*”) (2011:81). Thus the idols and demons are inexplicably linked in Western conception.

This connection manifests in the belief that demons specifically inhabit the idols. This notion is affirmed and echoed throughout Western literature and was believed by the European missionaries who came to the New World. Athanasius states that “Formerly demons deceived human fancy, taking possession of springs or rivers, wood or stone, and by their tricks thus stupefied the simple” (2011:100). According to Walker, Hermes Trismegistus echoes the same notion in *Asclepius*, describing how demons can be invoked and infixed into idols, thereby imbuing the idols with power (2003:40). Walker adds: “[Hermes] admits...demons in the statues were worshipped as gods” (2003:42). In the Western religious framework, idols are dead and lifeless material, but demons may inhabit them. Therefore, whenever the Maya worship an idol, they invoking the power of a demon, not the power of the idol itself. Hanks confirms that missionaries linked “power and idolatry,” stating: “For the missionaries, of course, the power behind evil, the ultimate idol, was the Devil” (2010:273). In fact, the missionaries in the Yucatán used the term *cizin* not just to refer to the “devil” but also to signify “the spirit agency materialized in the idol” (Hanks 2010:149). The idea is articulated in other colonial Christian manuscripts as well. In the “Nahuatl Bible,” some newly-converted pagans burn their idols, later stating “we believed that we burned the evil demons we had taken to be gods” (Christensen 2014:22). The underlying assumption is that by burning the idols, the demons that inhabited the idols were also burned. For Vico and the other missionaries, the idols were lifeless and

powerless, but they could be filled with a malicious supernatural demon. Their beliefs in demon-inhabited idols were not simply theoretical. According to Christenson, Las Casas reported Maya failing to fulfill their duties to such idols and mysteriously dying soon after. Las Casas attributed their mysterious deaths to the demons inhabiting the idols, with God not commanding but allowing the demons to do so (2016:88, 89). Thus when Vico lists the names of their gods in Part 1 Chapter 25, he is listing K'iche'an names for demons. The demons are therefore the same as the K'iche'an gods and inhabit idols to give them power.

Conclusion

In the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico describes aspects of K'iche' cosmology and metaphysics by categorizing them within three Western categories. The first category is the "idol." Vico defines an idol purely by its materiality and refers to it as *che' ab'aj* ("wood and stone"). Because wood and stone are lifeless materials with no agency, the idol in turn is equally lifeless and without any agency or power.

The second category is the "ancestor." To Vico, ancestors are understood biologically and temporally. He treats ancestors only from a lineal perspective wherein they precede and produce the following generation of people. Generations form a "chain link" of names that are traceable through time. Finally, an individual ancestor can serve as a status marker, as was the case with Mary and Joseph both being direct descendants of King David.

The final category is the "god." Vico considers gods to be demons who serve Satan. Whenever a pagan calls upon the name of their god, they are invoking a demon. While pagan groups across the world may give the demons different names, they all reference the same demons. Thus Zeus is no different from Thor, and Thor is no different from the hero twins Jun

Ajpu and Xb'alanke. Moreover, these demons fill and inhabit idols. Therefore, while the idols themselves are powerless, they appear to have power because of the demons inside them.

While these three categories function with a Western framework, they fail to understand and accurately describe the K'iche'an perspective. In the next chapter, I intend to describe the K'iche' perspective within the Amerindian cosmopolitical theory as articulated by Viveiros de Castro. Such a metaphysical framework would have made the Western framework utterly alien and in many ways incomprehensible to the K'iche' in 16th century Guatemala.

Chapter 5

The Animist Ontology of the 16th Century K'iche's

In this final chapter, I intend to demonstrate that the categories of Vico fail to accurately describe the K'iche'an metaphysical reality because the 16th century K'iche's had an animist ontological perspective, not a naturalist one. I will begin by showing that the K'iche's were not analogists, as Descola (2014) suggests. Rather, they were animists, and within this ontology they did not perceive relationships between "human" and "non-human" but instead recognized all life as human. I will then argue that the K'iche's were specifically perspectivists with ontological relationships based in exchange and annual renewal. Finally, I will explain how this ontology influenced their perceptions of "idols," "ancestors," and "gods" specifically. This chapter will incorporate the theoretical work of Viveiros de Castro (2017; 2011), Descola (2014), and Christenson (2016).

The Nagualism of the Nahuas

Before explaining how the K'iche's were not analogists, we must first understand what analogism is. In the same way that K'iche'an animism is a highly nuanced and localized within the Maya area, Nagualism is a highly specified and unique type of analogism. In general terms, analogism finds correspondences and differences in a network of intrinsic properties. Whereas naturalism conceives the physicality of life as the same and the interiority of life as a multiplicity of differences, analogism discerns a multiplicity of differences in both physicality and interiority. Descola defines "analogism" as follows:

By this ["analogism"] I mean a mode of identification that divides up the whole collection of existing beings into a multiplicity of essences, forms, and substances separated by small distinctions and sometimes arranged on a graduated scale so that it

becomes possible to recompose the system of initial contrasts into a dense network of analogies that link together the intrinsic properties of the entities that are distinguished in it. (2014:201)

Descola notes that analogism is extremely common throughout the world, citing ancient China, the Mandé-Voltaic region of Africa, and even Renaissance Europe as examples. Within this ontology, “each individual is made up of a multiplicity of mobile components whose combinations, all different, produce particular identities” (Descola 2014:222). In an analogist ontology, each living being has a combination of physicalities and interiorities that, like a fingerprint, make that being unique in the cosmos from all other beings. In Western naturalism, the physicality of all living beings is the same; this significantly limits the scope and range of possible differences between living beings, since only the interiorities can be different. On the other hand, in analogism, both the physicality and interiority are different between each and every individual being, and so there is an infinite number of possible beings that can exist. Descola states that the analogist’s cosmos is “a priori a chaotic and inflated world, since it contains an infinite number of different things, each in a particular place and each at the heart of an idiosyncratic network” (2014:205). Analogism is literally a world of infinite possibility.

While various analogistic societies share in common a cosmos of infinite differences, they are distinguished from each other by how they make sense of that chaotic world. In general, the analogist must create meaningful similarities, associations, resemblances, and connections within the chaotic cosmos. Descola states: “In order to reduce this dizzying atomist perspective, the links of similarity that justify repeatedly moving along certain meaningful paths need to be identified” (2014:205). Often, this creation of a network of resemblances leads to a stark cosmological and metaphysical dualism. One analogic “group” is the various Nahuatl-speaking

peoples of central Mexico. Descola states, while “Andean America would have served equally well,” he ultimately chooses to focus on the analogism that is specific to Mexico (2014:207). Like other analogistic societies, the Nahuas perceive of the cosmos as a chaotic habitat for living beings with unique combinations of physicalities and interiorities. Specifically, the Nahuas identify two types of physicalities, *tanacayo* and *ihiyotl*, and two types of interiorities, *tonalli* and *teyolia*, all four of which contribute to “the virtually infinite variants rendered possible by combinations of these types thus mak[ing] each entity in the world, whether human or nonhuman, quasi-unique” (2014:212). Furthermore, within this schematization is a “thick web of correspondences and mutual influences” not just involving living beings and their interconnected relations with one another but “all levels of the cosmos,” including “social strata, occupations, specializations, atmospheric phenomena, foodstuffs, medicaments, deities, celestial bodies, illnesses, temporal divisions, sites, and cardinal points” (2014:217). In this way, the multiplicity of beings is infinitely compounded and then amplified by an endless dynamism of interactions and relations.

One critical aspect of Nahua analogism is nagualism. The term “nagualism” has been used by English-speaking scholars since at least since the 1820s. In a paper read to the American Philosophical Society in 1894, Brinton says: “The words, a *nagual*, *nagualism*, a *nagualist*, have been current in English prose for more than seventy years” (12). Since the Conquest, the term “nagualism” has been associated with a “belief” in a “guardian spirit” (Saler 1964:306; Villas Rojas 1947:584, 584; Brinton 1894:21). This might not have always been the case though. Brinton notes how “none of the dialects of the specifically Aztec or Aztec stock languages do we find the word *nagual* in the sense in which it is employed [today]” (1894:13). Klein et al. confirm that Mexicanists still do not know for sure what *nagual* meant pre-Contact (2002:392).

Nevertheless, the word has a very long history in academic literature. This history has led to a fairly befuddled meaning over time, and Descola confirms “So many different factors have been intermingled in the use of the term and over such a long period” (2014:214). In light of this, Descola clarifies the meaning of the term and provides a list of its components. These components include an “animal double whose life cycle runs parallel to that of a human,” the *tōnalpōhualli* 260-day calendar, “sorcerers” that can transform their physicality, the animal into which those sorcerers incorporate themselves, and lastly “a component of a human person” (2014:214). But in a more general sense, nagualism involves certain living beings or aspects of the cosmos introducing “a foreign element of a generally physical nature (*ihiyotl*) onto an independent entity” (2014:216). Descola provides an example of such an influence, stating that a deity, animal, or the dead can assume the form of an animal (or in the case of animals, another animal) specifically by infiltrating and possessing the body of another living being (2014:215). Meanwhile he contrasts this with “tonalism,” which is another aspect of Nahua analogism. Rather than involving a “transitory and intentional” link between two beings (such as possession), tonalism involves an “involuntary and permanent” link (2014:215). This type of link is found with the *tona*, an animal that is born on the same day as a person. Because they share the same calendric day sign, a part of the human’s *tonalli*, which in certain instances can be translated as a “destiny,” “installs itself in his animal alter ego...until death” (2014:215). While nagualism and tonalism are different, their combination “amplifies the effect of multiplicity already engendered in normal circumstances by the huge number of combinations between the many different kinds of components that make up individuals” (2014:216). This Nahua analogism is therefore extremely complex (at least from a Western perspective), yet serves well as an example of a schema that sees multiplicity of differences in both physicality and interiority.

