

## Last Interview with Walking Fox, Kiwakootiwati, John H. Haddox

by Kim Díaz and Jules Simon

John Herbert Haddox (1929-2017) was one of the first North American philosophers to turn his attention towards what has now become the field of Latin American Philosophy. He began his work at the University of Texas at El Paso in 1957 and retired in 2015. Haddox was the first to introduce the works of Jose Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso to the English-speaking world and worked to include the areas of Mexican, Chicano, American Indian and Latin American philosophy as fully developed philosophies into the broader philosophical canon. Among his books are: *Vasconcelos of Mexico: Philosopher and Prophet* (1967), *Antonio Caso: Philosopher of Mexico* (1971), *Los Chicanos, an Awakening People* (1971), *Differences, Stereotypes, and Bi-culturalism* (1973). Haddox was also an adopted member of the Pawnee Nation and he inspired countless American Indians, Mexicans, Chicanos and Latinos from the US-Mexico border to deepen their philosophical interests Latin American, Mexican American, and Indigenous philosophies.[1]

John Haddox (JH): I think I have an extra copy of my autobiography. I'm 87 now. You can have that.

Jules Simon (JS): What is your true name?

JH: My true name is *Kiwakootiwati*, Walking Fox. That's my adopted Indian name, but my real name is John Herbert Haddox.

JS: Do you think of yourself as Walking Fox?

JH: Yeah, I was given the name in a long, involved, and beautiful ceremony when I was adopted by my Pawnee mother, Alice Morris. Part of it was in Pawnee that I couldn't understand. What I do remember is the part of the chief circle that was the adoption itself and then the drum and singers' ceremony. My Pawnee adopted mother and I danced around the circle and my own blood family was there along with her blood family and many friends and relatives. During the ceremony, everyone would stop and Alice Morris would say "I wish you all to know this is my son" and I would say "I wish you all to know this is my mother." And we said these phrases several times, like a vow in a marriage... "I take you to be..." which, for me, was the same kind of thing. It was a beautiful ceremony. I was twelve years old. Alice, my adopted mother had diabetes and she couldn't stay away from sugar and sweet



foods, so she was in in my father's office all the time. He was a general practitioner near Pawnee, Oklahoma and I used to go to my father's office and sit and retrieve patients for him and he would sometimes come out and give me a nickel. His office was on the second floor and with the nickel I could go run down the stairs to the bakery next door where I would buy a bunch of candy. Alice was very friendly and once we started talking we became really close and she decided to adopt me. Her children became my extra brothers and sisters and so, growing up, I had two whole families which was wonderful. They would come to my house and I would go to their house and the relationship grew in that way.

JS: Did that continue after you moved here?

JH: Yes. I used to go back home for homecoming around the 4th of July. The Pawnees from all over North America, many from California and other places would come back to Pawnee (Oklahoma) for a big Pow Wow and I used to go back every summer and, sometimes, dance all night. I used to dance pretty simple. I couldn't do any fancy dancing but I'd do the round dance.[2] It was a wonderful childhood in a small town. It was nice because I grew up in this little town but my parents loved to travel. My father always wanted to keep up with medicine so one summer, for example, we went to the University of Chicago where he took a course on modern surgical techniques because he was the only doctor in this little town. So I had a summer in Chicago. He also traveled to the New England Medical Center in Boston where he did some coursework on bloodwork. In this way, we spent a summer in Boston. Imagine how great that was for a little boy from Pawnee to spend a summer in Chicago and Boston! But we travelled all over the country because my father loved to drive and travel. It was a very happy childhood. I had one sister and two brothers who were all older than me. Because my sister was five years older and my brothers were seven and eight years older, my brothers and I were not nearly as close, but we were all a very close family. In fact, my sister and I were very, very close and I have a picture of us together when she was 10 and I was 5. At that age, I couldn't understand how she could be twice as old as me, but never again. She was also a fine poet and had several books of poetry published. She gave me her first poem and I submitted it to *Commonweal* magazine where it was published. After that she had many poems published and I used to come back to Pawnee and stay at her house for homecoming and she would visit here. It was wonderful growing up in a little town like that. However, the schools in Pawnee... it was during World War II... weren't very good. So, by the time I got to High School I had already visited Notre Dame University, when I was still a little boy, and so, with my sights set on attending that University, I went to a wonderful preparatory school in Tulsa, Cascia Hall Preparatory School. There were about 120 students in total and in the senior class there were only about 20. This meant that we had very small classes run by Augustinian priests and mostly lay faculty. For example, I took four years of Latin and in my senior year there were only four of us in the class and we read Virgil's *Aeneid*. I then went to Notre Dame University for the pre-med course of study and in my senior year applied to medical school in Washington University in St. Louis. My father and my brother had their M.D.'s but I wasn't sure that was what I was being called to do. It was

