APA Newsletters

FALL 2017

VOLUME 17 | NUMBER 1

ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES

FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY

LGBTQ ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY AND COMPUTERS

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

PHILOSOPHY IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
# Table of Contents

## Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies

- Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies ................................................................. 1
- From the Editors ........................................................................................................................................ 1
- B. K. Matilal: The Past and Future of the Study of Indian Philosophy ......................................................... 1
- Submission Guidelines and Information .................................................................................................... 2
- An Exemplary Indian Intellectual: Bimal Krishna Matilal ............................................................................. 3
- Philosophy, Indian and Western: Some Thoughts from Bimal Matilal ......................................................... 7
- Bimal Krishna Matilal’s Style of Doing Philosophy ....................................................................................... 10
- Three Dogmas of Matilal: Direct Realism, Lingophilia, and Dharma Ethics ...................................................... 11
- A Cautionary Note on Matilal’s Way of Doing Indian Philosophy ............................................................... 14
- Whither the Matilal Strategy? ...................................................................................................................... 18
- Nyāya Ethical Theory .................................................................................................................................... 21
- Bimal Krishna Matilal and the Enduring Significance of the Constructive Engagement Between Contemporary Analytic and Classical Indian Philosophy ................................................................. 28
- Expanding Matilal’s Project through First-Person Research ............................................................................ 29

## Feminism and Philosophy

- Feminism and Philosophy ............................................................................................................................ 33
- From the Editor .............................................................................................................................................. 33
- About the Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy ....................................................................................... 33
- Submission Guidelines and Information ........................................................................................................ 33
- News from the Committee on the Status of Women ...................................................................................... 33
- To Do Metaphysics as a Feminist: Reflections on Feminist Methodology in Light of the Hypatia Affair .................................................................................................................................................. 34
- Feminist Interpretations of William James ..................................................................................................... 38
- Philosophizing About Sex ............................................................................................................................. 40
- Moral Aims: Essays on the Importance of Getting It Right and Practicing Morality with Others ....................... 41
- Existential Eroticism. A Feminist Approach to Understanding Women’s Oppression-Perpetuating Choices ................................................................................................................................................. 44
- In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self ...................................................... 46
- A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and Other Social Identities .................................................................... 48
- Feminist Experiences Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations .................................................... 52
- Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from the Hunger Games to Campus Rape ................................................. 54
- Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights ............................................................................................................ 56
- Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice ............................................................................... 57
- Contributors .................................................................................................................................................. 60

## Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

- Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy .......................................................................................................... 61
- From the Editor .............................................................................................................................................. 61
- Submission Guidelines ................................................................................................................................... 62
- The Second Annual Latinx Philosophy Conference ....................................................................................... 62
- The 2017 Society for Mexican American Philosophy Conference ............................................................. 63
- What the “Nina” Film Controversy Shows about African Heritage in the Americas ........................................ 64
- Postcolonial Theory: Much Ado about Nothing/Noting? .............................................................................. 67
- Latinidad, Multiplicity, and the Time of Identification ................................................................................... 70
- Contributor Bios ............................................................................................................................................. 74

## Indigenous Philosophy

- Indigenous Philosophy ................................................................................................................................. 75
- From the Editor .............................................................................................................................................. 75
- From the Chair ............................................................................................................................................... 76
- A Committee of Change ................................................................................................................................. 76
- Submission Guidelines ................................................................................................................................... 79
- Prayer for First Day Teaching American Indian Lit... 79
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When Listening Isn't Enough: Settler Denial and Epistemic Injustice</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips for Teaching Native American Philosophy</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus for Philosophy 336 Metaphysics: Native American Philosophy</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting Trans: The Marriage Equality Backlash</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting the Inadequate Resistance to House Bill 2 at a Private University in North Carolina</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potty Humors: Melancholic and Choleric Presidents, Sclerotic Voters, and the Federal Courts on Title IX in School Bathrooms</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Papers</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and Computers</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Editor</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Chair</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Papers</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics as Syntax</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Biological to Synthetic Neurorobotics Approaches to Understanding the Structure Essential to Consciousness (Part 3)</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Engines Contemplating Themselves: A Conversation with S. L. Thaler</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and the Black Experience</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Editors</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission Guidelines</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and Its History: Six Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Philosophy That Is Ancient&quot;: Teaching Ancient Philosophy in Context</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching about the Existence of God</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering the Classroom as a Safe Space</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Happiness and Goodness</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editors</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books Received</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philosophical Treatise of William H. Ferris: Selected Readings from The African Abroad or, His Evolution in Western Civilization</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Editor</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberry Madness</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Who Don’t Give a Damn</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifications Grading: A Useful Two-Year College Alternative</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Summer Institute for Community College Philosophy Professors</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Papers</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Philosophy</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Editors</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission Guidelines</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and Its History: Six Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Philosophy That Is Ancient”: Teaching Ancient Philosophy in Context</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching about the Existence of God</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering the Classroom as a Safe Space</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Happiness and Goodness</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editors</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books Received</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 Presidential Election: The Capitalist State and the Political Economy of Democracy</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the Editors

B. K. Matilal: The Past and Future of the Study of Indian Philosophy

Ethan Mills
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Prasanta S. Bandyopadhyay
Montana State University

To readers familiar with the contemporary study of Indian philosophy, B. K. Matilal (1935–1991) needs little introduction. Through his tireless promotion of the philosophical riches of classical India, which was rooted in classical texts and traditions while at the same time forging connections to contemporary (primarily Anglo-American) philosophy, he became one of the most influential scholars of Indian philosophy of the late twentieth century (along with a handful of others such as J. N. Mohanty and Karl Potter).

Matilal was also a creative thinker in his own right, as exemplified by his intricate defense of direct realism in the context of a sympathetic treatment of philosophical skepticism, his nuanced understanding of ethics informed by careful readings of literature, and his articulation of a culturally informed ethical pluralism as a response to relativism (to give just a few examples). He continues to inspire philosophers who feel that a background in what he called “history of philosophy in the global sense” can be a vital resource for original philosophical work.

Matilal’s education was, like his later work, a mixture of Western and Indian elements. He studied Navya Nyāya (“New Logic”) with several pandits (scholars trained in traditional Indian philosophical systems) while completing his M.A. from Calcutta University. He eventually moved to Harvard, where he studied with Daniel Ingalls and W. V. O. Quine, earning his Ph.D. in 1965. After teaching at the University of Toronto in the early 1970s, Matilal was appointed Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College in 1976, a post he held until his untimely death from cancer in 1991. (Further biographical details can be found in the articles below, especially those by Ganeri, Hayes, Ram-Prasad, and Bilimoria).

The purpose of the present issue of the APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies is to honor the life and work of B. K. Matilal by continuing conversations—both complimentary and critical—concerning his extraordinary influence on the direction of the study of Indian philosophy both during his lifetime and in the quarter century since his death. A recent issue of the journal Sophia has a similar theme (see volume 55, issue 4), and we direct readers to that issue as well. We hope this issue of the newsletter will complement the Sophia issue.

Our first contribution, by Jonardon Ganeri, begins with Matilal’s biography and how this shaped his thought on issues from logic to cross-cultural understanding, all of which made him “an exemplary Indian intellectual.” Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad’s contribution explores some of the deeper cultural issues involved in Matilal’s work and their continuing relevance today, especially with regard to the relationship between Indian and Western philosophy and the place of Indian philosophy in the Western academy. The contribution from Richard Hayes is a warm, personal reflection on what Matilal was like as a philosopher and as a human being. Purushottama Bilimoria’s contribution focuses on what he calls “three dogmas” of Matilal: direct realism, lingophilia, and dharma ethics (although Bilimoria’s intentions are more expository than deeply critical).

Slightly more critical contributions are provided by Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty, Ethan Mills, and Kisor K. Chakrabarti. Chakraborty wonders whether Matilal’s efforts unfairly use Western thought as the standard by which we should understand Indian philosophy, while Mills questions whether we might consider approaches beyond Matilal’s typical classical Indian-contemporary analytic comparisons. Chakrabarti looks into whether Matilal has slightly overlooked the contributions of ethics in the Nyāya school through a detailed discussion of classical Nyāya texts.

The contribution from Anand Jayprakash Vaidya defends Matilal’s approach from criticism by noting that “analytic” can refer to a methodology, which is quite readily found within classical Indian philosophy. Lastly, the contribution from Neil Sims considers one way in which we might expand Matilal’s project to include first-person, phenomenological methods such as those provided by the Yoga school, methods that Sims argues should not be seen as irrational.

We hope this issue will continue the kinds of conversations Matilal wanted to have about deep philosophical issues in logic, epistemology, and ethics, but also about cultural issues surrounding relations between East and West in our contemporary, postcolonial world. We hope that the essays in this volume will encourage members of our discipline
to develop an appreciation of India’s rich and vast philosophical heritage. The proper representation of Indian and other non-Western traditions within the discipline would be the best way to honor the life and legacy of B. K. Matilal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The editors wish to thank Erin Shepherd, all of our contributors, and our anonymous reviewer for helping to make this issue possible.

NOTES

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

GOAL OF THE NEWSLETTER ON ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS
The APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies is sponsored by the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies to report on the philosophical work of Asian and Asian-American philosophers, to report on new work in Asian philosophy, and to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of importance to Asian and Asian-American philosophers and those engaged with Asian and Asian-American philosophy. We encourage a diversity of views and topics within this broad rubric. None of the varied philosophical views provided by authors of newsletter articles necessarily represents the views of any or all the members of the Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies, including the editor(s) of the newsletter. The committee and the newsletter are committed to advancing Asian and Asian-American philosophical scholarships and bringing this work and this community to the attention of the larger philosophical community; we do not endorse any particular approach to Asian or Asian-American philosophy.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
1) Purpose: The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of Asians and Asian Americans and their philosophy and to make the resources of Asians and Asian-American philosophy available to a larger philosophical community. The newsletter presents discussions of recent developments in Asians and Asian-American philosophy (including, for example, both modern and classical East-Asian philosophy, both modern and classical South Asian philosophy, and Asians and Asian Americans doing philosophy in its various forms), related work in other disciplines, literature overviews, reviews of the discipline as a whole, timely book reviews, and suggestions for both spreading and improving the teaching of Asian philosophy in the current curriculum. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies. One way the dissemination of knowledge of the relevant areas occurs is by holding highly visible, interactive sessions on Asian philosophy at the American Philosophical Association’s three annual divisional meetings. Potential authors should follow the submission guidelines below:

   i) Please submit essays electronically to the editor(s). Articles submitted to the newsletter should be limited to ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA submission guidelines.

   ii) All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. Each submission shall be sent to two referees. Reports will be shared with authors. References should follow The Chicago Manual Style.

   iii) If the paper is accepted, each author is required to sign a copyright transfer form, available on the APA website, prior to publication.

2) Book reviews and reviewers: If you have published a book that you consider appropriate for review in the newsletter, please ask your publisher to send the editor(s) a copy of your book. Each call for papers may also include a list of books for possible review. To volunteer to review books (or some specific book), kindly send the editor(s) a CV and letter of interest mentioning your areas of research and teaching.

3) Where to send papers/reviews: Please send all articles, comments, reviews, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Prasanta Bandyopadhyay (psb@montana.edu).

4) Submission deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1, and submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

5) Guest editorship: It is possible that one or more members of the Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies could act as guest editors for one of the issues of the newsletter depending on their expertise in the field. To produce a high-quality newsletter, one of the co-editors could even come from outside the members of the committee depending on his/her area of research interest.
ARTICLES

An Exemplary Indian Intellectual: Bimal Krishna Matilal

Jonardon Ganeri
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, ABU DHABI

Editors’ Note: The following paper originally appeared as Chapter 15 of Identity as Reasoned Choice: A South Asian Perspective on the Reach and Resources of Public and Practical Reason in Shaping Individual Identities (New York: Continuum Books, 2012; Paperback: London: Bloomsbury, 2014). We are grateful to the author and the publisher for their permission to reprint this paper here.