The Case for a K'iche'an Animist Theory

Many scholars have applied nagualism, and by extension analogism, to the Mayas. As far back as 1894, Brinton describes nagualism as a “universal belief” even “among the Maya tribes of Yucatan and Guatemala” (1894:33). This assumption of a universal nagualism held by the Mayas has continued to the present, though the assumption has updated its terminology with the times. In 1998, Monaghan argues that the Nahuatl concepts of *tonalli*, *vach*, *pixan*, and the *nagual* are a “Mesoamerican notion” that apply to the Mayas just as much as to Nahuatl-speakers (1998:141-144). And Descola (2014) frequently connects the Mayas to Nahuatl analogism using cherry-picked data in one-liner references (2014:209, 211, 219). But no matter the terminology nor the time period, the implication is the same: the Mayas are nagualists. Yet even in 1964 Saler astutely observed how ethnographers were “employing the term [*nagual*] generically even where, properly speaking, the native vocabularies themselves may lack it” (1964:307). Klein et al. also lament the reckless application of the word (2002:392). *Nagual* is a Nahuatl term, and yet ethnographers have historically viewed it as a “universal” concept readily applied to any group in Mesoamerica. This faulty and extremely outdated assumption continues to have an effect on scholarship today, leading scholars such as Descola (2014) and Pruffer and Dunham (2009) to view Nahuatl analogism as a pan-Mesoamerican feature. Even Sparks is guilty of this assumption, stating: “As a *Mesoamerican people*, the Maya shared in a set of cultural traits concentrated in the areas of present-day *central and southern Mexico*, Guatemala, Belize, and western Honduras and El Salvador” (2019:37, emphasis added). Only recently have some begun to consider the Mayas within an animist theory (Pankey 2013; Permanto 2015; Harrison-Buck 2012).¹⁵ I argue

¹⁵ It should be noted that these authors, at most, merely acknowledge that the Mayas had an animist ontology centered around metaphysical renewal. None of these authors attempt to analyze this ontology any further.

that the Mayas are not nagualists or analogists or a Nahua cultural spin-off, but in fact are distinctly and uniquely Mayan. I argue that the Mayas are specifically animists.

While Viveiros' Amerindian cosmopolitical theory is based on specific analysis of the indigenous of the Amazonian lowlands, its articulation of a uniquely Amerindian animism serves as an excellent model for such a K'iche' ontology, especially when coupled with Descola's analysis of an animism grounded in a relational schema of exchange. This relational schema distinguishes the 16th century Tupinambá from 16th century K'iche'. The Tupian groups of coastal Brazil had a relational schema based in "predation," which fosters a society founded in vendetta warfare and cannibalism. Meanwhile, the schema of the K'iche' is founded in "obligatory exchange," which fosters a society to "strive to respect such obligations meticulously in all their interactions with other inhabitants of the cosmos" (2013:345). Unlike the predation schema, which supports an imbalanced exchange system involving a predator taking something from prey (their body for sustenance, their life for vengeance, &c.), the exchange schema supports a balanced exchange system. Undergirding this schema is a system of renewal founded in the the daily movement of the sun, the growth cycles of corn, and the cyclical solar calendar.

The 16th century highland Mayas perceived time as a cyclical movement through stages of birth, death, and rebirth. Descola explicitly states that this conception of time is an animist one:

The fertilizing energy that emanates from Father Sun animates the entire cosmos and, through this cycle of fertilization, gestation, and growth, of humans, animals, and plants, ensures their vital continuity. [...] However, the quantity of energy produced by Sun is finite and is deployed in an immense closed circuit that encompasses the entire biosphere. To avoid entropic losses, exchanges of energy between the various occupants and regions

of the world therefore have to be organized in such a way that the quantities of energy that humans extract can subsequently be reinjected into the circuit. (2014:346)

This conception of time precisely describes the 16th century highland Mayas, whose conceptions of time are founded on the cycles of corn and the sun. The sun was particularly important since it created time and space. In Maya thought, history is divided into a number of eras or epochs called “suns.” When each sun dies, the world dies. A new sun is later born, and with it, a new world dawns also (Christenson 2016:124). The only way to keep the sun alive was by extracting energy and offering it to the gods; these offerings included human blood taken through auto-sacrifice and human sacrifice. Christenson notes that when Alvarrado and the Spanish destroyed Q’umarkaj, the Mayas believed the sun had died and the world had ended, and that a new epoch had begun (2016:124). This is why the appearance of the first dawn is such a central moment in the *Popol Wuj*: the sun is the giver of time (Christenson 2003:228-232). The Mayas were animists who used exchange in order to, literally, buy themselves more time.

The Nahuas meanwhile, though seeming to share the same conception of cosmology, are demonstrably analogic in their ontology. According to Descola, analogic societies tend to conceive of space as being symmetrical. He states that analogic systems emphasize “special and temporal symmetries” in which “quarters, cardinal points, and levels all reflect one another” (2014:276, 277). This is visually illustrated by the Nahuas themselves in the *Codex Mendoza*, specifically in folio 2r. The folio depicts the island upon which Tenochtitlan would later be founded, and the island is divided into four quadrants by the crossing of rivers (Coe and Koontz 2018:63). According to Anawalt, Huizilopochtli commanded the Mexica to divide their city into four main wards named Moyotla, Teopantlaza, Aztacualco, and Cuepopan (1997:4). The divisions depicted on folio 2r are perfectly symmetrical and correspond to the cardinal points,

fitting Descola's description of the analogist. Coe and Koontz affirm as much, stating "the Aztecs thought of the world in terms of the cardinal directions, each of which was assigned a specific color and a specific tree on the upper branches of which perched a distinctive bird. Where the central axis passed through was the Old Fire [god]" (2013:214). On a less overt scale, Taube mentions that "the Nahua would place small idols or 'stones of good color' at the four corners of the [Templo Mayor]. Building L in the Aztec Templo Mayor precinct contained... five jade beads forming a quincunx oriented to the four quarters and world center" (2005:25). Yet not only was space conceived symmetrically but also hierarchically. The Nahua cosmos was one that was analogical and by extension symmetrical.

Moreover, the analogic Nahua cosmos existed within a system of duality. Descola affirms that because analogic systems can only make sense of reality by identifying correspondences and differences, it can encourage a "dualist organization" involving "a classificatory order for the moieties and quarters, which is structured around a series of pairs, the first term of which symbolically predominates over the other one: east over west, right over left, masculine over feminine, upper over lower" (2013:299). There is an extensive literature on the duality of the Mexica, and so only a brief mention should suffice. One explicit example is the *Templo Mayor*, which Bernadino de Sahagún documented before the Spanish demolished it and used its stone to build a church. The *Templo* functioned as a temple of duality, with one half devoted to the sun and war god Huitzilopochtli and the other half to the rain and fertility god Tlaloc (Sahagún 2012:175-176). As Rideout notes, "Agriculture and bloodshed, the foundation of the light and dark twins, respectively, are two very opposing ideals and form the two halves of the fundamental base of Aztec society and economy" (2015:60). Moreover, he notes how each half of the temple featured ornamentation that was associated with each respective god, further

emphasizing the dualistic contrast (2015:60). A second example involves the dual-sex god-goddess of duality, *Ometecuhtli Omecihuatl*, which are referenced in various Nahuatl *canciones* (León-Portilla 1990:83; 1980:201). This deity was so central to the Mexica that their own poet-philosophers describe the duality god-goddess as the origin of cosmic forces, supporter and governor of the universe, origin of the gods, creator of humans, and even self-created and self-actuated *ex nihilo* (León-Portilla 1990:29, 45, 59, 84, 87, 95, 235). In these ways the Conquest and pre-Conquest Nahuas are demonstrably dualistic and ultimately analogic.

The highland Maya did not perceive of a quadrisectioned cosmos within a dualistic system. Rather, they perceived it as a single East-West axis based on the arching movement of the sun. Not many colonial Maya dictionaries seem to list the cardinal points. But the *Thesaurus Verborum* lists “Oriente” as “*Chi r’elabal 3ih*” and “Ocçidente” as “*Ch’u kahibal 3ih*” (1983:377, 383). The word for “east,” *relib’al q’ij*,¹⁶ translates to mean “the sun’s coming out.” The word of “west” is slightly more tricky. *El Vocabulario en lengua giche otlatecas* defines “*kaf*” as “*bajar, o descender*” (2017:270). So *uqajib’al q’ij*¹⁷ translates as “the sun’s going down.” Watanabe states that in modern Mam, the word for “east” is *ok took q’ij* (“when the sun rises [enters]”), but that the Mam also refer to “east” as simply *ook* (“enter”) and “west” as *eel* (“go out”) (1983:719). The Mam’s use of directionality has not changed since the Conquest era, since it also perceives space in an east-west axis. Watanabe further adds that the word for “north” is *jaaw* (“go up”), and the word for “south” is *kubni* (“go down”) (1983:712). He notes that while the words for east and west are used exclusively to refer to the movements of the sun, “north and south are only secondary meanings for the ‘directions’ up and down – these latter also referring

¹⁶ r-el-ib’al q’ij
3sPOSS-VI:leave-VN N:sun, day

¹⁷ u-qaj-ib’al q’ij
3sPOSS-VI:descend-VN N:sun, day

to the movement of the sun” (1983:713). Only the secondary meanings of *jaaw* and *kubni* refer to north and south because they are secondary to the primary axis, which is based on the movement of the sun. In this way, time, space, and motion are inextricably linked. Watanabe is careful to explain how there is no dualism in this model. He states that “the line traversed by the sun on its passage through the zenith does not physically divide the sky into two symmetrical quadrants; the sun passes through the zenith directly to the east and west only at the equator” (1983:721). In other words, the cosmos is not a dualistic composition of an overworld blue-vaulted sky and a dark underworld sky. Rather, the sun is born at dawn and dies in the evening (1983:721). Each day, the sun is born, then dies, and is reborn the following day. The link between sun and time (i.e. the 24-hour day) is emphasized in the word *q’ij* alone, which refers to both “sun” and “day.”