a very difficult period. I quit school after the first semester of my senior year and went home and told my father that I admired him and the medical profession very much but that I really felt my vocation was to become a philosopher. Well, he turned around and walked away and wouldn't speak to me. He thought that I was rejecting him somehow because he always thought that I would return to Pawnee to take over his practice. My brother, Austin, was a general practitioner in Antlers, Oklahoma and my other brother, Charles, taught in medical school at the University of Texas Medical School. After he earned his Ph.D. in genetics, he taught at the University of Dayton. Sadly, he was certainly the most intelligent in our family and, I think, the most accomplished scholar but he got Alzheimer's, which was awful. The last time that I saw him



he didn't even recognize me. When I was drafted and stationed at Fort Hood, in central Texas, I went home for a weekend and I was driving in my car to pick up a date when I got in a car wreck, hit by a truck head on. My whole face was smashed—my jaw was broken in seven places, my right eyeball was hanging on my cheek and when they took me into the hospital, no one could recognize me. I used to be so nice-looking! After I got well, I was still in the Army so they sent me to William Beaumont Army Hospital where I served as a medic. Luckily, I love to read so I used to go to the El Paso Public library and there was this beautiful young pre-med student there whose father was also a doctor before his death. I asked her for a date and she told me to leave her alone. After talking to her at the library many times, I finally said "can I give you a ride home?" and we went down and I realized I had no car! My car was being fixed so I walked her home and we started dating and on the first date I asked her to marry me and she said "you're crazy." Her name was Carmen. After we had been dating for about three weeks I went back home and then back to Notre Dame to become a philosophy major. I just about had my degree as a pre-med student and I so had to take many more philosophy and humanities classes. When I came home for spring break, Carmen took a bus from El Paso to meet my family. We both thought that we were so lucky to have met each other even though we had only dated a few weeks. In fact, we were so serious about each other that we got married next September. We returned to Notre Dame University where she worked for the Math department and then the babies started coming.

JS: I guess that I misunderstood you. So you did not meet Carmen at Notre Dame?

JH: No at the El Paso Public Library where she worked while she finished her degree. We moved to Notre Dame University after we had our first baby. We lived in a funky little apartment when we first got there. The apartment was on the second floor and the room had only one bed and the room was so small that to get from one side of the room to the other you had to climb over the bed. It had a tiny bathroom with a shower, a kitchen and dining room which was so small that if you wanted to open the refrigerator door you had to take the table out. Then after the first baby came, we moved into what was called

Vetville which was a very simple, primitive old army barracks for married students at Notre Dame University and, at first, Carmen worked for the Math department but when we started having babies she stayed home to raise the children. I had many different jobs. I was a janitor and swept the floors in the main building at the university. Then I got a big raise and became the middle-man to the Dean of Liberal Arts and the whole liberal arts faculty. After that I worked for the *Ave Maria* Press and kept getting new and better jobs as time went on. We had our second child, John, in the middle of a blizzard in South Bend. I had this old, beat up car and several times Carmen thought she was going to deliver so I'd go out to try to warm up the car because we didn't know if it was going to start. The neighbors were always looking outside excitedly to see if the baby was coming. I had warmed up the car so many times that by the time we finally did go, nobody cared and nobody bothered to look outside.



JS: Can I interrupt, Jack? I want to backtrack. Why did your Pawnee family name you Walking Fox?

JH: Because it was Alice's grandfather's name. It was a very important family name. In Pawnee it's *Kiwakootiwati*, which literally means *Kiwakoo* as Fox and *tiwati* as walking. So, it means fox-walking. In Pawnee it's backward.