Bimal Krishna Matilal is an exemplary case of a modern Indian intellectual whose identity is fashioned through an engagement with and re-appropriation of India’s intellectual past. I will first sketch his intellectual biography and then examine the range and significance of his work. Matilal became the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College in 1976, a position that had earlier been held by the renowned Indian philosopher and later President of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Born in 1935 in Joynagar, a small town in West Bengal, he left for Kolkata at the age of fourteen, where he studied many subjects, including mathematics, and was persuaded to take up the study of Navya-Nyāya—the “new reason” of early modern India—by Gaurinath Sastri, who, he said, “encouraged me to enter the dense and thorny world of Navya-nyāya when I was considering more favourably the sunny world of Kāvya [poetry] and Alamkāra [poetics].” He studied with Anantakumar Tarkatirtha and, while doing his M.A. at Calcutta University, with Taranatha Tarkatirtha. In 1957 he was appointed as lecturer in the Government Sanskrit College, continuing to study Nyāya with eminent pandits including Kalipada Tarkacarya and Madhusudana Nyayacarya. Under their guidance he completed the traditional degree of Tarkatirtha, Master of Logic and Argument, in 1962. Such was his enthusiasm that there are even rumors that he went to his wedding with a volume of Navya-Nyāya in his pocket.

For some time prior to this, Matilal had been in correspondence with Daniel Ingalls, who suggested to him the possibility of moving to Harvard in order to acquaint himself with the work being done by W. V. O. Quine in philosophical and mathematical logic. Breaking with traditional patterns Matilal decided to follow this advice, completing his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1965 having attended Quine’s classes and continuing his studies in mathematical logic with Dagfinn Fallesdal. In his doctoral thesis, The Navya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation, published by Harvard University Press in 1968, he gives voice to his growing conviction, emerging from this exposure to contemporary logic, that “India should not, indeed cannot, be left out of any general study of the history of logic and philosophy.” This was to be the first statement of a thesis to the defense of which he devoted his academic life, that our philosophical understanding of the fundamental problems of logic and philosophy is enriched if the ideas of the Indian scholars are brought to bear in the modern discussion. His further researches into Navya-Nyāya, as well as into Indian theory more generally, were published in a range of path-breaking books, including Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis, Logic, Language and Reality, and (posthumously) The Character of Logic in India.

It was without doubt very fitting that a conference should have been held in Kolkata in 2007 to commemorate Matilal’s enormous contribution to the field. When, fifty-five years before, D. H. H. Ingalls published his Materials for the Study of Navya-Nyāya Logic, what he managed to do above all else was to read the logical theory of Navya-Nyāya with the benefit of contemporary work in logic, especially the work of his Harvard colleague W. V. O. Quine. He demonstrated, simply but brilliantly, that the distinctions, techniques, and concepts that had been developed by the Naiyāyikas (i.e., followers of Nyāya) were not mere works of hair-splitting sophistry, as they had appeared to the logically untutored Indological eye, but were rather sophisticated achievements in logical theory. Before Ingalls, one of the few people who could be said to have achieved something similar was Stanisław Schayer, the brilliant student of the Polish logician Łukasiewicz, who tried to reinterpret the early Nyāya theory of inference according to modern logic much as Łukasiewicz had sought to reinterpret the Aristotelian syllogism. Ingalls was himself very much aided in his work, I should add, by the doctoral thesis of the Calcutta scholar Saileswar Sen, published from Wageningen in 1924 under the title A Study on Mathurānātha’s Tattvacintāmaṇi-rahasya. Saileswar Sen states that “It was in 1920, when I was a student of the University of Calcutta, that I made up my mind to prosecute research studies in Hindu Philosophy in a Dutch University,” a decision that led him eventually to Amsterdam, where he worked under the supervision of the great Vaiśeṣika scholar B. Faddégon. Another scholar from Amsterdam, Frits Staal, wrote a sequence of breakthrough articles in Navya-Nyāya logic in the early 1960s, now collected in his book Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics. Staal supervised the doctoral work of Cornelis Goekoop, which resulted in an important publication, The Logic of Invariable Concomitance in the Tattvacintāmaṇi. Because of this link between Holland and Kolkata, forged by a shared devotion to the study of logic, it is perhaps not a coincidence that Matilal chose to publish his second book with the Dutch publisher Mouton.

Ingalls’s inspirational approach drew Matilal to Harvard, and I do not think it would be very controversial to say that Matilal soon showed himself to have a finer logical acumen even than Ingalls himself (Ingalls by this time having already returned from Navya-Nyāya to the “sunny world” of poetics and the translation of poetry). Matilal’s interest was in logic per se, as a global human intellectual achievement, and in Indian logic and Navya-Nyāya logic insofar as they were very significant but poorly studied components of that achievement. Indian theory was then, and I believe remains today, a tremendously exciting area for someone to work in who is by temperament a philosopher, that is, not so much interested in the history of ideas as in the ideas themselves, in the potential and possibilities they can lead to. For philosophers in the past have often had ideas or thought in ways that did not enter the mainstream of historical development, and a return
to those neglected pathways in the history of thought is sometimes intellectually enriching as nothing else can be.

To give an example of what I mean, one has only to consider the dominance of Aristotle’s logic on the development of logic in the West, and to think, for instance, how the Stoics are now admired for their anticipations of the propositional calculus. If many other forks in the history of logic in the West were only briefly ventured along, which in many cases can be returned to now with profit, how much more so will that be true of an entire non-Western history of logic, branches, trunk-roads, and all? So when Matilal wrote about the relationship between Aristotelian and Nyāya logic, as he did in both his Logic, Language and Reality and in his The Character of Logic in India, he displayed very little interest in the question that would intrigue a historian of ideas, the question of diffusion or possible historical influence. Matilal’s interest was in the philosophical relationship between Greek and Indian logic; indeed, he was perhaps the first to demonstrate conclusively that there are structural differences between the two that go deeper than contingent differences in formulation or emphasis. Matilal’s insistence that Indian logic is to be thought of as operating with what he calls a “property-location” model of sentential structure rather than a subject-predicate model has wide-ranging implications that are still being worked out.

A similar spirit can be seen at work in Matilal’s groundbreaking work on the informal logic to be found in the debating manuals of the Naiyāyikas, Buddhists, Medics, and Jainas, in comparison with each other and with works such as Aristotle’s Topics and Sophistici Elenchi. Here I would highlight in particular Matilal’s defense and rehabilitation of the so-called vitamāṇā “refutation-only” style of debate, in which the proponent advances no thesis at all but merely attacks the opponent’s counter-thesis. Matilal simultaneously recognized that such debating positions have an important philosophical value in the construction of skeptical arguments, and offered a defense with the help of speech-act theory and the idea of illocutionary negation. In many ways this epitomizes Matilal’s approach, which resembles the spirit in which modern philosophers have sought to reinterpret the early Greeks. So when Matilal writes about Nāgārjuna’s caṭuṣkoṭi or “tetralemma,” his question is not “Where did this formula come from?” but “How is it logically possibly to deny all four lemmas?” This approach is one which he himself describes at various times as a “re-thinking of the ancient and medieval Indian philosophers in contemporary terms,” a reconceptualization and reappropriation of historical ideas which was seen by him as a prerequisite of all creative philosophical thinking.

In his study of Buddhist logic, Matilal again both saw the philosophical importance and asked the critical philosophical questions, challenging the theory with problems it had not previously had to address. Matilal was not the first to notice, for example, that Dinnāga’s idea of a “triple-condition” or trīrūpā seems threatened with redundancy problems, but to him we owe the distinction between an epistemic and a realistic reading of the conditions, as well as a formal solution to the redundancy problem. To Matilal is due also the idea that the Buddhist use of a double negation in its semantic theory incorporates two different negations, which he called “nominally bound” and “sententially bound,” thereby avoiding a triviality objection. In the last few years there have been several workshops and conferences on Buddhist logic and philosophy of language, and it has seemed evident to me that the trajectory of research over this period has been shaped very greatly by Matilal’s framing of the issues.

Something similar is true in the field of Jaina logic, where again Matilal asked the philosophical question “Is Jaina logic paracomplete?” a question that has generated a lively debate in recent years.

Many of the issues that earlier Indian logicians had wrestled with resurface, sometimes in a rarified form, in the early modern system of Navya-Nyāya. Matilal’s work on negation in Navya-Nyāya, both his book The Navya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation, and his article “Double Negation in Navya-Nyāya” (appropriately first published in a festschrift for Ingalls), are now standard works. Matilal’s “Q” notation, which formed the basis for the later idea of a “property-location” model, has been the subject of much discussion, and Matilal’s conjecture that Navya-Nyāya logic is best understood as a three-valued logic is an ongoing topic of debate. The field of Navya-Nyāya studies has been slower to take off than some of the other areas of research Matilal’s work has opened up, and this is, of course, both an irony and a pity. But with the gradual publication of better editions and translations, and with the continuing search for appropriate tools and concepts from modern theory to assist in its interpretation, I would confidently predict that Matilal’s work on philosophical theory in early modern South Asia may yet well prove to be one of his most enduring legacies.

**A CONVERSATION AMONG EQUALS**

The articles in Matilal’s two volumes of Collected Essays reveal much about the extraordinary depth and quality of his philosophical engagement with India. His reputation as one of the leading exponents of Indian logic and epistemology is, of course, reflected here. Yet those who know of him through his work in this field, as I have just described it, may be surprised to discover the range of his other work. His writings deal, in general, with every aspect of intellectual India: from analysis of the arguments of the classical philosophers to evaluation of the role of philosophy in classical Indian society, from diagnosis of Western perceptions of Indian philosophy to analysis of the thought of past Indian intellectuals like Bankimchandra and Radhakrishnan. Matilal, strikingly, is willing to look in a great range of sources for philosophical theory. As well as the writings of the classical Indian philosophical schools, he uses material from the grammatical literature, the epics, law books, medical literature, poetics, and literary criticism. Matilal argues that it is only in the study of such diversity of literature that one can discover the mechanisms of the internal criticism to which a dynamic culture necessarily subjects itself in the process of revising and reinterpreting its values and the meaning of its fundamental concepts, and to be sure that one’s own evaluation and criticism is immersed in, and not detached from, the practices and perceptions of the culture (vol. 1, ch. 28). He also observes that a selective attention to particular aspects of Indian
culture is part of what has generated a set of myths and misperceptions about Indian philosophy, notably the popular idea that Indian philosophy is primarily spiritual and intuitive, in contrast to "the rational West." Explicitly recognizing this risk of bias produced by selective attention, Matilal extends as widely as possible the observational basis from which his conclusions are drawn.

While his work always appeals to classical Indian sources, Matilal's treatment is neither historical nor philological. He does not engage in the reconstruction of the original Ur-texts, nor in descriptions of the intellectual development of a person or the evolution and chronology of a school. Instead, Matilal approaches the Indian materials with a methodology that is explicitly comparative-philosophical. In one essay, he describes the aims of this approach in the following terms: "The purpose of the Indian philosopher today who chooses to work on the classical systems is to interpret, and thereby offer a medium where philosophers . . . , both Indian and Western, may converse" (vol. 1, 356). Behind this modest statement lay a bold intellectual program, a reinterpretation of the relationship between contemporary philosophy and the classical cultures.