Ixiim (“*maíz seco en grano*”)¹⁸ is the second aspect to renewal and is completely complimentary with the sun. Corn is the primary source of sustenance and is so central to the Maya that Guatemala is also called *Iximulew* (“corn land”). There is an entire corpus of words based on corn, including nouns such as *ija’* (“seed corn for planting”), *ab’ix* (“cornfield” or “*milpa*”), *jach’* (“corn harvest”), *raxwa’ch* (“black corn”), *tz’alik* (“fresh corn husks used to wrap corn-dough tamales”), and *wa* (“corn-based foods”), but also verbs such as *-jach’(o)* (“to harvest corn”) and *-chaq* (“to grind corn”) (Christenson n.d.). There are four types of corn grown in *Iximulew*, namely black, yellow, red, and white. According to Watanabe, presently among the highland Mam Maya of Santiago Chimaltenango, “Chimaltecos recognize two principle types of maize, white *saq* and yellow *q’an*, each divided into ‘winter’ and ‘summer’ varieties” (1992:131). This is reflected in the pre-Columbian K’iche’ play the *Rab’inal Achi*, which

¹⁸ Translation provided by Mondloch (2020:391).

mentions “the yellow-colored, white ears of ripe corn / yellow sustenance / white sustenance,” without giving mention to the other two varieties (Tedlock 2003:56). Like the sun, corn also goes through cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. In the *Popol Wuj*, humans are created from *q’ana jal* (“yellow ears of corn”) and *saqi jal* (“white ears of corn”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:152-155). Thus *ixim*, the sustenance that feeds people and the substance that is a central aspect of the cosmological cycle of death and renewal, is also the basic composition of people’s bodies. All of these rich associative meanings of *ixim* culminate in the iconic corn god depicted in pre-Columbian Mayan art. Miller describes the corn god as follows: “Like maize itself, the Maize [g]od moves through the cycle of life: in one season, he is a handsome young man, alive and in motion; in another, he is decapitated, his harvested head put on a plate as an offering” (2002:160). The corn god is cyclically and eternally sacrificed as an “offering,” but his death is always temporary, since the god will inevitably return by rebirth.

Humans have the obligation to perpetuate the cycles of time; they accomplish this through a complex set of rituals including (but not exclusively) bloodletting and human sacrifice. Viveiros was possibly the first to suggest the Mayas of Mesoamerica as potential animists, but his expertise lies in Amazonia, and so he is left to muse that “elaboration of a classical sacrificial system” within an animist ontology is “quite difficult” (2017:157). While this elaboration is certainly difficult, a connection is feasible. Within an animistic system, all beings have the same interiority while all having a multiplicity of different interiorities. For the Mayas, their animism was founded on a relationality of exchange that manifested in a renewal-based cosmology. Renewal-based ritual was therefore prevalent because the cosmological renewal of the sun (i.e. time, direction, and space) depended on it. This became especially critical during the New Year, when the cycles of *ixim* (“corn”) and the cycles of *le q’ij* (“the sun”) converge in an annual

restart. The sun returns to the same noon-time position in the sky that it had 365 days ago, and the corn's growing season is ready to begin anew. The 365-day calendar therefore became extremely important to the Conquest and pre-Conquest highland Mayas. By extension, the New Year became one of the most important events in society, if not the most important. Colonial Spanish chroniclers observed a gamut of New Year rituals, which included the priests and nobles holding feasts and engaging in debauchery, rulers and other K'iche' Mayas performing in ritualized dramas (like the *Rab'inah Ach'i*), and priests striking a new fire onto *xk'ub'* (a set of three large, flat stones usually used for cooking) (Christenson 2016: 51, 91; Christenson n.d.). Another critical New Year ritual was the ball game. Athletes would play a ritualized ball game "not played for simple entertainment" but rather "as a means of regenerating the world" with players symbolically filling the roles of gods, "thus becoming engaged in a larger conflict between the Lords of Life and the Lords of Death" (Christenson 2016:90). It is worth noting that the K'iche' built more ballcourts than any other Mayas group in the centuries immediately preceding the Conquest, demonstrating the importance that the game held for the highland Maya (Christenson 2016:95). A final ritual involved a "spring cleaning" *en masse*, which entailed the K'iche's spending several days sweeping the streets and plazas and cleaning the temples. They then would decorate the temples with flowers (Christenson 2016:98). That does not mean that there is a dualism between life and death. Rather, Christenson states that they are complimentary to a larger whole, stating, "A god cannot be reborn without passing through old age, weakness, and ultimately death. Both life and death must dance together on the great stage of the world or the cycles of the seasons would not continue on their endless spiraling rotations" (2016:203). Rituals perpetuate these cycles of death and rebirth. One of the most central rituals famously involved blood sacrifice.

The sacrifices were not exclusive to humans, suggesting an animism that did not privilege the interiority of humans over non-humans. Pages 25-28 of the *Dresden Codex* are especially helpful in visualizing this sacrificial ritual for rebirth. The codex dates to the 13th or 14th century, making it a genuine glimpse into pre-Columbian Maya thought and society. Pages 25-28 are called the “New Years” pages, serve as a “yearbearer almanac...concerned with rituals to ensure adequate rainfall and thereby an abundant crop [which is] suggested by the hieroglyphic captions to the lower register, which give prognostications for each year” (Vail &Looper 2015:127). The pages depict four separate years, each represented by a god who presents an offering to a tree. Taube observes that each god presents a different offering, namely copal (incense), a turkey, a fish, and a bundled deer haunch (2012:15). Furthermore, Vail and Looper notes that the trees mark the beginning of a new year, just as in the *Chilam Balam* new trees grew after the old world was destroyed (2015:126). Both Carlson and Taube connect these “New Years” pages to page 74, which depicts the end of an epoch by a cataclysmic flood (Carlson 2015:208; Taube 2012:16). Significantly, these do not include depictions of human sacrifice, but of animal sacrifice. This suggests that the sacrifices are founded on an animist ontology wherein all animals are valid because they all share the same interiority. As for the copal, Prufer et al. note that when copal was burned, the offering became sustenance for the gods, in the same way that corn was sustenance to humans (2003:201). Even plants could be sacrificed to be nourishment to the gods. Copal, for instance, is a tree resin. Furthermore, Morehart et al. state that pine is the most common type of wood recovered in lowland Maya sites, adding that the Maya burned pine torches as a “sacrificial food for the deities” (2005:268). Watanabe documents how this continues with the highland Mam of Santiago Chimaltenango who feed their saints candles, rum, and incense, because if they neglected to feed them, then “‘God’ – and by implication, the saints

– ‘would have no *tortillas*,’ and they would starve” (1992:75, 76). This explanation for feeding the saints exactly mirrors the Tupinambá of Brazil, returning us to the Amerindian cosmopolitical theory of Viveiros. The Amazonianist states that within this Amerindian variety of animism, there is a “reflexive genre of humanity, given that it is defined by the fact that two different species that are each necessarily human in their own eyes can never simultaneously be so in the other’s” (2017:152). This is demonstrated by the Tupinambá, who say that jaguars drink manioc beer when a jaguar is drinking blood. Or when Hans Staden tells a Tupinambá that “a senseless animal hardly ever eats its fellow; should one human then eat another?” the Tupinambá responds by saying that he is a jaguar (2008:91). Viveiros explains this by stating that there is no “fixed point of view between beings,” but rather every living being sees itself as “human” and relates to other human beings by “relational multiplicities” (2017:157). From the perspective of the jaguar, it is a human drinking manioc beer, not a jaguar drinking blood. Or from the perspective of the Mayan saints, they are humans eating corn *tortillas*, not saints eating candles and rum. Fausto cites this as a “common ‘mode of identification’ between humans and nonhumans across the region but different ‘modes of relation’ subject to regional and historical variation” (2007:500). Geographically, the highland Maya are nowhere remotely close to the Amazon basin, and yet they share what appears to be the multinaturalism of the Tupinambá. From the perspective of the Mam, the gods are eating souls as nourishment; from the perspective of the gods, they are humans eating corn.