Kim Díaz (KD): How do you spell it?

JH: It's spelled in several ways. The Pawnee have no written language and so you just ... whatever it sounded like.

JS: The second question I wanted to ask you was - because I knew, since I taught with you for some many years, you had a tradition of giving gifts, specifically, a tradition of gift-giving in your classes. Did you learn that from the Pawnee?

JH: Yes, that is very important. The Pawnee had what they called "giveaway dances" and if you participated in a giveaway dance you were expected to dance over, and give somebody something. You could give them a big gift or give them a sack of flour, or a few ears of corn, or some beadwork, or you could give them a wish. You could tell them "I wish you joy in your life," "I wish you good health," "I wish you happiness," and these were just written down on a piece of paper and handed to somebody. When I started teaching I thought that was a nice thing to do. So for years I would give every one of my students around Spring Break or around Thanksgiving a wish on a slip of paper. It's funny because sometimes I see some of my former students and they say "I still have

that wish that you gave me. I keep it in my purse or in my wallet and it makes me feel good.”

JS: That’s beautiful.

KD: I wanted to ask you the next question, well there’s actually two questions to this. It’s a two-part question because you work on Native American, Chicano, Mexican, Latin American Philosophy. When did you begin to work on these traditions, when you were a little kid making friends with Alice?

JH: It’s in my autobiography. When I first came here to teach, I thought I’d come to El Paso and stay for about a year or two and then go on somewhere else. Texas Western had about 4000 students at that time and I didn’t think it was a real big deal, not a very important university. But the climate at the school was friendly and I thought, that it was good. After the first couple of years I decided to stay. When I got here in August Dr. Cecil Crawford, who was the department chair, had a discussion with me about the texts. He said “you’ll teach Logic, Ancient Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy, I forget the other one, and Latin American Philosophy. In seven years at Notre Dame University I had never heard a single word about Latin American philosophy so I thought I’ll just get the books and prepare the class. Well, there were no books! There was Patrick Romanell’s *Making of the Mexican Mind*. I got that, and then I got some books in Spanish and Carmen started translating for me. At Notre Dame I had taken four years of Latin and in High School also, so I knew Latin pretty well. At Notre Dame I could do enough French and German to get by but no Spanish at all and so I started working and I discovered that I loved it. I loved it! It’s what I grew up with. Latin American thought was so similar to the Pawnee Indian ways. The emphasis upon beauty, song, dances, poetry, and literature. I just felt at home with Latin American thought and so from then on it became my great love. And then I thought I should take advantage of my growing up Pawnee and so I started developing classes on Native American philosophy and I got to be friends with a lot of Native American philosophers. The Popular American and Popular Culture society always had a section on Native American Thought and I saw the table of contents of the book. This was the introduction to that book.

KD: Yes, I remember looking at this.

JH: Latin American, quite a variety.

JS: Do you remember your first choices in Native American Thought that you were attracted to or that you taught? Do you remember those? The first time you taught Native American Philosophy?

JH: These are the ones that interested me. [John shows us the table of contents to the book upon which he is still working]

KD: Great, let me put this in order. This is really good.



JH: These are just some of the philosophers.

KD: No this is really great. So, actually we have a question just about this. The question is, what are you working on now?

JH: Vasconcelos and Caso.

KD: Before I move to this though, I do want to ask you how did you see your role in working? Because you said you fell in love, you felt at home, or did you see yourself as a pioneer? Did you find it and then fall in love and you just kept doing it, or did you see yourself as spearheading a new field in Latin American philosophy? I ask because you were the first one to translate Vasconcelos to make him known to English speakers.

JH: I was delighted when Dr. Crawford told me to teach the course and I got Romanell's book and it included Vasconcelos and Caso and I just felt close to it because that's what I grew up with. And then being here on the border, it was a delight to have so many Spanish speaking students and students who were interested in Latin American philosophy. You know, I also did this kind of work on Native Americans.

KD: So, Jules wanted to know which of the Native American philosophers did you go to first? Who were you drawn by? Which aspects or which philosophers did you share?

JH: Being in this area, I concentrated first on the Apache and the Navajo, and the Hopi Indian, and then I moved to the Plains Tribes – the Pawnee who were originally in Nebraska in the Platte River and then they were forced by the US government to come to Indian territory which is now Oklahoma. So I started studying the mid-western Indians, the Plains Tribes and then just the whole thing!