The history of Indian philosophical studies in the twentieth century has indeed been a history of comparisons, comparisons between Indian philosophy on the one hand, and whichever philosophical system was in vogue on the other. British idealism, logical positivism, neo-Kantian, and ordinary language philosophy have all been used as counterpart points for a comparison with Indian theory. Matilal himself drew mainly on the developments in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Is Matilal's work, then, simply the latest in a long line of fashionable but transient counterpoints for a comparison with Indian theory? Matilal himself responded to this criticism, arguing that if nothing else, his work was a much needed "corrective," a way of displacing prevalent myths about the irrational and mystical nature of the Indian philosophers. More importantly, he criticized early comparativists for misunderstanding the nature and extent of the problem they were addressing. His predecessors were unclear first of all about the purpose of making the comparison, and in consequence rarely got further than merely juxtaposing doctrines, making priority claims in the history of ideas, or, at best, arguing that a doctrine acquires prima facie support if it can be shown to have arisen independently in different places. They could supply, however, no criterion for determining when a point of comparison is significant and when merely superficial. Indeed, the very existence of such a criterion might be cast in doubt by J. N. Mohanty's observation that, in practice, "just when an exciting point of agreement is identified and pursued, surprising differences erupt; and just when you have the feeling that no two ideas could be further apart, identities catch you off guard." Comparison is always a process of simplification, in which allegedly "accidental" differences in formulation or context are eliminated, but without a criterion for distinguishing the accidental from the essential, the comparison lacks proper grounding. Another objection to the early approach is that the Indian theories were mostly treated as the objects of the comparison, to be placed in correspondence with some subset of Western theory, an approach which necessarily denied to them the possibility of original content or of making a contribution to an ongoing investigation.

For Matilal, on the other hand, the goal was never merely to compare. His program was informed, first and foremost, by a deep humanism, a conviction that the classical thinkers should not be thought of as mysterious, exotic, or tradition-bound creatures, but as rational agents trying to understand their cultures and societies with as little prejudice as possible. "We may discover in this way that in the past we were not all gods or spiritual dolls, but we were at least humans with all their glories and shortcomings, their ambitions and aspirations, their reasons and emotions" (vol. 1, 376). It is this humanism in Matilal's approach that is brought out in his claim that the comparativist should create the means whereby philosophers of different ages and societies may converse. The point is to establish the prerequisites for a debate or an interaction, something that can sustain, in Amartya Sen's apt phrase, an "intellectual connecting" between philosophers of different cultures.

The basis for such an interaction is, for Matilal, a shared commitment to a set of evaluative norms on reasoned argument and the assessment of evidence, rather than to any particular shared body of doctrine. A little like the adhyakṣa or "supervisor" in a traditional Indian debate, the comparativist's role in Matilal's conception is to set out and oversee those ground rules adherence to which is a precondition for the conversation to take place. Matilal's field of expertise was analytical philosophy and so he sought to open the conversation between the classical Indian philosophers and his contemporary analytical colleagues. He succeeded in charting the philosophical terrain, identifying the salient groups of texts appropriate for analytical inquiry (most notably, the pramāṇa-sāstra), and pinpointing the topics in which Indian theory can be expected to make a substantial contribution.

Matilal stresses that it is essential for the modern comparativist to have, in addition to sound linguistic and philological skills, a good understanding of "what counts as a philosophical problem in the classical texts" (vol. 1, 356). How does one know, when reading a classical text, what is to count as a philosophical problem? Broadly speaking, there have been two sorts of response to this question: universalism and relativism. Universalism, in its extreme form, is the doctrine that philosophical problems are global, that diverse philosophical cultures are addressing the same questions, and that the differences between them are ones of style rather than content. A more moderate universalism claims only that there is a single logical space of philosophical problems, in which different cultures explore overlapping but not necessarily coextensive regions. Universalists believe that there is a philosophia perennis, a global philosophy, whose nature will be revealed by a synthesis or amalgamation of the ideas of East and West. The alternative, relativism, states in its extreme form that philosophical problems are entirely culture-specific, that each tradition has its own private conceptual scheme, incommensurable with all others. A more moderate relativism permits a "notional" commensuration of the ideas of diverse cultures, but insists that the similarities are in style alone, and not in content. The doctrines of the East can be made to look familiar to a Western thinker, similar
enough indeed to seem intelligible; but in substance, they are quite different.

A COMMON GROUND?
Matilal unambiguously rejects relativism, and he offers both a critique and an alternative. The alternative is most clearly formulated in his later analysis of relativism in moral theory. He formulates there a thesis of “minimal universal morality,” the doctrine that there are certain basic and universally applicable values, a “minimal moral fabric underlying all societies and all groups of human beings” (vol. 2, 260). The minimal universal morals are values that attach to the “naked man” stripped of specific cultural context; they are perhaps the basic capacities and needs associated with one’s position as a human being in a society. These are values that the comparativist can identify, if he approaches the other culture with humanity and imagination (vol. 1, chs. 24, 25). The existence of such raw human values is consistent with there being substantive and even incommensurable local differences, and for this reason Matilal regarded his position as combining pluralism with moral realism. The relativist, mistaking the local, context-specific values of a given society with the totality of its values, overlooks the existence of a commonality which can serve as the basis of real confrontation, interaction, and exchange between cultures: “To transform two monologues into a dialogue we need a common ground, some common thought patterns between the participants, as well as a willingness to listen to each other” (vol. 2, 163).

At the same time, it is the local, culture-specific values that characterize or individuate a given culture, distinguish it from others. The characteristic values of a culture, religion, or society are often the interesting and important things to explore, but it is the existence of a common framework that makes it possible to explore them: “I do not say that different Indian religions talk simply about the same thing in different languages and idioms. . . . Rather, I would say that they talk about different things while standing on a common ground” (vol. 2, 174). Underlying Matilal’s humane pluralism is a bold recognition that “human nature is manifold and is expressed through diverse values, ways of thinking, acting and feeling” (vol. 2, 387), that global human values can coexist with culture-specific constraints, that genuinely conflicting values are possible, and that they are possible because of the existence of a common set of values.

The idea has a specific application in Matilal’s approach to comparative philosophy. Here the common ground consists in norms governing rational argument. Any conversation between Indian and Western philosophers depends on there being a minimum of agreement, or at least a limit on difference, about what counts as a rational argument or a well-conducted investigation into a philosophical problem. Rationality in a minimal sense is itself a universal value. When he has identified the idioms for these shared principles of rational argument, a comparativist has a common ground from which to explore differences. Matilal’s pluralism acknowledges what is right about both universalism and relativism, without being reducible to either. His writings are “marvellous conversations of mankind.”12 between Sextus Empiricus and Sañjaya, Strawson and Udayana, Bhārtṛhari and Quine.

Matilal sought in his work to bring classical India into the philosophical mainstream, thereby “transforming the exile into companion.”13 If the Sanskrit philosophical literature had indeed been excluded from the philosophical curriculum, it was because of a myth, the myth that there are two philosophical cultures, one Eastern, spiritual, atavistic, the other Western, rational, materialistic, cultures having incommensurable values, doctrines, and standards. As H. H. Price, while Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford, put the matter: “We seem to be confronted with two entirely different worlds of thought, so different that there is not even the possibility of disagreement between them. The one looks outward, and is concerned with Logic and with the presuppositions of scientific knowledge; the other inward, into the ‘deep yet dazzling darkness’ of the mystical consciousness.”14 Matilal ruefully comments, in a slightly different context, that in this strange mixture of fact and imagination, it is as if the Westerner is set on conquering the other (foreign lands, the material world), and the Indian on conquering himself (his inner world) (vol. 2, 274). In any case, the effect of the division was to deny to “Orientals” the status of being people-like-us: “The Oriental man is either subhuman or superhuman, never human. He is either a snake-charmer, a native, an outlandish species, or else a Bhagawan, a Maharishi, a Mahārāja, an exotic person, a Prabhupāda. The implication of the presupposition is that there cannot be any horizontal relationship between East and West” (vol. 1, 373).

Matilal regarded the very idea that there are independently bounded and closed philosophical cultures as a dogma of Orientalism, albeit a self-sustaining one which has served the historical interests of Indian and Western philosophers alike. Mysticism and spirituality, the properties projected onto the East, do not fit the Western self-image as rational and scientific: “It is as is if our Western man is embarrassed to acknowledge anything that is even remotely irrational or mystical as part of his indigenous heritage” (vol. 2, 273). So streams of thought such as Neoplatonism have been marginalized in the standard history of Western philosophy. In no less measure, Indian authors like Radhakrishnan have wished to downplay the rationalist streams in the Indian cultures in their desire to represent Indian culture as distinctively spiritual and intuitive, a desire at one with the nationalist search for an autonomous Indian identity (vol. 1, ch. 26). Anthropologists and “colonial liberals” have also found the relativist dogma convenient, for it absolved them of the need to make value judgments on the practices of the society being governed or observed. The platitude, however, is a myth: “The fact of the matter is that materialism and spiritualism, rationality and irrationalism-cum-intuitionism, are monopolies of neither India nor the West” (vol. 1, 428). Matilal’s argument against the dogma (and, indeed, against other expressions of cultural relativism) is that it is impossible to individuate cultures in any such way as would give them sharp boundaries: cultures are always mixing and merging with each other, identities are being enriched and revised by adoption and absorption (vol. 2, chs. 18, 19). Indeed, it is for Matilal the very mutability of cultures that shows real confrontation between them to be possible. If relativism were true, the only confrontation that could occur would be notional, and would have no impact on the values of either culture.
Matilal’s insistence that cultures do not have unchanging, immutable essences anticipates Amartya Sen’s denial of the existence of “cultural boundaries” in the reach of reasons; even what seem to be the most characteristic and embedded values of a culture are subject to gradual trade-offs, rejections, and modifications in the course of time.

Matilal, then, as an intellectual had no desire simply to be a scholar of Indian intellectual history. He regarded himself as a philosopher in a cosmopolitan sense, a member of a global intellectual community. He was also very much a situated interpreter: someone for whom the engagement with India’s past was an important ingredient in the fashioning of his own intellectual identity as a philosopher. Nourishing his philosophical imagination with ideas made available to him by this past, he was perfectly able to offer a critique of contemporary analytical theory when appropriate; and it is for this reason that it is a somewhat facile misunderstanding of Matilal as a thinker to suppose that he was simply using analytical philosophy as a standard with which to evaluate Indian theory. It was through a retrieval of Indian theory that Matilal fashioned himself as a contemporary intellectual; and, as a modern intellectual, he was able to criticize both Indian and Western theory alike.

NOTES


**Philosophy, Indian and Western: Some Thoughts from Bimal Matilal**

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad
Lancaster University

In 1992, about a year after Bimal Krishna Matilal passed away, I tried to assess in a paper for the Sanskrit Traditions in the Modern World seminar, then held at Newcastle, his contributions in comparison (or rather, contrast) with S. Radhakrishnan, through the lens of their having held the Spalding Chair at Oxford University. I present here some of what I said about Matilal’s work, in the context of the challenges that faced him. Twenty-five years on, I have added a few things, and said some things differently, but I will leave it to the reader to think about how much those challenges remain, or have changed since that time. I think, in any case, that it is fair to say that a generation of scholars that is prepared to talk of “Indian Philosophy” has sought to take as given some of the very basic premises that Matilal had felt he had to articulate and defend.

In what follows, I want to talk about three interrelated aspects of Matilal’s project. First, in the face of the attitude that “philosophy” is a rational enterprise uniquely found in the history of Western culture, instead of granting that premise and claiming that what is called Indian philosophy had something else to offer (as Radhakrishnan had done), it should be demonstrated that the questions and methods of philosophy are found equally in Indian traditions. Second, to do so with Western philosophy in this intercultural way is not to give up working in and through Indian traditions of thought, but rather to do so as it necessarily needs to be done now, in the conditions of the present. And third, it is no longer possible to continue making a claim to uniqueness when different cultures have come to mingle so much that philosophy is irreducibly intercultural.

**INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AS COMPARABLE TO WESTERN PHILOSOPHY**

Throughout his academic career in the West, Matilal took himself to be working against the cultural assumption that whatever could be called “philosophy” could only be traced back to the Greeks. In particular, of course, he framed his intellectual activity as engagement with analytic philosophy. His starting point was the basic claim that the work of analysis was indisputably present in the Indian tradition, although he presented it as if he had only a modest proposal: “If two different streams of philosophical ideas that originated and developed quite independently of each other are found to be grappling with the same or similar problems . . . this fact is by itself interesting enough for further exploration,” he says in the introduction to an anthology emphatically entitled Analytic Philosophy in
**Comparative Perspective.** What this indicated was his determination to treat Indian thought as including those problems, responses, and procedures that could rightfully fall under the definition of the discipline of “philosophy.” In this he wanted to break away from the dominant nineteenth- and twentieth-century view (as we know, still stubbornly persistent in the twenty-first century academy) that Indian thought was primarily “religious.” Towards the end of his life, his tenacious resistance to this view was recognized. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen pointed out that “This [i.e., the conventional] view of the nature of Indian philosophy is rarely challenged. Bimal Matilal, one of the few major challengers, puts the problem thus: in answer to the critics that he has been ‘leaning over backwards’ to ‘show the analytic nature of Indian philosophy: ‘Too often the term Indian philosophy is identified with a subject that is presented as mystical and non-argumentative, that is at best poetic and at worst dogmatic. A corrective is long overdue.’”

In doing so, he challenged the authenticity and the basis of this dismissive view. Radhakrishnan had not denied the substance of the view that Indian thought was mystical and intuitive, but sought to show that its value was immeasurably greater than the rationalism of the West. Matilal never even implicitly accepted the exclusion of the Indian traditions from philosophical activity through such a radically alternative evaluation. His argument was that Indian thought had standards of rationality and rigor every bit as discriminating as—and in fundamental ways similar to—what had been claimed for Western thought.

It must be pointed out that this dismissal of Indian traditions of thought from the discipline of “philosophy” was hardly ever argued for; it was simply asserted as being unworthy. In insisting on the rigor of Indian thought, Matilal was moving it on to the same ground as Western philosophy: he hoped to force those who would deem Indian thought unworthy of the name of philosophy to move from assertion of that claim to arguments for it. (Alas, he did not realize until the later years of his life that he had not planned for a different response altogether: not any assertion against the status of Indian philosophy at all, but a complete and utter refusal to entertain altogether the very thought of its possible existence in the academy. Arguably, the generation of Indian philosophers since has been no better at coming up with a strategy to counter that cunning plan. . . .)

Matilal, then, was optimistic in his methodology. He hoped that by bringing Western analytic issues and methods to bear upon classical Indian texts, he would get the traditions to communicate. He would work on the boundaries of cultural identity, enacting the very nature of a future global philosophy. Even as Radhakrishnan disclaimed any assumption of India’s monopoly over knowledge, he nevertheless wanted to present the uniqueness of India to the world. When one asserts the uniqueness of one’s tradition, one is less engaged in the details of another tradition, for one must only reveal that one is not ignorant of it (Radhakrishnan had studied Western philosophy at Madras University and, as is well known, identified Absolute Idealism as the West’s nearest approach to his interpretation of Advaita Vedānta). But to deny the uniqueness of another tradition—as Matilal did—is to enter into it and function in it as one does in one’s own tradition, thereby demonstrating one’s claim that they are sufficiently similar for claims of uniqueness to be wrong. This is where Matilal’s work was significant: beyond familiarity with both canonical early modern and influential contemporary Western thought, he functioned with a mastery of the procedures of analytic philosophy. His approach to Sanskrit texts never fell short of scholarly rigor, and yet he made it seem entirely natural that one could think across from some intricate passage in a Navya-Nyāya text to a consideration of John Locke. He set out to do this because of his conviction about the nature of Indian thought. “The vocabulary of pramāṇa-sāstra [the study of the means of knowledge] implies a universe of discourse that not only is commonly shared by all the different schools of Indian philosophy but also tends to be global in meaning. If we use ‘logic’ in a broad and liberal sense, then, . . . it would be difficult to talk about any inherent distinction between Indian and Western logic.”

**STILL “INDIAN” IF “PHILOSOPHY”?**

It could be (and has been) asked whether this is a revisionary and perhaps artificial and ahistorical view of Indian thought. Such a question is misplaced, although understandable. In considering Matilal and Indian thought, two issues should be disambiguated. One was his approach to the history of thought, the other his interpretation of it in the present. Of course, the former informed the latter—he never denied the necessity of philology, only sought to make it a tool for his philosophical inquiry. Naturally, this required a hermeneutic shift from the discipline of Indology, and he showed this in the way he situated the context of the textual past within terms relevant to the enterprise of the present. Thus he talked of the “seriousness and professionalism” of the classical Indian thinkers and commented that one “cannot but admire greatly their intellectual honesty and professional sophistication.”

The contemporary idea of professionalism therefore informs his reading of the past, but to say it is anachronistic is already to fail to appreciate that the hermeneutic shift from Indology to philosophy (a shift apparently permitted freely to philosophers of the Western traditions) has already been made. But this is a legitimate undertaking, his attempt for a Gadamerian “fusion of horizons,” past and present. This fusion is not automatically present in a tradition; it is not even automatically available if one reads the texts of the traditions. It requires a readiness to create novel conceptions of the implications of the texts as well as of the nature of the interpreter’s intellectual presuppositions. (So it is not as if an Indologist reading philosophical texts text-critically and historically is not starting from a set of hermeneutic prejudices, too. But the philosophical reading of these texts is not only to operate from out of the inevitable historical condition of the scholar, but imaginatively to reconstruct the significance and functions of that condition.) Matilal was well aware of the fact that he was taking these hermeneutic liberties of the imagination: “Too often, Indian philosophy has been considered (very wrongly) as being ‘soft’ and tender-minded. . . . An emphasis on the other side has been attempted here to correct this heavily one-sided picture. What better way is there to accomplish this than by initiating a dialogue with...
modern analytical philosophers in a way that would try to transcend the language-barrier?10

In a slightly different context (discussing ethical norms), Matilal comments that “a conscious individual belonging to a particular culture may self-consciously be able to articulate the . . . norms embedded in his or her culture. In the process she would have to distance herself from her culture or community and develop an internal critique for looking across boundaries in order to have the real options derivable from her knowledge and acquaintance of other cultures.”11 Of course, this fusion of horizons is complex for those working on Indian philosophy: it is not merely of the past and present of a supposedly single culture (although, as scholarship on such areas as the role of Arabic texts in the history of “Western” philosophy has shown, the singularity is an imaginative act of forgetting, not a historical truth). The “present” is already non-singular, already a time in which awareness of the other is unavoidable and ignorance of the other indefensible. This attitude is implicit in Matilal’s bold engagement with Western philosophy.

There are essentially two criticisms of the Matilalian approach. One is the primarily philological approach of a certain—often dominant—strand of academic Indology. This discipline sees the ideas of the texts only in terms of their historical context, leaving their content without life and value today.12 Indian philosophy is therefore dismissed as either historically impossible or disciplinarily incoherent. Matilal did not particularly engage with this, primarily because his traditional training in Sanskrit texts before his Harvard doctorate made him simply impatient with claims about the scholarly demands of reading Sanskrit texts.

The other criticism stems from what we have already noted about the assertion that “philosophy” as a category is a purely Western product. As I said, Western philosophers themselves both then and now have seldom bothered to engage even critically with the Matilalian notion of Indian philosophy. But nonetheless, there is a question that does arise from the assumption of the Western-ness of “philosophy”: Can there be anything authentic about doing Indian philosophy that not only functions in Western languages and is inescapably aware of Western philosophical categories but, even more rashly, deliberately engages with Western philosophy through Indian texts?

The first line of response to this is, of course, that history has happened, there can be no reversing of time, and Indian thought that happens now is no less Indian for that; the real issue is what one does now. There is a whole area of debate there, perhaps going back to Ashis Nandy’s provocative notion of the West as the “intimate enemy” after colonization. Matilal did not say anything explicit about this, but he assumed that this was simply a fact, from what I gathered in conversations with him. But he had a second, more specific line of response, which he did articulate towards the end of his life: this is not just a challenge for those who were colonized, it is a challenge for everyone in a world of global cultural flows. This means that the question of philosophy is not just about the Indian-ness of Indian philosophy (or of similar questions to other non-Western traditions), it is about the artificiality of the boundaries that the West has tried to keep around philosophy, as if such cultural determinism is possible.

**PHILOSOPHY AND THE THESIS OF THE “IMPOSSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUATION OF CULTURES”**

Matilal’s view of philosophy challenged the crystallized view of tradition that both internal and external interpreters had largely taken for granted. His knowledge and use of analytic procedure was meant to show that functional familiarity with different traditions blurs the boundaries between cultures of thought. In one of the last pieces he completed for publication, he made a rare, explicit methodological statement about his work. He argued for what he called the “Impossible of the Individuation of Cultures” (ICC), the view that “the proper individuation or separation of two contemporary cultures . . . does not seem possible.”13 He thought it incoherent the notion that historically separate cultures of thought could continue to be considered pristine and singular as contact increased and mutual study became possible. “[C]ultures and subcultures flow into each other, interacting both visibly and invisibly, eventually effecting value-rejection and value-modification at every stage. This only shows the vitality of cultures, which are like living organisms in which internal and external changes are incontrovertible facts.”14

His project, then, was meant to challenge not only the treatment of Indian thought as locked away in the past, an inert historical object. It also rejected “the essentialist dogma”15 of Western philosophers as well as anyone tempted to keep the *pandit* traditions of Sanskrit texts somehow insulated from today’s world. A tradition may well have traits and values, as well as textual materials that are historically central to any contemporary reading. But that centrality is a historically contingent fact, and if a tradition lives today, it participates in a history that is in the making. Indian philosophy today is a global philosophy. But equally significantly, Western philosophy ought to be just a part of that global philosophy, even if Matilal ruefully acknowledged, “I have not assumed here that such time has come!”16

That day has not arrived yet, but for the generations of students of Indian philosophy since Matilal, it has become a tenet of our disciplinary faith that it will.

**NOTES**


4. “From the beginning of her history India has adored and idealized, not soldiers and statesman, not men of science and leaders of industry, not even poets and philosophers, who influence the world by their deeds or their words, but those rarer and more chastened spirits, whose greatness lies in what they are and not in what they do; mean who have stamped infinity on the thought and life of the country, men who have added to the invisible forces of goodness in the world” (Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, 35).

6. A systematic comparison awaits between his method and the very different yet fruitful approach of his great older contemporary, J. N. Mohanty—not only in that Mohanty functioned primarily in phenomenology but that he developed his work largely on parallel lines, establishing a reputation in phenomenology quite independently of his work in Indian philosophy.


8. Ibid.

9. Soon after I suggested this notion in my original talk, I read J. N. Mohanty’s appreciation of Matilal, in which he too—with considerably greater authority—makes a Gadamarian point about the nature of interpretation involved in doing Indian philosophy (Mohanty, “On Matilal’s Understanding of Indian Philosophy,” 404). To my mind, this is perhaps the most acute study of Matilal’s approach, and while Mohanty is often modest about his own comparable achievements, the essay offers rich potential for further consideration of both thinkers.

10. Matilal and Shaw, Analytic Philosophy in Comparative Perspective, 37.


12. Mohanty comments on how they felt about this as students, in Mohanty, “On Matilal’s Understanding of Indian Philosophy.”