The shamanic *ajq'ij* (“daykeeper”) played an important role not just in feeding the gods but in ensuring that the world was renewed every New Year’s day. This shamanic figure is unique because he is human; there are no jaguar shamans or quetzal shamans or fish shamans. The reason for this seems to be one based in physicality. In the *Popol Wuj*, before there were

humans, the gods created the *winaq poy* (“wooden people”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:38). The people turn out to be wicked and forgetful of the gods and so are destroyed. But when they were first made, the god Juraqan says: “*Chiqawinaqb’itoj, chiqaqinaqtz’aqoj ta chik tzuqul, q’o’l. Kojdik’ix taj, kojna’b’ax taj puch*” (“*Haragmos de nuevo a la gente formada, gagamos a la gente construida; los alimentadores, los sustentadores*”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:36, 37). From the mouths of the gods themselves, the purpose of humanity is to fulfill a unique role as sustainers. Even before the creation of the world, the gods wonder: “*Jupacha’ ta chawaxoq, ta saqira puch? Apachinaq tzuqul, q’o’l chuxoq?*” (“*¿Cómo será la creación? ¿Quién llegará a ser el alimentador y sustentador?*”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:30, 31). From before the foundations of the world were laid, the gods had intended humans to serve as sustainers and providers. The difference between humans and the *winaq poy*, and the difference between humans and all other beings, is that humans are made of corn and water. While the flesh is made of *q’ana jal, saqi jal* (“yellow corn, white corn”), the *kik’el* (“blood”) is made from *ja’* (“water”). Thus the *Popol Wuj* states: “*Ja’ k’ut ukik’el, ukik’el winaq xuxik*” (“*Y el agua fue su sangre; llegó a ser sangre*”). In animism, the interiorities of all living beings are the same, but the physicalities are different. Animals, birds, fish, and plants can all serve as sacrifices to the gods because they have a soul that can become sustenance, but only humans have the unique physicality that gives them the role of worshipper and ritual actualizer. The distinction between *winaq* (“humans”) and *chikop* (“animals”) is explained by the gods after they curse the animals: “*iwecha’, ik’uxu’n, iwarab’al iyakalib’al, x iwech wi, mi xe’uxik siwan, k’eche’laj rumal mawi xutzin qaq’ijilo’xik, mawi ix sik’iy qe*” (“*Su comida, su alimentación, su lugar de dormir y guarida permanente llegarán a ser los barrancos y los bosques. Eso es porque no realizaron nuestra adoración, ni fuimos invocados por ustedes*”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:34, 35).

While all living beings have the same interiority, humans are unique because of their physical composition of corn and water. This uniqueness distinguishes them as the true “humans” with the duty to worship the gods.

Evidence suggests that the pre-Columbian rulers themselves served as shamanic figures. As Scherer notes, these shamanic rituals “are inherently ‘bodycentric’: costumes are worn, gestures repeated, feasting and fasting occurs, and so forth” (2015:8). Rose echoes the same observation, stating that “During these rituals there was also the giving of offerings, which usually included clothing and other adornments, copal incense, and in many cases, the sacrifice of royal blood to feed the gods” (2017:64). She adds that the role of shamans was to serve as a mediator between humans and gods and, as their “main responsibility,” “to care for the gods in ceremonies of renewal”; they accomplished this through “god-conjuring,” or making the gods present in visions through blood-letting and ingestion of hallucinogenic substances (2017:64, 65, 102, 128). These interpretations are largely based on careful observations of pre-Columbian Mayan art and their inscriptions. And while art decipherment is often speculative, full of “possibilities” and “perhapses,” Lintel 25 at the site Yaxchilán serves as a concrete example of a ritual performed by a ruler. The lintel depicts the female ruler Ix K’ab’al Xook summoning a deity who emerges from the mouth of a flying centipede with a segmented body and many eyes. There are two bowls, one in Ix K’ab’al Xook’s hand and one at her feet, filled with blood-splattered pages; the centipede flies directly over the bowl on the floor. The lintel is accompanied with glyphs, a portion of which translate as: “Ix K’ab’al Xook makes an offering,” and “she summoned the spirit of the scepter,” and again “she summoned the scepter, the weapon and shield of the flaming, smoking Thunderbolt” (Tedlock 2011:102, 103). The glyphs clearly convey that the ruler summoned the deity through bloodletting ritual. A similar feat is recorded

at the temple of Wakaj Chan, which is part of the Cross Complex at Palenque. In the temple's main sanctuary, the glyphs relate a narrative involving two gods named Cormorant and Corn Silk. A portion of the glyphs are translated as follows: "And then he [Corn Silk] arrived at invisibility. On 9 Wind 15 Deer, he touched the earth, he was invisible. Cormorant fasted, she let blood, 2 times a mother" (Tedlock 2011:71, 72). Tedlock interprets the glyphs to mean that the goddess Cormorant is conducting bloodletting to make Corn Silk, who is the planet Mars, reappear in the night sky. And like Ix K'ab'al Xook at Yaxchilán, the glyphs state that Cormorant also receives the *sak huun* ("white paper") for bloodletting ritual: "After she was born, the white paper was handed to her, to Cormorant, on 9 Wind" (Tedlock 2011:67, 72). Thus it is the Mayan stone carvers themselves who affirm the role that rulers played in rituals of renewal.

Such inscriptions are ubiquitous in the lowlands. Zamora confirms as much, stating that "On the surface, most Maya inscriptions conform themselves to the pattern of...a powerful ruler erecting a monument and stating the date of his deed. However, we have seen that this vision is partial. [...] The true protagonist of inscription in most cases are the consecration rituals of the very objects that bear the inscriptions" (2016:79-80). Zamora adds that the common theme in many of these inscriptions is one of the "divine king, master of ritual relationships" (2016:82). This role of the Maya shaman is not like the analogic Nahuatl "sorcerer," which Descola describes as "reputed to be able to change themselves into an animal or a ball of fire" and is "incorporated" into other beings, usually animals (2014:214).¹⁹ Rather, the Mayan ruler is much more closely aligned to the "shaman" of Viveiros. This shaman is merely an enlightened figure who can establish relationships with other beings by occupying their subjective point of view. Such a feat

¹⁹ Villa Rojas describes the *nagual* in similar terms: "In most cases the nagual is thought of as an animal, a dog, a lizard, or a hawk. [...] Other are a ball of fire of three different kinds: red, yellow or green" (1947:583).

is possible because all beings share the same interiority; they all see themselves as “human.” But the Mayan rulers have an added role, which is to ensure that ritual exchange occurs so that the gods and the world can be renewed. Communication with the gods is only the means of accomplishing this task, not the ultimate purpose of the ritual itself.

While a relationality of obligatory exchange shaped the renewal rituals performed by Mayan shamanic figures, there was an additional, secondary relationality based in “predation” as described by Descola (2014). This is not contradictory to Descola, who himself demonstrates with the Tukano groups of the Amazonian lowlands that predation can function as a secondary schema within a larger schema of exchange (2013:360). Descola outlines a relationality of predation as “the obligation to acquire from others the individuals, substances, and principles of identity that were reputed to be necessary for the perpetuation of the self” (2014:338). Such a relationality schema can easily foster and support societies based in vendetta warfare. The Tupinambá of Brazil were such a group. Hans Staden shows how this vendetta-based warfare not only manifested in ritualized dialogue between captor and captive each swearing vengeance upon the other, but that their society was so saturated in vengeance that women would pick out the lice from each other’s hair and eat them as act of revenge against the lice for eating their heads (2008:54, 91, 121). Moreover, Staden explains that their cannibalism was rooted in the desire for vengeance (2008:127). Viveiros affirms Staden’s observations and even builds on them, stating that “the point was to die (preferably in enemy hands) *in order to* bring vengeance into being, and thus bring into being the future” (2011:71). Thus vengeance became a self-perpetuating cycle that, by merit of its own cyclical tug-of-war, shaped Tupian conception of time.

Predation was not the primary type of relationality for the Maya but was instead secondary to the overarching relationality of exchange. This fostered a system of ritualized slave

capture and human sacrifice, not to “perpetuate the self,” but to perpetuate time and the sun as a ritual of renewal. This dynamic became particularly ritualized between the victorious warrior and his defeated captive. This ritualized relationship is portrayed in the K’iche’an play *Rab’inal Achi*, which focuses on the dialogic exchanges between the victorious warrior Rab’inal Achi (“Man [of] Rab’inal”) and the defeated captive Cawek. Their exchanges include highly formalized and ceremonial monologues, with Rab’inal Achi repeatedly addressing Cawek as “Brave man / prisoner / captive” and telling him: “Because this is where we chop clear through / your root, sir / your trunk, sir / here at the navel of the sky / navel of the earth” (Tedlock 2003:32, 63, 70). This predatory relationship forces the captive Cawek into humiliation. Initially, Cawek adamantly declares “I am the brave / I am the man,” but by the end of the drama Cawek says “Then if it comes down to bowing / if it comes down to lowering my face / very well then / here is my way of being humble / my way of kneeling / well this is how I humble myself / this is how I get down in the mud” (2003: 35, 91). Not long after his humiliating submission to his captive, the ruler of the Cawuks and Rab’inals tells Cawek “and truly you are dead, sir / you are lost” (2003:97). This humiliation of captives is well-attested even in pre-Columbian Mayan art. At the site Bonampak, for instance, is a structure composed of three rooms; the walls of each room are painted in murals from floor-to-ceiling. Room 2 depicts a graphic battle scene: one warrior wears a trophy head, and another warrior drags his defeated opponent by the hair (Miller 1995). The dragging of hair is mentioned by Las Casas, who reports that slaves to be sacrificed were seized by the hair (Christenson 2016:100). More overtly, the Bonampak’s Room 2 also depicts bleeding, weeping slaves lying prostrate or sitting in submissive postures before a victorious ruler (Miller 1995). The relationship between Mayan warriors and their defeated captives is one based in humiliation. A central component of this humiliation is ritualized

dialogue. Hans Staden recorded a ritualized dialogue among the Tupinambá, which Viveiros calls it “the ritual drama of the execution” (Staden 2008:49, 62-64; Viveiros 2011:58-65). Still, the dialogic content is very different between the two animist groups. The Tupinambá dialogue of Hans Staden involves both captive and captor swearing revenge to each other, whereas the K’iche’ dialogue of the *Rab’inal Achi* involves the victorious warrior coercing the captive to admit defeat and accept humiliation and a fate of sacrifice.