KD: Can you tell us about what you're working on now? This book is one project, right? And then what about your autobiography? Do you want to publish it? What are your projects that you're working on now?

JH: I started this book. [shows us a very thick, unfinished manuscript]

KD: Oh, look here is your name.

JH: And this is my Pawnee mother.

KD: And then this goes here. So, this is your book and you have it all ready?

JH: Yes, these are some Native Americans in the book.

KD: These are some pages that we grabbed from your table of contents.

JH You can have that.

KD: Ok, we can put that here. I have all these chapters, 1, 2 ... 15 oh I see because it's several parts. I just noticed. You have the Intro and then this part 2, part 3, part 4 and each one has chapters. I've been going through your boxes that you gave me, and I've shared these ones with the students so they're very helpful. When will you send it out? How are you doing with that?

JH: I will have to find out from the editor of the Notre Dame Press and send them, I think, some selections, the table of contents and a few of the essays. There's a lot here!

KD: It is a lot! It may be a few volumes!

JH: A few of them maybe, but perhaps just doing a book on Native American and a book on Latin American. These have all been published somewhere or presented somewhere over my 57 years of working as a philosopher: Santa Fe, Atlanta, New Mexico, Notre Dame, Oxford, San Antonio, Pittsburg, Notre Dame, and Saint Louis. These are from many, many years of teaching and writing.

KD: And what about your autobiography is that another project that you want to publish.

JH: That's just part of this book.

KD: I have other questions if I may?

JH: Sure.

KD: What distinctions, what do you think are the main differences between Native American, Chicano, Latin American, and Mexican? What distinctions do you draw?

JH: Oh gosh... there's similarities first of all. Humanistic and personalistic and aesthetic that are right at the center. Not much in the way of epistemology or metaphysics, but sociopolitical, aesthetic, creative. I don't know, there is something about joy... I've had some tragedies like the death of a son to AIDS. The death of a daughter to cirrhosis, but I've had an unbelievably joyful life. I've been so blessed with Carmen most of all. Like I've said, on the first date I wanted to marry her, and she has made me happy ever since. It was nice having most of my family near-by. Every Friday night we have maybe 10 or 15 people over, and we have some pizza or something and drink some wine, and eat some food, and laugh a lot. Sometimes I'll stand in the other room and watch a football game or something and I love to hear the sound from here because it is almost always laughter. It's just fun, it's us having a good time together. The games we play, after a little while, we're just happy.



KD: There's just more similarities than differences?

JH: Yes... other question?

KD: Well, you partly already told us, but we didn't know you were going to answer us this way, so the question – why did you choose to work with Vasconcelos and Caso?

JH: Because I found in their thought myself. I saw myself. The values that they emphasize, beauty in Vasconcelos, love in Caso. What more could you need?! I thought they both expressed it so well. I was so excited when I discovered their thought and I was so thankful that Dr. Crawford made me teach that course. When I first talked to him I told him "I don't know a thing about this! What can I do?" and he said "get to work!" and Carmen started translating for me and you'll see in my books the one on Caso and Vasconcelos, that there were some selections that I translated, but most of them were Carmen Haddox or Rafael Gonzalez, or somebody else doing the translating and that was all fine too, to do the book with someone and to have them to share.

JS: So you were interested in them for teaching reasons but you say you felt at home with their thoughts. What is it about their thoughts because in Vasconcelos's case he was an educator but was also very much involved in politics. Did you see yourself being inspired by Vasconcelos to become more aware of and involved in the politics of education? The kind of issues that he was concerned with affirming the Mexican people and their determination to educate themselves in their own way?



JH: Of course, there was Carmen and her family, and they welcomed me so quickly and were so kind to me. I used to... when I was stationed out at Beaumont hospital, I used to go to her house every Sunday morning and have a huge Mexican breakfast with her family and it was just like when I grew up. Like I said, I had planned to come to stay for only a couple of years, but I fell in love with El Paso and the people and Texas Western. Texas Western, formerly the College of Mines, has gone from 4,000 students to 24,000 today at UTEP, so it has grown. I've had a great love for UTEP and the faculty. Fortunately, I have had some wonderful faculty members as colleagues, David Hall and Peter Robinson... they were just good people, fun to be with, fun to talk with and with whom I didn't always agree with. But again I think I have...