14. Ibid., 152.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bimal Krishna Matilal’s Style of Doing Philosophy
Richard Hayes
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

In the mid-1990s I went to a daylong interdisciplinary symposium with a friend who was trained in computer science and was working as a software developer. Although well read in the humanities, my friend had not had much exposure to professional academic philosophers, religious studies scholars, and sociologists shuttling their stuff in a confined space. During the day many papers were read, and after each paper came an aggressive critique and a good deal of spirited discussion. When the day was over, my friend characterized the academic culture he had witnessed that day as “non-contact blood sport.” He had expected to see people with differing backgrounds and expertise sharing ideas and cooperating on solving intellectual problems, but what he witnessed was people showing off their knowledge, belittling the accomplishments of others, and competing aggressively as if they were in a debate tournament. His observations of a style that I had grown accustomed to seeing gave me much to think about, and invoked in me a nostalgia for a very different academic culture, one that I had experienced in my decade of taking seminars with and being supervised by Bimal Matilal.

My first encounter with Matilal was at the University of Toronto in the autumn of 1972. The first issue of The Journal of Indian Philosophy had come out just two years earlier, and his book Epistemology, Logic, and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis had been published in 1971. Both the journal and that book represented what could be described as a missionary zeal to present Indian philosophy in a way that it would be taken seriously as philosophy by philosophers in Europe, the Americas, and the Antipodes. In those days, Matilal felt that if Western scholars knew anything about Indian philosophy, they knew something about the mystical forms of Vedānta and the notion that the empirical world is an illusion, but they knew next to nothing about the rigorous linguistic analysis of the grammarians or the logical systems in the realism found in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika and the school that Stcherbatsky had dubbed Buddhist logic. In those times, Matilal was a great admirer of Bertrand Russell, and he hoped that someday Western philosophers would regard Indian philosophy to be as worthy of study as Russell and his circle. Matilal hoped he could play a role in bringing that respect for Indian philosophy about. The title of his 1971 book hit all the themes he wanted to emphasize as being important in the Indian philosophical traditions: epistemology, logic, grammar, and philosophical analysis.

In the 1972–73 academic year, my first year as a graduate student, Matilal offered a graduate seminar based on his newly published 1971 book. The students enrolled in that seminar and the philosophy professor who audited it represented the full range of intellectual and social ferment of the early 1970s. Matilal found himself leading a seminar in which there was a student keen on learning...
as much as possible about the Yoga school, an admirer of Theosophy and paranormal psychology, a follower of Jiddu Krishnamurti, a couple of devotees of the later Wittgenstein, a couple of students in the thrall of a Mādhyamika conviction that philosophy is a hopeless enterprise, an enthusiast of the mind-expanding potentials of hallucinogenic drugs, and no one who was particularly receptive to hearing about Indian philosophy as an adumbration of Bertrand Russell. Not only were there no people in the seminar in fundamental agreement with Matilal’s mission, there were no two people in philosophical agreement about much of anything. Given the participants, and the rather stark cultural divisions of the times, the seminar might well have turned into a free-for-all. It did not. Most of the reason it did not was because of Matilal’s way of doing philosophy, and in particular because of two doctrines from the history of Indian philosophy that Matilal took very seriously and put into practice.

The first of those doctrines was one from the Nyāya tradition. Very early on in the seminar, Matilal explained that the Nyāya tradition distinguished three kinds of discussion. In one kind of discussion, he explained, the participants have as their principal goal stating a position and defending it, using whatever it takes to win an argument at all costs. In a second kind of discussion, the participants have as their goal finding whatever fault they can with their opponent’s position, using whatever it takes to win an argument not so much by establishing their own position but by refuting the opponent’s. The third kind of discussion is one in which all the participants have the goal of finding out what is true. That is done by listening respectfully to what others say, reflecting on it, building upon it, being willing to change one’s mind. It was this third type of discussion that Matilal unfailingly demonstrated through his own example and encouraged in every way.

The second principle was one that every Indian tradition embraced but which Matilal felt the Jaina philosophers had mastered most thoroughly, and that was the principle of non-violence (ahīṃsā). Matilal was convinced that the practice of intellectual non-violence, of non-combative but still enthusiastic and spirited discussion, was closely associated with the Jaina practice of looking at every issue from as many perspectives as possible and recognizing that there is something of the truth, and therefore something of value, in every perspective, but that there is no single perspective that is privileged above all the others. In 1981, Matilal articulated some of these ideas in his book The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anékāṇṭa-Vāda), but his interest in and practice of those ideas were a key part of his approach much earlier than that. They were the essence of his personality.

The result of applying those two principles—cooperative, non-combative discussion and intellectual non-violence—was one of the most pleasant and intellectually stimulating seminars I had as a student. I kept coming back for more seminars in subsequent years and eventually asked Matilal to supervise my doctoral dissertation. Never was I disappointed.

Three Dogmas of Matilal: Direct Realism, Linguophilia, and Dharma Ethics

Purushottama Bilimoria

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, SOPHIA (JOURNAL AND BOOKS SERIES, SPRINGER)

It is something of a truism and also much clichéd that Bimal K. Matilal was one of the twentieth century’s leading exponent of Indian logic and epistemology as well as something of an analytical visionary on the role of philosophy in classical Indian society. A special issue of Sophia was recently dedicated to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Professor Matilal’s demise, and therein one will find a number of full-blown articles discussing and analyzing his views and theories on a number of related issues and topics covered in this issue of the APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies.

Matilal took as part of his intellectual mission the correction of Western perceptions of Indian philosophy, the advancement of attention to classical and modern Indian philosophy, and an examination of the confluence of currents of thought that had informed recent Indian philosophers. His philosophy drew on grammatical literature, the epics, dharmaśāstras, medical literature, poetics, and literary criticism. One of his last works, Epics and Ethics (2000), sought to uncover the dynamic moral theorizing implicit in the epics, The Rāmāyaṇa and The Mahābhārata.

Many readers will have guessed that the title of my paper is a play on Quine’s “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (in philosophy of science the use of the term “Dogma” was a self-conscious and self-deprecating reference to certain prejudicial views which one wanted to defend with or without apologies). It does not entail “dogmatism.” Churches have dogmas as axiomatic creeds; here it signifies axiomatic principles. I do, however, even as a close disciple of Matilal, remain somewhat skeptical about his axiomatic beliefs (I represent for argument’s sake the Mīmāṃsā school through-and-through). But of course, Quine was attacking the dogmas of empiricism, while I am merely explicating Matilal’s views—so it is all in the spirit of vādavivāda (debating and arguing). Therefore, my intentions are somewhat on a par with Quine’s use of dogma in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” but without the intent to ravage the philosopher’s beliefs under discussion.

Matilal’s eclectic approach to philosophy was motivated by deep intellectual commitments. He believed that a comprehensive study of literature is necessary in order to understand the dynamics of a culture’s intellectual development and its fundamental philosophical commitments. He also believed deeply that philosophical cultures could neither be understood ahistorically nor in isolation from one another. Prior to Matilal’s influence, Indian philosophy had been most often misconstrued in the West as being predominantly spiritual, mystical, and intuitive. Matilal undermined this Orientalist prejudice by
systematically developing a rigorous dialogue between European and Indian philosophy drawing both on classical and modern literature. He believed that by relating current thinking to tradition, new insights could be developed from the epistemés of the indigenous systems and that contemporary reflection could lead us to a deeper understanding of those classical systems. An example of this is the epistemology of testimony, where the extensive Indian discussions have a real prospect of informing contemporary debates. A co-edited book, Knowing From Words, and writings of his students on Šabdapramāṇa are impressive illustrations of the sort of philosophical “interconnecting” Matilal worked to provide.

Another example is his defense of a form of direct realism in his seminal work, Perception (Clarendon Press, 1986). The realist Nyāya philosophers assert that we, in fact, see the objects we take ourselves to see as opposed to properties, surfaces, sensations, etc. The Nyāya philosophers also argued that those objects exist by having parts without being merely the sum of their parts, and that they fall into objective, natural categories. They argued that the parts and properties of an object may well feature in the explanation of our coming to see it; but the thesis denies that the parts or properties of the object can enter into the explanation only if they themselves become entities of perceptual awareness.

If this is correct, Matilal points out, then the move typically made by the Buddhist phenomenalists that the percept (ālambana) in perceptual awareness must be unstructured and immediately given is blocked. This leads to what Matilal claims is the hardest problem for the Nyāya realist: if phenomenal entities like sense-data have no explanatory role in perception, how do we account for such (apparently purely phenomenal) illusions as seeing the blue dome of the sky, a rainbow, or a circular disk as elliptical? Matilal’s defense of this theory is anchored on the unique formulation of objectivity.

To be objective, he argued, is to be independent of minds. Being “mind-dependent,” however, need not mean being a private, intentional object in the way that sense-data and other purely phenomenal entities are. It can mean simply having a mental event as a causal condition, an event on whose continuing existence the object depends. Although illusory, the blueness of the sky and the ellipticality of the disk are objective at least in the sense that they are not purely private objects of sensation, but are produced and shared by the perception of any observer located in the appropriate position. This is a softer realism than that to which skeptics are committed, according to which objects can exist independently of anyone’s capacity to know they exist.

Matilal was also a proponent of the close relationship that exists between language and knowledge, meaning that language is intimately implicated in the construction of knowledge qua knowledge (which is not the same as the view that language essentially constructs knowledge, reductively so). I call this “lingophilia.”

In a longer paper titled “Bimal Matilal’s Navya-Realism, Buddhist ‘Lingo-Phobia’ and Mental Things,” I take Matilal’s work to be central to the issue concerning the relationship between language and the world. While developing his approach, Matilal brought many of the issues and viewpoints that were pertinent to the basic theme. It remains a comprehensive approach to the subject. Essentially, Matilal adopted the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika approach, which assumes a realist perspective of the relationship between language and the world. Through this perspective he seeks to construct a realist metaphysics supported by a theory of language appropriate to it. If this realist account goes through and the analysis is accepted, then, according to Matilal, the Buddhist critique of language is unacceptable and may be deemed to be as “lingophobic.”

I present an analytic account of how Matilal develops this realist theory of language within the Nyāya and Navya-Nyāya framework drawing also on the work of Michael Dummett and Hilary Putnam (only just as Putnam changed his view a number of times and veered closer to qualified anti-realism or “relative-realism” toward the end of his life); here the issue of language mainly arises while in pinning down the structure of jñāna or cognition. Cognition is always cognition of something, i.e., directed towards an object, and is always expressed through some verbal form. There is an influential view in Indian epistemology, which suggests that cognition necessarily consists of a sensory core required for the construction of particulars. Such a perspective denies any causal connection between the internal sensory experience and the external object of awareness. This sensory core remains ineffable. Matilal seeks to show that this view is not unconnected to the view of language that underpins this perspective. Dinnāga and many other Indian philosophers, including Candrakīrti, arrive at this view of cognition in accordance with their supposition that private language is possible. But Matilal refutes this view by using the argument especially of Quine and Wittgenstein that language is a social behavior. Wittgenstein’s private language argument shows that the idea of language being private is unintelligible and thus to hold that private sensory experience can be expressed through language is equally unintelligible and logically incoherent. This is the reason why the Buddhist critique of language, as Matilal claims, turns into a lingophobia that reduces mentalese entities to merely mythical or illusory projections. The Nyāya view, on the other hand, claims that any cognitive experience must be expressible in language. Gangeśa rules out the presence of the ineffable sensory core to be the essence of cognition on the ground that it is merely physical and is thus non-cognitive. Matilal interprets this to be a version of metaphysical realism, which argues for an inseparable connection between language and cognition: it is a “linguistically compromised doctrine of knowing.”

