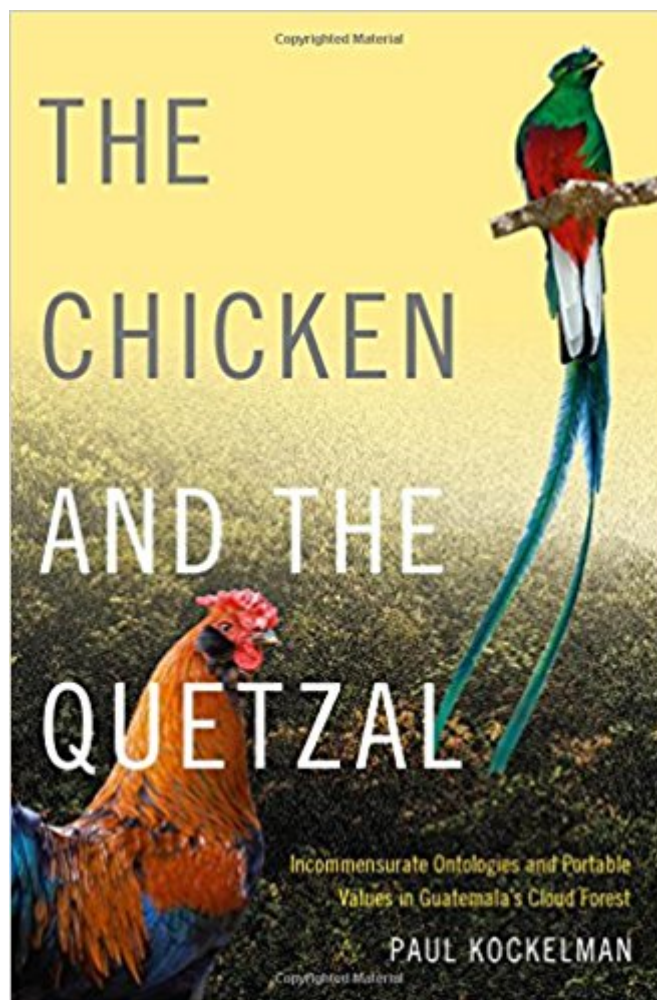


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# The Chicken And The Quetzal: Incommensurate Ontologies And Portable Values In Guatemala's Cloud Forest



## Synopsis

In *The Chicken and the Quetzal* Paul Kockelman theorizes the creation, measurement, and capture of value by recounting the cultural history of a village in Guatemala's highland cloud forests and its relation to conservation movements and ecotourism. In 1990 a group of German ecologists founded an NGO to help preserve the habitat of the resplendent quetzal—the strikingly beautiful national bird of Guatemala—near the village of Chicacnab. The ecotourism project they established in Chicacnab was meant to provide new sources of income for its residents so they would abandon farming methods that destroyed quetzal habitat. The pressure on villagers to change their practices created new values and forced negotiations between indigenous worldviews and the conservationists' goals. Kockelman uses this story to offer a sweeping theoretical framework for understanding the entanglement of values as they are interpreted and travel across different and often incommensurate ontological worlds. His theorizations apply widely to studies of the production of value, the changing ways people make value portable, and value's relationship to ontology, affect, and selfhood.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a big book, speaking to the hard and intractable questions about the distinctions between the particular and the universal, the private and the public, and the intimate and the ultimate. Insofar as philosophy has tried to understand the human condition as bridging the mental and physical world, Paul Kockelman's book is one of the boldest things out there. I love this book and its analytical project. Anthropology needs something like this, now." (Bill Maurer, author of *How Would*

