The Chicken and the Quetzal: Incommensurate Ontologies and Portable Values in Guatemala's Cloud Forest

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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.

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