And, finally, a brief vignette on Matilal’s thinking on ethics. Matilal was fond of narrating this account supposedly from the epics: namely, the story around not telling a lie. In one of his earth-bound births, Kaūśika had been reprimanded for causing the death of an innocent deer fleeing from its predator; while in a subsequent birth, telling the lie in the recurrent situation to save the fleeing deer cost him
gravely the salvation he had all but earned through his stoical moral practices. This was his way of illustrating the tussle also between two dominant paradigms in Western ethical discourse, namely, of utilitarianism and Kantian deontology. But overall, Matilal remained skeptical about the prospects of solid foundation for Indian ethics. Thus he averred,

Certainly, there exists a lacuna in the tradition of Indian philosophy. Professional philosophers of India over the last two thousand years have been consistently concerned with the problems of logic and epistemology, metaphysics and soteriology, and sometimes they have made very important contributions to the global heritage of philosophy. But, except for some cursory comments and some insightful observations, the professional philosophers of India very seldom discussed what we call moral philosophy today. It is true that the dharmaśāstra texts were there to supplement the Hindu discussion of ethics, classification of virtues and vices, and enumeration of duties related to the social status of the individual. But morality was never discussed as such in these texts. On the other hand, the tradition was very self-conscious about moral values, moral conflicts and dilemmas, as well as about the difficulties of what we call practical reason or practical wisdom.

Matilal nevertheless agonized over the exemplary moral dilemmas presented in narrative literature, particularly the epic Mahābhārata, and he suggested that there was always a rational solution around the corner or possibly missed, even by Krishna. Matilal was airing the suspicion that Indian philosophy, particularly during what he calls the Indian Middle Ages, did not break away sufficiently from preoccupations with theology and mysticism, and that without “logic,” any branch of philosophy is bound to flounder at its core. To that end he wrote a number of essays on Indian ethics, underscoring its supposed rational predilection, mostly in the context of the (Hindu) epics while also drawing from the Jaina theory of anekāntavāda (not one-sided-ness) that reinforced Matilal’s vision of moral pluralism. The epics embed and exemplify a myriad of moral issues which are thought through rationally, but the epics no more than the tradition at large quite succeeded in articulating a sui generis thesis that we would call “ethics” or “morality,” without the cultural, theological, and historical overtones and baggage that might go along with the disciplinary discourse. The irony should not brush over any keen moral thinker that Matilal reduced moral problems and challenges to basically those presented in the context of moral dilemmas or conflicts, when in fact there may be straightforward moral challenges that are not presented to the agents as two horns of a dilemma or a conflict in search of a resolution: for example, climate change and the dangers of the excessive use of fossil fuel, perhaps also premeditated murder and negligent manslaughter (say, from drunken driving). Yet Matilal would state the problem in this form to underscore the point that a rational solution is well neigh around the corner (or ought to be) for almost any moral dilemma. And so this is how he articulated his position:

Admission of moral conflicts or genuine moral dilemmas (or dharma-dilemmas) requires using some method toward making a rational choice. It is obvious that some sort of pre-ordering or ranking of principles helps such rational deliberation. In matters of ritual-orientated dharmas, when conflict arises, the Mīmāṃsā school has determined a fixed rule of pre-ordering, and has given a rational argument in favour of such ordering. Unfortunately, in all practical cases of value conflict or ordinary dharma-orientated conflict, it is extremely difficult to establish priorities in the same way. Many epic stories that illustrated such practical dharma-conflicts show that the practical resolution of such conflict does not always fix priorities according to the same pattern. It appears to me that this respect for the difficulties encountered in real life is not a mark of irrationality or inconsistence, but emphasizes that we sometimes face moral predicaments for which we cannot find a simply rational solution.

Matilal returns us again and again to the epics where numerous instances of moral dilemmas appear to plague the actors, from the dice game that Yudhīṣṭīra finds himself lured to (where the joint asset of the Pāṇḍava brothers, including their shared Draupādi, is at stake and gambled away), to Arjuna’s dilemma on the battlefield (to be in the fight, or not to be in the fight), and various conflicts that the paradigmatic hero of the Rāmāyaṇa is also confronted with—such as whether to resist or accede to the decree of being sent to exile in the forest. Matilal claimed, “sometimes there was more realism in these old epic stories than they are given credit for today. They underlined the two most prominent aspects of dharma: the vulnerability of moral virtues and the ever-elusive nature of truth in the moral domain.”

However, Matilal did believe that a historical understanding of the concept of dharma (he rarely strayed away from dharma to some of the other issues in Indian ethics, barring caste, karma, and “evil”) has some relevance today, for it remains a widely misunderstood concept in the modern study of Indian philosophy. And he concluded his insightful essay on “Dharma and Rationality” by noting that the explanations of the traditional ethos of India has always been somewhat controversial among the Indianists (South Asianists) of today: “The sociologists or social anthropologists propagate one way of looking at it. The development economists favour another way of taking it. Both, however, assume that to understand modern India some basic knowledge of classical India is absolutely necessary.” And to that end, he proposed to me a comprehensive volume on Indian ethics, which has since been completed, and in which his own most celebrated essay in edited form on “Dharma and Rationality” has been included (although he did not live to see the volume in print).

Matilal indeed was a rare kind of thinker, a philosopher of profound sensibility who embodied East and West in balanced proportions and who demonstrated that Indian thought, even in its most metaphysical and soteriological
concerns, was rigorously analytical and logical as well as discursive. His work has found broad endorsement and inspired lively debate not only among many contemporary Indian philosophers and Indologists, but also in international philosophical circles.

NOTES
5. Ibid., 99.

A Cautionary Note on Matilal’s Way of Doing Indian Philosophy

Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty
RABINDRA BHARATI UNIVERSITY

Tirelessly and with a missionary zeal Matilal, through his entire philosophical career, presented classical Indian philosophical debates in contemporary philosophical idioms thereby highlighting the richness of the insights and the intensity of the effort to gain philosophical clarity that the ancient philosophical works exhibit. And Matilal has succeeded in his effort to a great extent. Matilal thought that this is the way one could integrate classical Indian philosophical insights into the contemporary Western analytical tradition. While Matilal concedes that the basic philosophical motivations of the classical Indians might be very different from the contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophers, still some important questions and puzzles found in the classical philosophical literature “do seem to coincide to a considerable extent with those discussed today.” Matilal, with great acumen, demonstrates how a dialogue could take place between the classical Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, and Buddhist schools on the one hand and the Cartesian epistemologists and modern analytic philosophers on the other in his magnum opus, Perception. Matilal thinks that Indian philosophy is an enigma to many and he substantiates his claim with quotes from David Hume and John Locke where both remarked about the “poor” Indian philosophers who came up with absurd proposals like God creating the world like a spider creating a cobweb out of itself or an elephant supporting the earth and a tortoise supporting the elephant. And this kind of attitude toward Indian philosophy still persists as is evidenced by Anthony Flew’s comment that Eastern philosophy is not concerned with arguments and so history of philosophy records philosophical activities that took place only in Europe. Matilal felt strongly about correcting this view of Indian philosophy. Too many times Indian philosophy is presented as mystical and non-argumentative, as poetic or dogmatic. Matilal dedicates his entire philosophical career to correct these misconceptions even at the cost of “leaning backwards.” Matilal holds that even Locke himself would have been surprised to note the similarity in arguments in defending certain problems of empirical philosophy, had he been aware of the classical texts like Abhidharmakosa-bhāṣya or Padārthadharmasamgraha. Even the Lockean notion of substance as something where properties inhere is as old as the Vaiśesika-sūtra. Matilal is aware of the friendly criticism that if classical people were ultimately concerned with attaining the ultimate good, then why are these questions regarding perception held to be so important regarding its nature and content or the possibility of its failure to generate knowledge? Matilal hopes that even the questions about the nature of the ultimate good and the nature of reality lead to many specific and complicated philosophical issues. And these demand a philosophical handling. After a while, almost unconsciously, theological concerns are replaced by philosophical engagements. The intellectual history of classical India bears this out.

From what has been presented so far, it seems clear that for Matilal, 1) The model of philosophy is that which is practiced in the Anglo-American analytical tradition. Matilal’s exposure to the works of Quine, Strawson, Dummett, etc. colored his interpretation of classical Indian philosophy, and he took great interest particularly in those problems and puzzles in Indian philosophy that could be juxtaposed with their counterparts in analytic philosophy. 2) This leads Matilal to unearth the key concepts and issues debated in the analytical tradition within the corpus of classical Indian philosophy. Western analytic philosophy becomes the yardstick for him. This generates what Matilal calls “comparative philosophy in the minimal sense.” Let me comment on each of these points.

The idea of philosophy as it is found in the Western tradition is not a homogenous one. Certainly Anglo-American analytic philosophy is not the only philosophical activity that the Western tradition offers. There are multiple ways of doing philosophy within the Western tradition. Each of these philosophical stances has its own style of writing, its own preferred set of problems and perspectives. The philosophical movements that originated and were nourished in Germany and France are different both in their style and problematic from the tradition that mesmerized Matilal. Edmund Husserl’s exploration of logical foundation of experience is far from how Frege talks about logic in his attempt to have a foundation of arithmetic. Even for Frege, logic does not remain content with formalization procedures. Logic in Frege turns out to be a theory of meaning, a philosophy of language as it is understood in the analytic tradition. A logician per se might not accept this Fregean use of the word “logic.” And so Western philosophy is not to be equated with Anglo-American philosophy. In fact, Michael Dummett thinks that it is better to call this “Anglo-Austrian” and not Anglo-American philosophy for reasons he has explained. Thus even within the Western tradition one comes across varied paradigms of philosophy, philosophical problems, and philosophical methodologies.
And this is expected. If philosophy, broadly speaking, is an attempt to explain human experience in all its facets, then different people could be expected to philosophize in different ways. And these philosophical trajectories move in different directions. Taking one of these as the philosophy, and then trying to shape all other philosophical activities following this proper philosophy, so to speak, is misleading at best and authoritarian at worst. If Husserlian logic and Fregean logic can coexist, then why can't Western logic and Indian logic? Any attempt to interpret Indian logic in terms of the Western logical problems and vocabularies would actually reinforce the claim that logic proper is Western in its origin. If it is true, as Matilal formulates, that relativism moves ahead of pluralism in claiming that alternative concepts are equally valid and that there is no overarching standard to evaluate each of the individual claims, then one could be a relativist with regard to various conceptions of logic. And a relativist in this sense could be an orthodox person. An orthodox person undergoes three stages in her life: 1) She accepts whatever is given, sometimes through family, sometimes through society, education, etc.; 2) She constantly evaluates the received data resulting in reformulation, accepting, or rejecting what has been received; and 3) Finally, the orthodox person rests herself either on the old view that has been received, or she might accept the new view after the conversion takes place. The dogmatic person does not undergo these stages. Thus if an orthodox person leaves open the possibility of conversion and still wants to hold on to her views, then an Indian logician might appreciate logic in the Western sense and yet stick to her Indian logic that she has received from the indigenous system of education. And then the attempt to reorient Indian logic following Western logical vocabulary and problematic does not seem to be a desideratum.

Two points stand out in the Indian theory of inference having five syllogistic members. First, the entire account is given in terms of mental events that take place in the mind of the interlocutor. The internal consistency of the inferential process is guided by the norms of cognitive psychology. Second, this whole inferential process is taking place against the background of a dialogical context where one person tries to convince the other of the desired conclusion. The inferential process aims at proving something to the other person. This process was often followed in the cases of disputes or debates. It is quite clear that Indian theory of inference is couched in psychological terms. It is also evident that the account of inference that is found in Indian philosophy is different in a significant sense from that one can find in Western logic. Acknowledging this distinctive feature of Indian logic, can one label Indian logic as psychological?