KD: This is great - all of this looks great.

JH: It's a good long story.

KD: I guess I already know the answer to the next question, but I'm still going to ask it. You said, well, the question was, over the years you focused on aesthetics in Mexican philosophy, why? And I think I know why because when you mentioned the big Mexican breakfast... that's an insight, right?

JH: And the Native American! For the Pawnee, I think all Native Americans, if you talk about good news and truth and beauty, the most important is beauty. Of course, for Vasconcelos goodness and truth are beautiful. As a little boy I used to... I remember there was this hill in Pawnee and down below there was a place called Black Bear Creek and on the other side they had a dancing area and I can remember as a small child lying on the blankets on my front yard and hearing (Haddox sings: AH HEYA HEYA HA OH). It was so beautiful, and it got into my heart as a little child. That's why, I think, Alice and I were so close. She was a beautiful woman. She came here for our wedding. I drove Alice and one of her cousins all the way down from Pawnee to the wedding and it was such a great time with her here. We have some pictures of the wedding with her there. Then for years I drove back to Pawnee every year and visited with her children and grandchildren. Up to about three years ago I used to go almost every summer. Last time I had a whole set of cousins who lived in Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky who had grown up... what happened was that my mother, one of her brothers died very young and his wife had three small children and was expecting a fourth when he died. He died in the middle of a dust storm back in the 30's in Oklahoma. They then moved to Memphis, where her family was, and they would spend every summer in Pawnee. So, I grew up with my blood/immediate family, two brothers and a sister and four brothers who adopted me. We were so close that we still correspond. One summer about five years ago my son John and I drove to Pawnee and all those cousins came from all over and we had a great reunion. We hadn't seen each other for 30 years and it was like, it was just.... !

JS: There is that beauty of familial relations, that's what you've been talking a lot about. What drew you to Caso? Caso is not the same. There is Antonio Caso...

KD: I think that he already answered that question because he said that with Vasconcelos he found beauty and with Caso he found love.

JS: But with Caso it's more Christian though. So, the difference between Caso and Vasconcelos is that Caso was Catholic, right? So, what do you think is the difference between the Catholic religion and the Native American religion?

JH: I think one reason Catholicism took over in Mexico is because there were priests like Vasco de Quiroga who were like Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas who felt so close to the Natives and they found in the Native religions again an axis upon beauty, self-sacrifice, love. I think that's why you find in somebody like Vasconcelos, you find both. He really writes, he thought like an Indian and he was a devout Catholic. A Catholic who didn't hesitate to have three or four mistresses, you know, different times, but he found, I think, in his faith an emphasis upon creativity that he found among the Natives and he saw them further together, which is challenging.

KD: What have been the biggest challenges as you have worked on Latin American Philosophy and Native American Philosophy?

JH: Not knowing enough Spanish. Knowing a lot of words but still having to depend on Carmen and actually, our children like our son Tom, he's the one that died of AIDS. He spoke Spanish like a native. He lived for a year in Mexico City while he was a student at Notre Dame. He studied there and lived with a Mexican family for a year. He came back speaking very good Spanish and he was actually a Spanish teacher in Austin when he died. He was gay and he had a wonderful partner named Al Hernandez. They loved each other. I guess they weren't married, they couldn't in those days. Now Al is still so close to us. We got a beautiful card from him just recently. He had AIDS but he was able to get treatment. Our son Tom got AIDS too soon. There were several treatments he tried but he just... It was so sad because he also had his degree from Notre Dame, which was recognized as Honors. He then got a Masters' degree from UT Austin, and was working on his PhD when he got AIDS. He was 32 years old. Of all of our children, I think he was the happiest. I'm going to cry. He was the nicest. He was such a sweet, sweet person.

KD: What is your hope for the future of Latin American, Chicano, Native American, and Mexican Philosophy?