Yet this was not the only facet of the relationship, at least in the case of the K’iche’ and other highland Maya. In the *Rab’inal Achi*, after Cawek submits himself to a sacrificial fate, he begins making requests. All of his requests are granted, including his request to have “thirteen score days / thirteen score nights...to say farewell / to the face of my mountain / the face of my valley / where I walked / where I moved” (2003:118). Moreover, because he submits himself to be sacrificed, he is granted affinity. Before Cawek submits, Rab’inal Achi tells him: “What a terrible joke you’re someone I ought to help out. / What a terrible joke you’re my elder brother. / What a terrible joke you’re my younger brother” (2003:36). But later Rab’inal Achi tells Cawek that he could become a “father-in-law” or “son-in-law” if he quietly kneels and bows before the ruler of the Cawuks and Rab’inals and even tells Cawek: “We are elder and younger brother / one to the other” (2003:70, 87). This ritualized treatment of captives is attested by the corroborative colonial account of Las Casas. According to Las Casas, when Mayas were preparing to sacrifice their captives for the New Year, they would release the captives on temporary leave. Guards escorted the captives, but the captives were nevertheless allowed to walk wherever they wanted in the town, feast and get drunk, and eat with whomever they wished, including the ruler himself (Christenson 2016:97). Christenson remarks that “the temporary release of captives intended for sacrifice and their special treatment with feasting and

other honors indicates a reversal of societal norms” (2016:98). Like ritualized dialogic exchanges, this reversal of norms and bestowing of affinity are both attested in the Tupinambá. For instance, Staden reports being fed, allowed to walk through the village at his leisure, and even being granted his own hut (2008:92). Fausto and Rodgers describe this process as “predation-familiarization-predation,” noting that the Tupinambá would “adopt” their captives into their families and would feed them and protect them (1999:946). Fausto notes that the Tupinambá would insistently remind their captives that they were kin, not enemies (2007:505, 507). A part of this familiarization process involved the bestowing of affinity, often “brother-in-law.” Fausto and Rodgers attribute this process of familiarization by adopting the enemy within a structure of affinity as part “of a wider relational structure that involves the familiarization of human spirits in warfare and of animal spirits in shamanism” (1999:949). In other words, this attribution of affinity onto the captive functions within an overall animist ontology that emphasizes understanding the other. As Viveiros puts it: “There, the other was not merely good to think – the other was necessary for thinking” (2011:16). In the case of the K’iche’ as depicted in the *Rab’inal Achi*, their animist ontology manifested primarily with a relationality based on obligatory exchange but also in a secondary, subsidiary relationality based in predation. This predation facilitated a ritualized dynamic between the K’iche’ captor and his captive that included the process of understanding the other but was founded on a basic, practical method of acquiring sacrifices to renew the world.

The K’iche’an Gods, Ancestors, and Idols

Essentially, the K’iche’an ontology is an animist one, extremely sophisticated and incorporating aspects of a corn cult, sun cult, and a war cult. Having established this theory of K’iche’an animism, it may now be applied to the K’iche’an *k’ab’awil* (“gods”), *ojer winaq*

(“ancestors”), and *chee’ ab’aj* (“idols”). To European naturalists like Domingo de Vico, idols are the most different of the three beings, since they are made of “dead” stone and wood. In other words, they lacked an interiority. Meanwhile, the gods and ancestors seem most similar to each other, since they are ethereal, invisible beings with agency. Vico conflates the gods with demons, but even demons have an interiority of reason, unlike the idols which have no interiority whatsoever. It is for this reason that modern researchers often conflate “gods” and “deified ancestors” when discussing Mayan rituals (Lorenzen 2006:26; Morehart et al. 2005:265; Newman 2019:833; Rose 2017:3; Taube 2005:32; Wanyerka 2003:219; Zamora 2016:86). Both the colonial Spanish and various modern scholars fail to understand the K’iche’an understanding of “gods,” “ancestors,” and “idols,” because of an ontology grounded in naturalistic assumptions. There is a clear logic to K’iche’an animism, just not a Western logic.

In animism, all beings share the same interiority while having different physicalities. This makes distinguishing between living beings extremely easy, since one only needs to observe their physical appearances to tell the difference (though any of the senses will do). To the naturalist, these “gods” are ethereal demons, utterly metaphysical and thus lacking any physicality at all. For the K’iche’s, the gods do in fact have physicality. Here again the animism of the K’iche’s shares a parallel with the animism of the Tupinambá. In her study of modern Tupinambá diet, Matos Viegas states that the Tupinambá consider diet a type of physicality. She states that the Tupinambá “explicitly drew a contrast between the Tupinambá of Olivença and indigenous people living on the other side of the mountains, based precisely on eating habits” (2012:548). The importance of diet as a type of physicality cannot be understated. She continues that those who have a different diet have a different body, concluding: “Those who have a different body because they ate raw food were, thus, ‘other people,’ meaning enemies (*herege*)”

(2012:548). Viveiros concurs that diet can serve as a type of physicality in animism (2017:69, 73). For the K'iche's, their gods ate blood, something that is well attested in the *Popol Wuj*, glyphic inscriptions at the Temple of the Foliated Cross, and by the Spanish chroniclers. Humans fed them especially to ensure that they would return on New Year's day after dying. Christenson affirms as much, stating: "Maya gods are not all powerful or immortal. A god cannot be reborn without passing through old age, weakness, and ultimately death. Both life and death must dance together...or the cycles of the seasons would not continue" (2016:203). Thus while the gods maintained the cosmos throughout the year, their power was finite and required humans to reinject them with renewed life every year, ultimately fitting Descola's model of an animist ontology based in a relationality of obligatory exchange (2014:346). The relationship between gods and humans is articulated well by Christenson: "With the close of the five dangerous days at the end of the calendar year, their rulers had successfully vanquished death as proxies for the gods and the world had been restored with the capacity to nourish and sustain life" (2016:110). The gods are not immortal tyrants like Zeus, or evil liars like Satan's demons, or even the all-powerful Mexica god-goddess of duality. The gods are collaborators with humans who each assist the other to ensure time, the cosmos, and all living beings continue to exist.

The ancestors are not to be conflated with the gods, as so many scholars frequently do, nor are they to be conflated with humans, as Vico and the missionaries clearly did. Rather, between ancestors, gods, and idols, the ancestors are perhaps the most complex to understand from a naturalist perspective. Because the colonial Spanish chroniclers were fixated on the idols and gods of the K'iche's, much less is said about the ancestors. Yet ancestors nevertheless held a central importance to the K'iche's and other highland Maya, and ethnographic data affirms that this importance still remains today. First, ancestors are not fully human, at least corporeally. For

instance, Christenson note that the highland Tz'utujil Maya of Santiago Atitlán offer white candles to both gods and ancestors (2016:275). This is similar to the offerings made to gods, Vogt shows that the highland Tzotzil-speaking Maya of Zinacantan also offer burning candles to their deities (1976:3). In this way, the ancestors have at least one difference in physicality from humans, namely that they eat candles. At the same time, nowhere in my readings did I find an account of blood sacrifice to ancestors. This includes the present era, when ethnographers still record blood sacrifices of animals to gods or for cosmic renewal (Christenson 2016:178; Vogt 1976:52, 92, 93). If the colonial Maya had been sacrificing human blood to their ancestors, the Christian catechisms do not mention it and instead focus their efforts on decrying idolatry and the pagan worship of demons and false gods. When the Christian manuscripts like the *Theologia Indorum* do address *ichuch iqaqaw* (“your ancestors”), they typically associate them with original sin rather than sinful worship as false gods. This suggests that Spanish recognized a deep reverence for ancestors, but nothing pagan. Watanabe notes the tragic effects that this Spanish portrayal of ancestors had on the Maya, stating how the Mam now wrestle with the “the shadowy transgressions of their ancestors’ past” and more potently how “the past remains associated with the sinfulness of unsaved ancestors” (1992:194, 202). This suggests that the ancestors, while not physically the same as their descendants, share much more in common with them than they do with the gods. Even on a matter of diet, Tedlock documents how the *ajq'ijaab'* (“day keepers”) of Chichicastenango would pass *ija'* (“corn seed for planting”) or *jal* (“fresh ears of corn”) through copal smoke as a way to feed their ancestors (1993:114). The ancestors, like their human descendants, eat corn.