A reconstruction of Indian theory of inference à la J. N. Mohanty could be of help here. In this interpretation we are talking about inference in terms of mental events, but here a mental event exemplifies a universal structure in the sense that two mental events can illustrate the same structure. When we talk of a mental event or act, there is always a reference to a self where that mental act or event occurs. And, of course, it has a temporal reference. There is a particular point in time when that mental event/act takes place. But we can also talk about the act nature, and by “act nature” I mean the act could be perception or memory, etc. And last but not least, there is the content of the act. This content is clearly not the object lying there outside in the world. It is best understood as the intended object of the mental act. The epistemic entities like qualifier, qualified, etc. do not belong to the objects in the world per se. They float in the structure of the content of the knowledge. These entities and their structure are universal in the sense that many cognitive acts or events may illustrate the same structure. In the Indian theory of inference we can be said to deal with this structure of a cognitive act that is universal. On this account two cognitive acts can be said to be identical if they have the same act nature and exemplify the same content-structure. Viewed in this way, the references to the owner of the mental act and the time when the act takes place are irrelevant. Here we are giving an account of knowledge in terms of mental act, but it does not land us in the realm of the subjective that the anti-psychologistic philosophers thought it would. Thus, one can very well argue that Indian logic (or the Indian theory of inference) does involve the idea of the mental, but nonetheless, it does not lead to psychologism in the sense in which it has been used in Western philosophy. In light of the above account we can now look at the ideas of necessary and contingent truths in Indian logic. Usually, logical truths are treated as necessary truths. They are true by virtue of their forms. They are analytic. Factual truths are contingent. They are true by virtue of what happens in the world. Setting aside the question whether this distinction between necessary and contingent truth is ultimately tenable, in the present context the more significant query concerns the presence or absence of the idea of necessity in Indian logic. If the Indian theory of inference is formulated in terms of mental acts, then can we talk of logical necessity, in the Western sense, playing any role in such a theory? One could talk of different kinds of necessity: 1) logical necessity, 2) physical necessity, and 3) causal necessity. Logical necessity is the necessity that could be said to hold between sentence-forms. This is the kind of necessity that we find obtaining among different propositions in logic in Western philosophy. Physical necessity is expressed in the laws that are grounded on the essences of the things concerned. If one accepts this kind of necessity, then these laws are, though necessary, not analytic. One could also talk of causal necessity where the relation holds between cause and effect.

From the above presentation of the Indian theory of inference, it is natural to conclude that this theory involves the idea of causal necessity. In the Indian formulation of the inferential process, causal necessity can be said to hold between the sequences of mental episodes leading to the conclusion of the inference. The structure of inference for other (parârthānumāna) is presented in such a manner that the cognitive episodes expressed in the corresponding sentences do exhibit a causal structure where each mental act is bound to produce the following mental act provided the required conditions are fulfilled. The important question that we face here is can we ascribe non-causal necessity to the Indian theory of inference? One problem that arises immediately is that logical necessity is said to hold between propositions, and Indian logic lacks any
such concept. Instead, what we find in the Indian theory of inference is the division between inference for one self (svārthānumāna) and inference for other (parārthānumāna). In inference for one self, the inferential process involves an internal mechanism where one cognitive episode necessarily follows another. In the case of inference for another, the external mechanism is expressed in terms of sentences or utterances of them where each of these sentences/utterances is necessarily followed by another. This leads Matilal to suggest that in the internal case “logic appears to be psychologized while in the second it is linguisticized.” And he further claims that in either case causal necessity is superimposed on what is called logical necessity. Matilal’s argument for ascribing logical necessity to Indian theory of inference is that when it is said that if A is a sign (liṅga) of B and if we assert A of something, we must assert B of it, internally it is viewed as a causal sequence of mental cognitive events like seeing A in a particular case combined with another cognitive episode of remembering that A is the sign of B, etc. The combination of these episodes is called parāmāraśa; it is said that if there is parāmāraśa, then the conclusion will necessarily follow. This causally necessary consequence is also a logically necessary consequence, according to Matilal, for to the question what would happen if the person gets distracted or falls asleep immediately after the appearance of parāmāraśa, the answer would be that though the concluding cognitive episode would not follow, this psychological contingency would not undermine the logical necessity of the conclusion that follows from the prior cognitive episodes. The failure of the conclusion to appear is due to some non-logical factors. Even in the external mechanism of inference when it is said that if the sign (pervaded or vyāpaya) is there, the signified (pervader or vyāpaka) is necessarily there, the principle is couched in non-psychologistic terms. It is true that we identify a sign as a logical sign, i.e., sign that warrants inference through empirical method, but then a sign is thus identified only if its presence necessarily signifies the presence of the signified, thus concludes Matilal.

There could be several responses to Matilal’s attempt to find logical necessity in Indian logic. First, one could suggest that there is hardly any opposition between causal and logical necessity. In inference for one self we find causally necessary connection and in the inference for other we find logically necessary connection, and these are just two sides of the same coin. Viewed in this way, the charge against psychologism gets rather weak because there remains no unbridgeable gap between the psychological and logical. One could move further and claim that the idea of logical necessity can be derived from that of psychological necessity. Psychological necessity is the fundamental one on which other kinds of necessities rest, one might claim. If one makes a distinction between source and justification of necessity, one could very well claim that if we think of the source of necessity, then we will fall back on psychological necessity. But if we are interested in the justification of necessity, then we can think in terms of logical necessity for it is in logic that we take up justificatory questions regarding our inferential knowledge. Matilal, it seems to me, is siding with the claim that logical necessity gives rise to psychological necessity, and he cites evidence for this claim from Indian theories of inference, especially those of Nyāya and Buddhism.

Let me toy with a rather radical idea, viz., psychological necessity is all there is. If this is acceptable, then the motive behind Matilal’s attempt to find logical necessity behind the talk of psychological necessity in Indian theory of inference would seem to be wrong headed. Let us take a close look at the use of the word “necessarily” in English. If people thought that almost everything that happened in the world happened by necessity, or if people thought almost nothing in the world happened by necessity, then we would have little occasion to use the word “necessarily.” Often we use “necessarily” to talk about future events, like “If a polluting industry is built here, then the local inhabitants are bound to be hostile,” meaning thereby that they will necessarily be hostile. We use words like “bound to,” “surely,” and “must” as synonymous with “necessarily.” We use these necessity idioms also to talk about the past and present, like “As a chief minister he must have enriched himself”—meaning he necessarily did—for look at his earlier record as a member of the Legislative Assembly. Notice that we use the word “necessarily” or its synonyms where we are less than sure of the facts. When we are sure, we just affirm without any intensive. This is indeed paradoxical. But then “necessarily” is not always a rhetorical device to cover up our uncertainty. When somebody is told while looking for a leopard in a jungle, “Necessarily it will have spots,” other than viewing it as a prediction, this utterance could also be viewed as a conditional sentence of the form “If it is a leopard, then it has spots.” Here there is no rhetoric involved. All these examples show that necessity is a matter of connection between facts, and it is not concerned with facts taken separately.

Now, what does make connection a necessary one? To take the example of the leopard, when the arrival of some leopard is announced, we expect an animal with spots. What is the connection? We have the knowledge of general truth that all leopards have spots. The only answer to the question why the newly arrived leopard should have spots is that all leopards have spots. One can take some more complicated examples, but I guess the answer would be the same. One must not interpret it claiming that a person is entitled to apply “necessarily” as long as she thinks that there is some general truth that subsumes the present one. This would make it possible to use “necessarily” to everything and the term would lose its significance. What is important is that the person has some actual generalization in her mind that she thinks subsumes the present one and whose truth is independent of the particular case in hand. Two points stand out here. First, the adverb “necessarily” applies not to particular events or states, but rather to whole conditional connections. Second, the application of “necessarily” requires an allusion to some generality that subsumes the present case.

One of the cases where the term “necessity” comes under close scrutiny is the case where we explain the dispositional terms like “soluble.” To claim that a particular lump of stuff is soluble is to claim more than that whenever it is in water, it dissolves. For a lump to be soluble we must be able to claim that if it were in water, then it would dissolve. Clearly,
what we need here is an “if-then” formulation guided by necessity. With the knowledge gained from chemistry that gives us the details of the sub-microscopic structure of the lump concerned, we equate these explanatory traits with solubility. What is true of the dispositional terms like “solubility” could very well be true of subjunctive conditionals like, “If x were treated like this, then it would do so and so.” One could always come up with a set of explanatory traits, sometimes with the help of an expert, to explain the conditional. These conditional sentences may or may not contain the adverb “necessarily” explicitly; nonetheless, the subjunctive form connotes it. The point worth noticing is that the necessity constructions rest on generality, and the generality can be explained in terms of certain traits that the relevant theory can tell us.

How is one going to explain what is called “logical” or “mathematical necessity”? These varieties of truths are called necessary because they are true by definition. Imagine a physicist is confronted with an experimental finding that goes against her professed theory. She has to change her theory at some point to inactivate the false prediction. And the normal practice in the scientific community is to modify or change the relevant concepts in such a manner that the apparently false prediction can well be accommodated within the theory. Definitions are not something sacrosanct that they can never be altered. They are also susceptible to changes like other sentences. As theoretical and experimental physics do have the same content and differ in motivation and application, so also pure mathematics (dealing with logico-mathematical truths) and physics differ only in motivation, but not in their content. If this is true, then logical necessity is stripped of its privileged status, and the only necessity that one can talk about is the necessity resting on generalization, which in its turn is explicable in terms of empirical traits. So the real burden that the idea of necessity is to bear is shouldered by empirical necessity (i.e., physical and causal necessity). Empirical necessity is all that we need in order to have science including the Indian theory of inference. When this empirical necessity is applied to knowledge, what we get is necessity among the different cognitive episodes. And this is precisely what we have in Indian formulations of inferential knowledge. Let us not split hairs in trying to find out the idea of logical necessity in Indian logic.

What I find uncomfortable in Matilal’s way of doing comparative philosophy is the attempt to excavate the Indian counterparts of Western tradition. As a student of Indian philosophy, what is more natural to me is to understand Western philosophical insights in terms of that which are available in Indian tradition. And it might quite so happen that certain questions are never raised or that the formulations of certain questions are very different in Indian philosophical tradition. Comparison does not and should not force us to find out correlates in the alternative traditions. While analyzing the pervasion (vyāpati) relation, one could see that the distinction between necessary truths and contingent truths is not maintained—so the analytic-synthetic distinction seems to be foreign to Indian logic. Consequent to this are the universal ideas that are graspable through senses and the absence of the distinction between formal truth and material truth. And none of these ideas are available in Western philosophical thinking. This does not make Indian philosophy more philosophical than its Western counterpart. As students of philosophy, we are not obligated to combine all the different paths into a single highway. Each philosophical development is a result of the historic dynamics that are peculiar to it. The long and rich commentorial tradition of classical Indian philosophy shows how philosophical ideas developed by understanding, reformulating, and sometimes rejecting the predecessor’s views.

The original motive of philosophical pursuits, be it either in the East or in the West, was to unravel the mysteries of life and world. And part of this pursuit was to understand human life in its various facets. Philosophers of antiquity thought that life in its present state is fraught with various inadequacies. So they started talking about an ideal state of human existence and the ways to attain that state. Socrates declares that “of all investigations, . . . this is the noblest. . . . what sort of man should one be, and what should one practice and up to what point, when he is young and when he is old.” Similarly, the Upanisadic quest for the understanding of the nature of self leads many of the classical Indian philosophers to set an emancipatory goal before humans and, of course, philosophical justifications ensue. If the mokṣa-orientedness of Indian philosophy degenerates into mysticism, then Socrates would meet the same fate. And any student of philosophy would agree that this is furthest from the truth. One need not be apologetic about Indian philosophy. One need not engage in a selective interpretation of either Indian or Western philosophy in the name of comparative study. Let us not delude ourselves in competitive comparative studies of Indian and Western philosophy.