You Like to Pay? How Technology Is Changing the Future of Money)"The Chicken and the Quetzal is a masterpiece. Paul Kockelman's finely grained ethnography of an ecotourism NGO in Guatemala's highlands opens up new ways to think about meaning, value, ontology, ecology, development, indigenous studies, and more. A broad audience from advanced undergraduates to specialists will benefit from the insights of one of our generation's most rigorous and original thinkers presented in beautifully written prose. The Chicken and the Quetzal has the power to make one see the world in a different way." (Julia Elyachar, author of Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo)"The Chicken and the Quetzal is exemplary of semiotic ethnography, a thriving genre in linguistic anthropology that details much more than the linguistic aspect of social life.... Its theoretical contribution to linguistic anthropology is significant, and it offers an invitation to dialogue with other ways of doing anthropology and social science.... I encourage you to read the book, to respond, and so to generate the value that the semiotic process produces, coined in the currency of social relationality." (Christopher Ball Anthropological Quarterly 2016-06-01)"Kockelman is at his best when he deals with concrete examples, such as the cultural meaning embedded in language structures. It is these brilliant and illuminating insights that anthropological and historical specialists in Guatemala and elsewhere will find so thought-provoking." (Michael D. Kirkpatrick History: Reviews of New Books 2017-05-01) "In The Chicken and the Quetzal, Kockelman proves that he is one of anthropology's last great system-builders. His analytical framework can be applied to any ethnographic object, regardless of time or place. Moreover, its multiple elements are of a piece.... [P]ondering the lessons of The Chicken and the Quetzal is a worthwhile endeavour for any anthropologist, from the beginning student to the seasoned professor." (Michael Cepek Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 2017-06-01)"This volume is a brilliant in-depth analysis that repays rereading not only for its empirical observations, but also for its theoretical connections to classic works by Marx, Veblen, Pierce and others. Whilst Kockelman explores the construction of values deep in the Guatemalan Cloud Forest, with a little imagination his work can be translated to address research in developed world urban contexts where value creation has become a key focus of applied tourism research." (Adrian R. Bailey Tourism Management 2017-06-01)

Paul Kockelman is Professor of Anthropology at Yale University and the author of Agent, Person, Subject, Self: A Theory of Ontology, Interaction, and Infrastructure. Â

Scholarly and Creative Book and Journal Reviews: Pennsylvania Literary Journal: Spring 2016:

freely available excerpt: [...]Paul Kockelman. *The Chicken and the Quetzal: Incommensurate Ontologies and Portable Values in Guatemala*. Cloud Forest. Paper \$23.95: ISBN: 978-0-8223-6072-8; Library Cloth: \$84.95: ISBN: 978-0-8223-6056-8. January 2016. Duke University Press.

I must have read the summary for this book too quickly before requesting it. I assumed that as the cover promised it would detail the birds of Guatemala from the chicken to the quetzal. So, I was a bit hard-hit by the academic introduction that reads like the first part of a dissertation because it laboriously summarizes the concepts, terms, and all major research in the field of eco-tourism and at-length summarizes what will be discussed in each of the coming chapters, despite the relative brevity of the book as a whole. As a thesis would, the first chapter then summarizes the history of eco-tourism in the central region of Guatemala. The usual academic pattern is broken in a section called "Priming the Ecotourism Experience" where questions such as: "What are the tour and the accommodations like [at the Proyecto Ecologico Quetzal]?" and "How do we get there?" are answered. "In the ecotourism program you will travel to see and experience the cloud forest and learn about the life and culture of the Q'eqchi' people living near the forest. Your accommodations in a typical Q'eqchi' home are rustic. Their homes are constructed with wood walls and dirt floor, and there is an open fire inside the home over which your food will be cooked" (28). Note, that his food was cooked for him. I doubt some that can cook will not be allowed to volunteer to help these extremely impoverished Guatemalans. Kockelman has a section later in the chapter on "Immaterial Labor, Incommensurate Values, and Intersubjective Intentions" and uses Marxist and Kantian terms to explain these but in the spirit of ecotourism, I doubt hard labor is the point of touring an ecologically beautiful environment. Chapter 2 is dedicated to "poultry."

Kockelman explains that the "local ways of framing the relation between women and chickens" frame the key themes of this section, "ontology (what kinds of entities there are in the world), affect (cognitive and corporeal attunements to such entities), and selfhood (relatively reflexive centers of attunement) (52). This is another typical critical trick. Kockelman starts with a basic emotional subject or the archetype of farming and chicken raising by small family units. The book is about ecotourism, but instead of exploring the environmental solutions and complications of the Proyecto Ecologico Quetzal program, the author digresses from the concrete chicken to the chicken as a surreal entity. Just as feces is feces, a chicken is a

chicken. The chicken has been introduced to the region five hundred years ago, as Kockelman points out. Thus, the chicken or how the chicken is raised by women in this region are not questions of deep rooted ancient culture that needs to be preserved. If the chicken is still a nutritious and economical good for the locals, this domestic industry should continue. If parrots can legally be traded today and they can make the locals more money, they should switch to caring for this commodity. But, even if the chicken and the love between the Guatemalan women and their chickens must be protected, the criticism should not diverge into mythology or theology in a discussion of the *“corporeal”* and the *“entities”* of the *“world.”* I do not recommend reading this book to eco-tourists or to ecologists because it is likely to frustrate and confuse both.

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