The ancestors more resemble humans than the gods, but the ancestors are nevertheless still separate from humans. Ultimately, the biggest difference between ancestors and their

descendants is a plain one: the ancestors lived in the past but are dead now, and their descendants are still living. This simple distinction between humans and ancestors is best articulated through a brief passage in *Maya Saints and Souls*:

A Chimalteco cries beside a grave of a young niece. 'I'm crying because of the sadness, not because I'm drunk,' he insists. 'I was the one who gave her her name.' It is hard not to sense how little separates the living from the dead. (Watanabe 1992:40)

In general, the ancestors are largely considered generally and amorphously as *qanaan*, *qataat* or *qati't*, *qamam* rather than as a list of specific names. Still, Tedlock notes that the K'iche's acknowledge "both the good and evil done by the ancestors while they were living," and she states that "most clans retain the knowledge of a founding ancestor" (1993:25, 142). Therefore the ancestors are not stripped of any individuality, but this individuality is less emphasized than the intricate genealogy trees and genealogical obsessions of the West. Rather than emphasize a linear list of names, the K'iche's and other highland Mayas emphasize the corporeality of their ancestors. Because naturalists like Vico perceive of living beings as unique interiorities inhabiting more or less the same physicality, an ancestor is perceived as a soul "freed" from the body, rendering the body meaningless since the person is now "up there," "in Heaven," "above," or any other euphemism for not being physical anymore. Within an animist ontology, physicality is the only way to distinguish one being from another. For the K'iche's, the corporeality still mattered because it was the body, not the "soul," that endowed the ancestors with identity, which is why gravesites are much more revered among them than among Westerners, who often describe them as eerie and avoid them.

The ancestor's corporeality (i.e. their physicalities) separates them from gods and humans. They are "dead," but still alive and able to be communicated with by trained *ajq'ijaab'*

(“day keepers”) (Tedlock 1993:160). They are living beings, just as alive as humans and gods, only with a unique set of physicalities that distinguish them as the *ojer winaq* (“ancestors”). This physicality is twofold: part involves the physical body itself and part involves the body’s burial into the earth. Regarding the body itself, its importance is clearly stated in the K’iche’ drama *Rab’inal Achi*. Cawek knows he is going to be executed by his captors, and so he says:

Then won’t this also [referring to his skull] become a work of some kind / an artifact /
this bone of my crown / bone of my head / carved in back / and carved in front? / Then
it’ll be sent down there / to my mountain / my valley / ending up as an even trade for /
five score seeds of pataxte / five score seeds of cacao / paid for by my children / my sons
/ at my mountain / my valley. / My descendants will hear / my grandsons will hear: /
“This is the skull of our own grandfather / our own father.” My descendants will hear /
this resemblance of me / by my children / by my sons / as long as there are days / as long
as there is light. (Tedlock 2003:105)

The physical remains of Cawek are so critical to his being that his descendants will treasure his skull “as long as there are days” and continually pass the skull down from generation to generation in memory of him.

Yet this is not the only physicality of an ancestor; the other is their burial in earth. The importance of burials is extremely evident in the ethnographic record. According to Christenson, both colonial and modern churches contain a number of burials in a space beneath the church (2016:169, 170). Tedlock documents how the *ajq’ijaab’* (“day keepers”) would enter a pew near the center of the church’s nave, “where the ancestors are buried beneath the floor,” and would formally communicate with them (1993:69). She adds that in 1954, one Catholic priest “felt confident he had converted enough ‘pagans,’ [and] he dared to lock the doors of the church on 8

Batz, the initiation day for new...daykeepers (*ajkij**),” which spurred a delegation “primarily of patrilineage heads” to threaten to kill the priest (1993:41). It is therefore clearly evident that in K’iche’an ontology, one of the physical characters of ancestors was conceived in terms of space. This connection of ancestors to burial space beneath the earth led to a further association of ancestors with mountains and *Xib’alb’a* (“place of fear,” the underworld beneath the earth). In the case of mountains, Christenson states that one Maya told him at a ceremony that “the most powerful” ancestors live in the center of the mountain of Paq’alib’al, and the portal into it is a cave there (2016:250). Additionally, Tedlock mentions Socop, which is “the sacred western mountain of the [K’iche’an] ancestors” (1993:124). And in a similar vein, Watanabe mentions the *taajwa witz* (“owner or master of the mountain”) of the Mam, which were formerly “actual personages” but now “personify the land and all that it produces...with the peaks themselves suggest[ing] an impassive, brooding presence” (1992:67). In addition to mountains, the ancestors are also associated with *Xib’alb’a*. According to Christenson, because ancestors were buried in churches beginning in colonial times, the church became associated with the entrance to the underworld. He adds: “The most sacred opening into the world of the dead within the church is a small hole called *pa ruchi’ jay xib’alb’a* (at the doorway of the underworld) or *rumuxux ruchuliw* (navel of the face of the earth)” (2016:170). This was not merely metaphoric or poetic, as one Maya named Nicolás purports to Christenson, “the underworld below [is] where the ancestors live” (2016:286). This connection between death and *Xib’alb’a* is demonstrated in the *Popol Wuj*, which describes Jun Kame (“One Death”) and Wuqub’ Kame (“Seven Death”) as its rulers, and which also relates how at *Xib’alb’a*’s entrance Jun Ajpu and Xb’alanke “*Xe’ik’ow chi j’ut pa Pujiya’, pa Kik’iya’*” (“*Y después pasaron por un río de pus y por un río de sangre*”) (Mondloch and Carmack 2018:72, 71, 116, 117). Not only is *Xib’alb’a* a place of death, but it

emphasizes the corporeal aspect of death with its two rivers of blood and pus. Xib'alb'a is a place of death and bodily fluids because the earth is where the ancestors' bodies are placed when they die.

Ancestors play a different role than their descendants. Virtually all ethnographers have observed that humans have a role to honor their ancestors by continuing to enact their practices (Christenson 2016:310, 335; Krogstad 2014:93; Tedlock 1993:110; Watanabe 1992:96; Vogt 1976:9). Tedlock adds that in Chichicastenango the day K'at "is the day for paying one's debts (*casaj*)...to Nantat (ancestors)," and that if anyone neglects their obligatory duties to the ancestors, they must provide "great stacks of offerings" on 1, 6, 8, and 9 K'at (1993:110). At the same time, the ancestors have an important role of sustaining and providing for their descendants. According to Christenson, the role of ancestors includes protecting and watching over their descendants as well as revealing their will on how to properly live life (2016:134,192, 193, 269, 270). Tedlock echoes the same, mentioning that the ancestors reveal their will through the *ajq'ij* ("day keeper") on how to navigate important life decisions and for general protection, blessings, and approval for critical life decisions like marriage (1993:124, 163-168). This is similar to the role of the gods, as Las Casas reported how the colonial Maya would petition the gods for similar blessings (Christenson 2016:176). But unlike the gods, ancestors are not bound to the cycles of the year. Rather, they are bound to the cycles of tradition. Thus a day keeper-in-training named Xuan tells Christenson: "My daughter is a flower. Flowers die, but they leave their seed. Each of us has our time on earth and then we pass away, but our seed remains to create other flowers. Each flower is different, but they are also all the same. We must remember this. If we do, we will never die" (2016:335). This is why respect and dutiful fulfillment of obligation towards the ancestors are so critical.

Ancestors are made alive and present when their descendants honor them and continue life in the same way they did. Thus Watanabe states: “Parents and grandparents, in particular, authenticate the generational continuity – if not absolute constancy – of practices that extend back to the ancestors” (1992:96). On the other hand, children in particular emphasized the beginning of a new cycle. Thus Pankey states that corn was used during child birth ceremonies of the Pokoman Maya. She adds that the Tzotzil Maya had a similar corn ceremony in which a corn seed, called the “child’s blood,” was planted in a field, and the crop that grew was called the “blood crop” (2013:9). She concludes: “Newborn infants were a manifestation of a new life cycle,” which was enacted when the child’s family ate the “blood crop” (2013:9). This cycle of ancestors passing on their lives to their descendants is expressed in the *Popol Wuj*. When Jun Ajpu spits into the hand of Xk’ik, daughter of Kuchuma Kik’ of Xib’alb’a, he tells her in one of the most beautiful passages in the *Popol Wuj*:

Xa retal mi xnuya’ chawe, ri nuchub’ nuk’axaj. [...] Keje’ ri uchub’ uk’axaj uk’oje’ik we uk’ajol awjaw, we puch uk’ajol, we puch uk’ajol na’ol ajuchan. X ma chisach wi chib’ek; chitz’aqatajik. Ma wi chupel, ma pu mayixel uwach ajaw, achij, na’ol, ajuchan. Xa xichikanajik[x chikanajik] umi’al, uk’ajol.

Mi saliva y mi baba son una señal que te di. [...] Como si sólo su saliva y su baba fueran su esencia, ya sean hijos de un sabio o hijos de un orador. Nunca desaparecerán al irse; serán (seres) completos. Nunca se extinguirán, tampoco se perderá la memoria del Señor, del magnánimo, del sabio o del orador, pues quedarán sus hijas e hijos.

(Mondloch and Carmack 2018:86, 87).

Descendants are the essence of their ancestors, which is enacted through perpetuating the ways of those ancestors. Yet this connection extends beyond daily and ceremonial activity, and is

something alluded to by both Jun Ajpu in the *Popol Wuj* and by Xuan in Christenson's ethnography. Namely: the *ija'* ("corn seed") is once part of the great multiplicity of physicalities of one crop. The *ija'* is harvested and later planted, and the physicality of the original crop is transferred to another crop. In the same way, the ancestors did not just endow their descendants with their traditions but also with their appearance; the child resembles their parents who in turn resemble their parents. Therefore the ancestors have also passed on a physicality to their descendants, and when they die, their interiority goes beneath the earth, to Xib'alb'a or to the mountains, and much of their multiplicity of physicalities is buried in the earth, but some of those physicalities are also in their descendants. The ancestors are always present and always alive. When Jun Ajpu spits into the hand of Xk'ik, he is literally passing some of his physicalities (though not all) to his future children.