JH: I'm hopeful that it will all develop. I'm so amazed to go every year to the American Popular Culture meetings. They're always huge because they include so many areas and they always had a lot of Native American sections and I used to present papers at either or both of these for several years. I remember the Native American it used to be 10 maybe 15 people who would show up for their presentations. Last time I went, three

years ago, there were about 40, many more. So, I was encouraged by that. I think that there are a number of Native American writers. I think Latin American Philosophy, again, the meetings tend to be pretty big. I had my 50th anniversary celebration and we had one section that was devoted entirely to Native American philosophy, and then one was on Latin American, and we had several people here from all over the country for that. I was very encouraged to see those developments and so I have hope.

KD: There have been instances where the culture of people gets appropriated or co-opted, and we co-opt what is sacred, and in fact I could do it too because I'm Chicana, but I didn't grow up in a reservation. So, I can't speak for Native Americans.

JH: Yeah, who the hell am I?

KD: So sometimes, maybe inadvertently, maybe deliberately, we co-opt peoples' experiences and this is because we are outside of their culture. What is your advice?

JH: I just feel that I was so fortunate to have somebody like Alice adopt me because I was able to go to the dances and to dance and to give gifts and to receive gifts... all important! I was given some beautiful gifts over the years. I would always take a few dollar bills, or sometimes even five or ten, and from the Pawnee gifting hands they sometimes pass money. Sometimes I would have started out with ten ones and end up with thirty-five dollars and I'd end up giving it all away. That was so important - the sharing. It wasn't really giving, it was sharing. You give to receive and that is very much a Native American trait. There is a woman named Cipriana Toledo who lived in northern New Mexico and I used to go visit her and she always had gifts for me, and I always had gifts for her. She is dead now, but she became almost family for me. Actually, we went up to the Jemez Pueblo on the day of San Diego and they have special dances. They have ceremonies which are different. You go to a Catholic church and they say a prayer and they say mass, and then we go out and have an Indian prayer and have an Indian dance. That's what I grew up with. The Pawnee were mostly Methodists, but they also had their Native beliefs and there were a few Catholics there in Pawnee ... so I felt... I just feel like I was a Pawnee. I didn't think I was trying to build on what I had grown up with and my father was the most generous person I ever knew. He practiced medicine for over 50 years. I'd have to think how many patients never paid him. He never cared. One time, my mother said that there was this family who were fairly well off in Pawnee and he had done a lot of care for them and they never paid and my mother said to my father: "you ought to think about hiring a lawyer or something," and my father said "no, I'll take care of it." So later on, she looked at the bill he was sending them, and he wrote on it "please remit." That was as tough as he ever got... please remit... but he loved us so. We grew up on a farm outside of Pawnee which is all in my autobiography. After he died my mother tried to stay there in Pawnee but she really couldn't so she came here and spent the last fifteen years. She died at the age of 90 in El Paso and that was great because it gave my children a chance to get to know her. She'd come over about once a week to have dinner and for the holidays and so I was very lucky that

way to have her. I'm 87 now and I saw my internal practitioner yesterday and he said "you are disgustingly healthy."

KD: He's jealous, huh?

JH: Yeah. So, I'm very lucky. I plan to hang around."

KD: Maybe this question is a moot point then. The last question is: how do you hope to be remembered?

JH: As a happy... as an extremely, I think, blessed person. I've had such a beautiful family. Before we worried about this because we had eight children and then we adopted the last three. They were the best things we did. One of our adopted sons, Robert spends some weekends with us. He lives in Pecos. He is a wonderful young man, and the other twin Richard has two sons.



KD: Thank you!

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[1] We would like to thank Carmen and Madeline Haddox, John's wife and daughter, for graciously helping us edit this interview for accuracy as well as sharing with us their family pictures. As the field of Latin American philosophy becomes mainstream, it is important for us to acknowledge the work of those who came before us and led the way. Thank you, Jack, for your selfless dedication and your expansive vision.

[2] The round dance consists of a group of hand drummers standing in the center singing songs while groups of people dance in a circular movement around the drummers. Sometimes the dancers will join hands while dancing but, depending on how many people are dancing, they may not join hands. The round dance is a way for community members to share food, stories, and song. Recently, the round dance has been used as a way of mobilizing communities around certain issues affecting people and tribes in Indian Country such as the Idle No More movement of 2012 which spread the Round Dance worldwide as a way to peacefully effect social change.