As for the last "category" of living beings, there are the *chee' ab'aj* ("idols") that were so despised by the Spanish and became emblematic of the Maya during the Conquest. However, the K'iche's did not refer to their idols as *chee' ab'aj*. According to Sparks, the K'iche's used *k'ab'awil* to refer not just to their gods but also to their idols (2019:164). The couplet *chee' ab'aj* was created by Spanish missionaries like Vico, who viewed the idols as lifeless statues of wood and stone and who sought to create a *lengua reducida* that was better suited to understand Christian doctrine. That is to say, *chee' ab'aj* is a false category created by Westerners. Christenson shows that in 1562 at least one Spaniard, Francisco Camal, acknowledged that the Maya did not perceive a distinction, stating how the Maya offered sacrificial hearts to both their idols and their gods and referred to the idols as gods (2016:64, 65). In Mayan thought, the idols are living gods with an interiority just as valid as that of any other living being. And like gods, the idols eat sacrificial blood and depend on humans to provide it. Christenson notes that both

Diego de Landa and Las Casas observed the Mayas soaking the mouths of the idols with blood and wine (2016:58, 108, 109). He adds that the Maya would take the blood of birds, deer, and themselves and rub the blood into the mouths of the idols (2016:102). The idols share the same diet as the gods, giving them a shared physicality. Moreover, according to Christenson, Las Casas observed human sacrificial hearts taken to both the altars of the gods and to the idols (2016:102). And like the gods, the idols had limited power that was tethered to the cycles of time. Thus Christenson cites the Spanish chronicler Diego López de Cogolludo, who reports that during the Wayeb' (the final five days before New Year), certain idols would be revered with great enthusiasm, but on New Year, they would be discarded (2016:51). Like the gods, the idols also died on New Year, making the stone or wooden material a corpse with no interiority inside it anymore.

The gods and idols therefore were the same to the K'iche'; both were *k'ab'awil*. Yet their physicalities are different. One is ethereal and eats blood from altars, and one is visible and can be handled. This distinction can be likened to the perception of the color “blue” in certain languages. Specifically, both K'iche' and Classical Greek languages lack a word for “blue.” Instead, K'iche' uses the word *rax* (“green”) to signify “blue,” and Classical Greek has *γλαυκός* (“gray”) or *κυῖανος* (“dark, dark-blue”). In Greek's case, the lack of the word led to Homer's famous reference to the ocean as *οἶνον ποσειδος* (traditionally translated “wine-dark sea”). Obviously, both the K'iche's and the ancient Greeks were not colorblind, unable to tell the color of the sky apart from the color of grass and trees. Or in another example, English distinguishes spatial containment as either *on* or *in*, whereas Spanish only uses *en*. This does not mean the Spanish cannot distinguish whether a cup is on top of a table or infused into the table. The same is true for the *k'ab'awil*. Even though there is a clear difference between the physicalities of the

visible idols and the invisible gods, there is still only one category of *k'ab'awil*, not “idols” and “gods.” Lopéz Ixcoy is therefore correct when she states that *k'ab'awil* in its original meaning signified “*divino, puro*” as opposed to “*dios*” (2017:xxii; 2011:4). For the K'iche', “gods” and “idols” are not categories. They are European constructs forcefully superimposed onto the *k'ab'awil* by the Spanish. While there is clearly no exact equivalent of *k'ab'awil* in English, “divinities” is the most accurate analog.

Ultimately, the *ojer winaq* (“ancestors”) and *k'ab'awil* (“divinities”) are physically distinct from humans, but their interiorities are not. The ancestors have a fractured physicality existing in the earth and in their descendants, and the divinities have a physicality based on the subsistence of ritually provided blood. But, in the animist ontology, they have the same interiority as humans and therefore are also both fully human. For a final time, we return to the Tupinambá. For animist societies like them, all living beings require categories to make sense of reality. Moreover, they require the same categories: *winaq* (“human”), *chee'* (“trees”), *chikop* (“animal”), *ojer winaq* (“ancestors”), *k'ab'awil* (“divinities”). This is because, as Viveiros points out, “humanity is reciprocally reflexive,” and more to the point, “there is no fixed point of view between beings” (2017:69, 157). This leads to a “self-reflexive apparatus for the production of concepts, of ‘symbols that represent themselves’” (2017:195). Here Descola must be headed, who warns of “the misleading analyses of dualism, and [its application], without distinction” to relational schemas in animist ontology (2014:343). The human experience is relative to all living things in an all-encompassing cosmological webbing of relationality. For the Tupinambá, the jaguar sees blood as manioc beer, the peccary sees a mud puddle as a grand ceremonial house, and the souls of the dead see a rotten corpse as fermented manioc (2017:71). The “human” experience of each living being begins with their individual interiority, which is the same as all

other living beings. The various parts that make their physicality are the lens through which that interiority sees the world. When Viveiros says “A perspective is not a representation because representations are properties of the mind, whereas a *point of view is in the body*,” he is describing exactly this (2017:72). All living beings are human in mind and soul; their experiences are just filtered through a different set of bodily tools ranging from appearance to instincts to diet.

The same is the case for the K’iche’ and other highland Mayan groups. For instance, Watanabe documents how the Mam feed their saints candles, rum, and incense. The Mam say that if they do not feed the saints, then “‘God’ – and by implication, the saints – ‘would have no *tortillas*,’ and they would starve” (1992:75, 76). The case is the same for the Tzotzil in a number of rituals recorded by Vogt in *Tortillas for the Gods*. When the Tzotzil adorn their crosses with red geranium flowers, they are giving the crosses their “clothing.” When the crosses are dressed, they are “waiting” for their “food.” When the shaman waves a flower-carrier over burning candles, he is giving the gods their “cigarette.” And lastly, when the shaman lights white tallow candles, he is giving the gods their “chicken,” “beef,” and “tortillas” (Vogt 1976:49, 50). This reflects what Viveiros calls “an essential ontological incompleteness: the incompleteness of sociality, and, in general, of humanity” (2011:47). The universe is an objective reality, but each being’s experience of that universe is subjectively human. Thus when the *k’ab’awil* (“divinities”) are eating blood, in their perspectives, they are humans depending on the nourishment of their creations, their *tzuqul, q’o’l* (“nourishers, sustainers”) according to the *Popol Wuuj*, to provide them their *ixiim* (“corn”), their *ak’* (“chicken”), and their *masaat* (“deer”). This is also demonstrated in the lowland glyphs. For instance, in the Cross Group temples at Palenque in the lowlands, inscriptions inside the temple inner sanctuaries mention “*u-pi-bi-na-li*” (transliterated

upib'na'il). The word *upib'na'il* is related to the Yucatekan word *pib'* (“subterranean oven” or “sweat bath”) and also includes the word *na* (“house”), suggesting the word *upib'na'il* references a “sweatlodge” (Houston 1996:136, 137). The glyphs also mention the “*u-k'u-li*,” which references the Yucatekan *k'u* (“divinities”), and continue “*pu-lu-yi u-chi-ti-ni-il* (transliterated “*puluy uchitini*”) (Houston 1996:137). *Puluy* relates to *pul* (“burn”), and *uchitini* relates to *chitin*, a cognate form of *kitin* or *kitim*, which is a synonym for *pib'* (“subterranean oven” or “sweat bath”). Ultimately, the glyphs relate how before the three sanctuaries of the Cross Group were dedicated, the gods prepared a sweat bath. In fact, in the sanctuary of Wakaj Chan (now referred to as the Temple of the Cross), the sanctuary is called “*ku-nu-il*” (transliterated “*kuni*”), with *kun* meaning “oven in which ink is made from smoke” (Houston 1996:137, 138). Houston states that the inscriptions of the Cross Group associate both the images of the furnace and the sweat lodge with divine birth, concluding that they are only metaphors (1996:138, 146). But his interpretation is incorrect. From the perspective of humans, the divinities are made from ovens. Simultaneously, from the perspective of the divinities, they are humans born in sweat lodges. It is not a matter of poetic metaphor but a matter of reality based on the ability to assume the perspectives of other living beings.

When the Maya made the *k'ab'awil*, they were creating living beings. Christenson relates how, according to Diego de Landa, the process of “birthing the gods” was an extremely serious one that involved fasting, sexual abstinence, and their own blood (2016:35). Descola notes this as a commonly shared trait among animistic hunters, who have the responsibility to “compensate for the losses” when taking the life of nonhumans, and states: “The most common means to [compensate] is sexual abstinence. By checking one’s carnal desires, a hunter effects a retention and accumulation of sexual energy that can rejoin the general stock of fertilizing power that is in

circulation in the universe” (2014:346, 347). While the creation of *k’ab’awil* is different than taking the life of an animal, the same concept applies. In order to create new life in the form of a *k’ab’awil*, energy is required. This includes the giving of blood as well as accumulating life-giving energy through fasting and abstinence. The Mayan sculptors themselves claimed the process was extremely dangerous, and they feared that either they or someone in their family would die or become infected with the “fainting sickness” (2016:35). But the work was necessary, because the *k’ab’awil* were necessary to sustain them and the cosmos from year to year. Therefore, just as the *k’ab’awil* created the *winaq* (“humans”) to be their *tzuqul, q’o’l* (“nourishers, sustainers”), the *winaq* created the *k’ab’awil* to be their own *tzuqul, q’o’l* that would provide them with *q’ij* (“day, the sun”), which is the source of time. In this sense, the relationship between *winaq* and *k’ab’awil* is unique because it necessitates not just a reflexive humanity but also a reflexive divinity wherein each sustain the other according to the cyclical patterns of the calendar.

Conclusion

I have made the argument that the K’iche’s and other Mayan groups were ontologically animist. Historically and near universally, the Mayas have been considered analogists like the Nahuas, only with superficial differences. But this is not the case. Rather, I have argued that the K’iche’s were animists, with a major schema of relationality based in obligatory exchange, and with a minor schema of relationality based in predation. This ontology was highly specified to the Mayan region. Within this ontological lens, there are no “gods” and “idols.” There is only the *k’ab’awil* (“divinities”). Furthermore, the *ojer winaq* (“ancestors”) are neither *k’ab’awil* nor *winaq* (“human”), but are former humans whose interiority is separated from their physicalities, and whose physicalities are fragmented and dispersed between the earth and their descendants.

And finally, both the *ojer winaq* and the *k'ab'awil* are fully human from their own subjective points of view, yet exist in the same objective reality with all other living beings. The cosmos is a web of interwoven relationships between humans, gods, ancestors, animals, trees, and rocks, all of which see themselves as human and see others through physical differences and relational equivocations of actions.

Chapter 6:

Conclusions

The argument of this paper, while ambitious in scope, is simple in argument. In this paper, I address two questions: (1) How does Domingo de Vico perceive K'iche'an gods, ancestors, and idols? and (2) How do the K'iche's view them? To answer these two questions, I review the ontological schematization of being that informs both the K'iche's and Vico. I then carefully analyze the *Theologia Indorum* to interpret Vico's understanding of idols, gods and ancestors. After that, I analyze indigenous writings, especially the *Popol Wuuj* and *Rab'inal Achi*, to attempt an understanding of the K'iche'an perspective. The two perspectives of Vico and the K'iche's are wildly different. Vico sees the gods as demons, the ancestors as souls sent to Hell, and idols as dead rock and wood. The K'iche'an perspective, on the other hand, sees the gods and idols as the same type of divine being, a *k'ab'awil*, and they view their ancestors as more than disembodied spirits who have departed to the unreachable metaphysical dimension.

Both perspectives are different from those of modern scholars, many of whom conflate gods and "deified ancestors" as the same thing, while also viewing idols as representative depictions of either gods or deified ancestors. Vico and modern scholars therefore fall on two extremes, and therefore both are in error. Vico perceived gods, ancestors, and idols as three completely separate categories. Meanwhile modern scholars tend to view gods, ancestors, and gods as conflated and interrelated aspects of the same fiction: the Mayas worshipped all three, and there really isn't much difference between them. Thus archaeologists tend to view stone or wooden idols as possibly representing a god or a deified ancestor, just as art historians tend to interpret paintings or stone relief depictions of divinities as either gods or deified ancestors. In either case, the distinction between gods and ancestors is never important.

I have argued that Domingo de Vico was ontologically a naturalist. During the 16th century in Spain, Vico studied at the Dominican university at Salamanca. There, he received training and education in Scripture, the Western Canon, as well as in Latin (and possibly Greek). From there, he was recruited to serve as a missionary in Guatemala's highlands. When he arrived to the shores of the New World, he brought with him all of the ideas of the Old. He then wrote the *Theologia Indorum* to teach the indigenous his ideas. Ultimately, his manuscript became part of an unforgiving and relentless machine of colonization that enslaved the Mayas and forced them to not just talk like but *think like* the European invaders. New ideas were not welcome to Vico and the Universal Church that he represented.

Vico, like the average European of this time, was a naturalist. As such, he perceived being as a matter of interiority only. That is to say, a person was purely a soul inhabiting a temporary, physical body. The body was not person. Moreover, the body was, in essence, the same as the physical bodies of animals. Therefore the human body, with all of its animal instincts and tendencies, was constantly at war with the soul, which strived to attain perfection through reason and the attainment of Truth. Attaining such Truth was the sole purpose of humankind.

This naturalism was coupled with the European obsession of categorization. The *Theologia Indorum* is replete with examples of categories, along with groupings and subgroupings of those categories. These categories informed how Vico perceived the cosmos.

Vico perceived the gods, ancestors, and idols of the Mayas as distinct things. First, because Vico perceived the soul as the only true way to distinguish between living beings, he believed that the gods were purely spirit. He believed that they were real, only that they were demons that had deceived the Mayas into giving them names and worshipping them. Second, because the body is physical and the same as that of an animal, the ancestor is a soul who has left

the body. In the case of the Mayas, because their ancestors had not received the Word of God from the Spanish, their souls were sent to Hell, while their bodies rotted in the earth and no longer mattered or had meaning. That is to say, the ancestor's body was just an empty shell, devoid of the soul that once animated it. Finally, the idols did not have souls or even the ability to think or feel, and so they were purely physical objects, dead and inanimate.

The K'iche's on the other hand had a much more nuanced perception than what modern scholars often credit to them. The K'iche's did not perceive gods, ancestors, and idols as three separate categories in the same way that Vico did. But they did not perceive of a single, vague, mystic category of gods and deified ancestors. The problem with the approach of many modern scholars is that, in trying to avoid Western conceptions of gods, they fail to replace those Western conceptions with Mayan ones. As a consequence, they fail to render any logic to the Mayas, instead treating their gods and ancestors as the same thing, more or less, perhaps with some distinctions, perhaps not. But there is a distinct logic to Mayan perception of divinities and ancestors, and to ignore this risk completely misunderstanding them just as Vico did.

In a very limited space, I have attempted to understand K'iche'an ontology and argued that it was animist. While many scholars tend to ignore Mayan ontology, many of the ones who address it tend to consider the Mayas an analogist. This reasoning is based in the grave and tired misconception that the Mayas were very similar to the Mexica (more commonly called the Aztecs). That is to say, this assumption of a Mayan analogism is rooted in the perception of a generalized pan-Mesoamerican ontology, distinguishable only by geography and some other superficial aspects. I argue against this notion, instead favoring an ontology that is uniquely and distinctly Mayan, not "Mesoamerican."

In an animist ontology, living beings are not distinguished by their interiorities. Rather, animism is the exact opposite of naturalism, since it perceives an unmarked interiority that inhabits a unique physicality. All “souls” are the same, that is to say, they are all human in their own subjective perspective. Rather, the only way to distinguish between living beings who all think like and believe they are humans is through the physicalities. A human and a jaguar are both human from their point of view, but a human walks on two legs, and a jaguar has a pelt covered in dark rosettes.

This animist ontology is founded in a relational schema of obligatory exchange. In this schema, it is the obligation of the gods to sustain the sun and the cosmos. But the energy of the gods is limited, and so they die at the end of every solar year. In order to revive the gods, humans must return energy for energy. This takes the form of a various number of rituals that include cleaning the streets, homes, and temples, as well as playing a ball game and conducting bloodletting rituals and human sacrifices. By successfully completing and fulfilling these obligations, the gods are revived and can once again sustain the sun and the cosmos for another year. This obligatory exchange includes a sub-schema based in predation. Within this schema, the K’iche’s actively seek out human captives to sacrifice to the gods. This predation serves a method for assisting in the overall schema of obligatory exchange. That is to say, predation serves a means of accruing the resource of human blood.

Within this animist ontology, the K’iche’s do not perceive of three separate categories of “gods,” “ancestors,” and “idols,” nor do they have a vague generalization of them as a single and interrelated divineness. Rather, they perceive two separate categories: *k’ab’awil* (“divinities,” including both gods and idols), and *ojer winaq* (“ancestors”). For the K’iche’s, their *k’ab’awil* (“divinities”) are a single category of living beings who sustain the sun, die at the end of each

solar year, and are revived through bloodletting and other New Year rituals. Additionally, they believe that the being of the *ojer winaq* is found in both the interiority and the physicalities. The interiority exists in the underworld Xib'alb'a, while the physicalities exist in the corporeal remains of the body, the space where the body is buried, and finally in the descendants themselves who have received a portion of their parents' physicality in them.

These perceptions of *k'ab'awil* and *ojer winaq* are radically alien to the Western perspective. While I have endeavored to understand K'iche'an ontology, I have only scratched the surface of this topic. This study is not comprehensive in any sense, but I have tried to be as intellectually honest as possible and have based my conclusions largely on the words of the Mayas themselves, whether it be in the *Popol Wuuj* or in *Rab'inal Achi* or even in their glyphic inscriptions. K'iche'an ontology is not Mexican or European ontology. It is unique and highly sophisticated and logical. But Domingo de Vico did not sense this, nor did he try to truly understand the K'iche's. Instead, he simply deemed the K'iche's as pagans in need of Christ and Western wisdom. Through education and mass, he would reform the indigenous and make them truly human, which to him meant Christian. Even if he had to enslave the indigenous, it would be worth it to save their souls. The *Theologia Indorum* was a tool for this project, and its words would be used against the Mayas for centuries.

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