NOTES
6. For the ideas expressed in the following paragraphs I draw heavily on W. V. Quine’s “Necessary Truth” in his The Ways of Paradox and other Essays (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
8. This is from Plato’s Dialogue Gorgias as mentioned by G. Vlastos, Socratic Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.
**Whither the Matilal Strategy?**

Ethan Mills  
**University of Tennessee at Chattanooga**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

B. K. Matilal (1935–1991) was undoubtedly one of the most influential scholars of Indian philosophy in the late twentieth century. His work has greatly influenced many who work on Indian philosophy today, especially those who do so in philosophy departments in the Anglophone world. One of his greatest influences has been what I call “the Matilal Strategy,” which he saw as a way to make the study of classical Indian philosophy more visible within the philosophical community. After discussing Matilal’s articulation and defense of this strategy as well as ways in which it continues to influence the field, I argue that, while the Matilal Strategy still has an important place, there are alternative approaches worth our attention. I consider two such alternatives, which I call “joining the consciousness club” and “expanding the history of philosophy.”

### 2. MATILAL’S STRATEGY

I could have easily written about the J. N. Mohanty Strategy or the Karl Potter Strategy. I in no way mean to diminish the contributions of Mohanty, Potter, and others, but Matilal, who brought his considerable talents and traditional training in Nyāya to positions at the University of Toronto and Oxford University, probably did more than anyone else to increase the visibility of Indian philosophy on the philosophical scene of the Anglophone world.

One of the clearest articulations of the Matilal Strategy can be found in the introduction of Matilal’s *opus magnum*, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*.

The concern of this book is not purely historical. The writer on classical Indian philosophy today is generally pulled in two different directions—toward the historical reconstruction of some classical views and toward the critical examination of similar modern views. I believe those two “forces” are not diametrically opposed; with their combined impetus we might make some progress if only diagonally. This “diagonal” approach represents a tension which is acknowledged here by the author with apologies.

In his use of this diagonal approach, Matilal makes frequent comparisons with contemporary analytic philosophy and admits that he has been “strongly influenced by the analytical tradition of Anglo-American philosophers.” As for why analytic philosophy should be the tradition to which Indian philosophy is compared, Matilal says, “Both contemporary analytical philosophy and the classical Nyāya and Buddhist tradition of India seem to be interested in the problems of knowledge and perception, the varieties of meaning and reference, the theory of inference, and the issue of psychologism.” Perhaps we can glean another answer from his comments on his motivations for engaging in such comparisons:

this gesture is needed to correct persistent misconceptions, and sometimes to remove ignorance. Too often the “soft-mindedness” and tender nature of Indian “philosophy” or Oriental wisdom have been emphasized. Too often the term “Indian philosophy” is identified with a subject that is presented as mystical and non-argumentative, that is at best poetic and at worst dogmatic. A corrective to this view is long overdue.

More specifically, Matilal meant to call into question what he called the dogmas of Orientalism, according to which India has a tradition that is monolithic, atavistic, emotional, spiritual, intuitive, irrationalist, and mystical, which contrasts with the opposing features of the West. According to Matilal, the problem with these myths—aside from the fact that they are false—is that “The Oriental man is either subhuman or superhuman, never human. . . . there cannot be any horizontal relationship between East and West.”

To summarize, the Matilal Strategy is to engage in comparisons between the contemporary analytic and classical Indian philosophical traditions as a means to accomplish the following goals:

1) To make the study of classical Indian philosophy more visible within the discipline of philosophy, and

2) To correct harmful misconceptions about classical Indian philosophy in particular and South Asia in general.

### 3. THE MATILAL STRATEGY TODAY

#### 3.1. CONTINUING INFLUENCE

The dogmas of Orientalism are alive and well today, even if they are not quite as well as they used to be. Consider, for instance, that a recent *New York Times* article by Jay Garfield and Bryan Van Norden (2016) calling for a more inclusive discipline elicited many online comments with varying mixtures of ignorance, dismissiveness, and hostile Eurocentrism. As there is still a need for the Matilal Strategy, many scholars continue to employ it. Indeed, the Matilal Strategy is so pervasive it is difficult to think of scholars of Indian and Buddhist philosophy in the philosophical circles of the Anglophone world who do not at least occasionally feel impelled to draw a comparison with some contemporary analytic issue or figure.

#### 3.2. CRITICISMS

There have been, however, criticisms of the Matilal Strategy. Matilal himself considered one of the most common: that his approach is insufficiently historical in that it takes Indian ideas out of their historical context and creates somewhat forced comparisons with Western ideas. Matilal says, “I have sometimes faced, rightly I believe, the criticism that there is a little ‘leaning over backwards’ in my writings to show the analytic nature of Indian philosophy.” Matilal’s defense was that this approach was necessary to combat harmful preconceptions about Indian philosophy, but one might wonder if there could be other ways of accomplishing this aim. In fact, J. N. Mohanty suggests that Matilal was
himself considering other possible comparative partners in continental philosophy and postcolonial thought.

Another criticism is that the Matilal Strategy supposes that mainstream analytic philosophers have a deeper interest in the history of philosophy than is actually the case. Of course, analytic philosophers are no more monolithic than their classical Indian counterparts, but one might worry whether a certain type of analytic philosopher is sufficiently interested in any history of philosophy, whether that history is European or Asian. For instance, a specialist in contemporary ethics once told me that philosophy began in 1970. This person was being facetious, of course, but it represents a not entirely atypical attitude. Whatever else we are doing when we study classical Indian philosophy, we are attempting to understand philosophers temporarily distant from ourselves, which often requires a great deal of work. I suspect the historically incurious are often unwilling to do this work, even with help from a practitioner of the Matilal Strategy.

A related criticism is that, even in the hands of a scholar as creative as Matilal, classical Indian philosophy will often, but not always, look like a watered down imitation of the latest analytic positions. Or, to use a phrase from Elisa Freschi, it will be “almost as good as analytic philosophy.” Why go through the trouble to understand a similar Indian position when one has already gone through the trouble of understanding the corresponding contemporary analytic position? The Matilal Strategy may well backfire; an analytic philosopher might say, “It is quaint that Indian philosophers almost thought of epistemic contextualism, anti-realism, content externalism, etc., but I prefer to get on with some real philosophy.”

4. ALTERNATIVES?

These critiques do not constitute an attempt to dismiss the Matilal Strategy, but rather an attempt to understand its limitations. Doing so ought to encourage us to think of ways to add to the methodologies in our scholarly toolboxes. I consider two possible alternatives here.

4.1. JOINING THE CONSCIOUSNESS CLUB

One promising strategy in recent years has been investigating what classical Indian philosophy might add to contemporary discussions of consciousness in phenomenology and philosophy of mind. I call this strategy “joining the consciousness club.” Several scholars, Christian Coseru in particular, have done much to practice and promote this strategy. These philosophers bring classical debates, such as whether consciousness is self-illuminating, into dialogue with contemporary phenomenology and philosophy of mind. The strategy has been particularly successful with regard to Buddhist philosophy, especially within the tradition following Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, although it has been applied to other Indian schools as well, such as the Yoga school.

This strategy has in recent years brought a lot of visibility to the field. Respected mainstream philosophers such as David Chalmers and Owen Flanagan have taken note of this work. Flanagan has even written a book on Buddhist philosophy.

4.2. EXPANDING THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Another strategy is to expand what we think of as the history of philosophy to include classical India. Why not take a page from historians of philosophy to offer historically informed, yet philosophically nuanced, readings of Indian texts? A Plato scholar and a Dharmakīrti scholar have much in common: they both read difficult ancient languages, encounter ways of thought that are temporally and culturally distant from themselves, and work with texts that are rich enough to allow for competing plausible interpretations. Engaging in such scholarship may occasionally benefit from comparisons with contemporary thought or with historical Western figures, but this is also the case for many historians of Western philosophy. Gary Hatfield, a prominent historian of early modern European philosophy, has argued in favor of an approach he calls “contextual history,” which both invites comparisons with contemporary interests and takes seriously the historical context of the object of study.

Distinguished historians of ancient Greek philosophy like Martha Nussbaum, Julia Annas, and Pierre Hadot are rightly thought of as interesting philosophers, not despite, but rather because of their historical interests. Expanding the history of philosophy would encourage us to form professional and intellectual connections with our colleagues in the various periods of Western philosophy as well as colleagues in Islamic philosophy, Latin American philosophy, African philosophy, East Asian philosophy, and so forth.

Amber Carpenter (2014) has done some work in the direction of expanding the history of philosophy. My own work is moving in this direction as well. In particular, I think we have much to learn from comparisons between Hellenistic and classical Indian philosophy. Hadot’s claim that Hellenistic philosophers considered philosophy to be a way of life has a lot in common, for instance, with the Nyāya Sūtra’s articulation of the importance of philosophy for one’s pursuit of the highest good. The similarity between the goals of Nāgārjuna and Sextus Empiricus might help us understand whether Nāgārjuna defends a philosophical position or whether Sextus had any beliefs. We might reevaluate the typical view of Cārvāka hedonism through a comparison with Epicureanism. Like all good history of philosophy, such projects should also be thought of as philosophy per se insofar as they may provide new insights regarding our concerns today, often by juxtaposing contemporary assumptions and understandings with ancient ones.

Few contemporary philosophers doubt that Hellenistic philosophy is a worthwhile area of study. In particular, there is a great deal of interest in Stoicism, both within and without the academy. A future in which the study of classical Indian philosophy occupies a similar place within the discipline as a respectable historical interest is a modest and attainable goal.

5. CONCLUSION

I think of both of these alternatives more as extensions of the Matilal Strategy than replacements for it, with the consciousness strategy moving toward the comparative side of Matilal’s diagonal approach and the history strategy moving toward the historical side.
While Matilal's work tends to focus on logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, he did occasionally discuss issues in philosophy of mind. There's no reason one could not simply extend the Matilal Strategy to work on consciousness that often goes beyond traditional analytic philosophy (indeed, the borders of analytic philosophy are probably more porous today than they were in Matilal's lifetime). As for expanding the history of philosophy, it may be that Matilal was in favor of this approach all along.

"comparative philosophy" in this minimal sense may be seen as falling within the discipline of the history of philosophy in the global sense. Since it has already been argued that the history of philosophy is philosophy primarily, the above task should also fall within the general discipline of philosophy.1

And

Many of those who are doing Greek or scholastic philosophy today are also regarded as philosophers in their own right. The same should hold for the Indian philosophers.2

Perhaps the Matilal Strategy, as a means of challenging false and harmful Orientalist dogmas about Indian thought, need not be dogmatically wedded to mainstream analytic philosophy. Matilal's real concern was to secure a place for classical Indian philosophy within the discipline that befits the richness of the tradition and makes our picture of Indian philosophy visible and accurate enough so that all philosophers might have the chance to learn from it. I am confident that he would be in favor of continuing all philosophers might have the chance to learn from it. Perhaps the Matilal Strategy, as a means of challenging false and harmful Orientalist dogmas about Indian thought, need not be dogmatically wedded to mainstream analytic philosophy. Matilal's real concern was to secure a place for classical Indian philosophy within the discipline.

REFERENCES


Ganeri, Jonardon. "A Return to the Self: Indians and Greek on Life as Art and Philosophical Therapy" makes an interesting comparison of Greek and Nyāya philosophers on the role of philosophy in the pursuit of the highest good. See also the contribution from Kisor K. Chakrabarti in this issue.

See also Dreyfus and Garfield, "Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism."

Ganeri ("A Return to the Self: Indians and Greek on Life as Art and Philosophical Therapy") makes an interesting comparison of Greek and Nyāya philosophers on the role of philosophy in the pursuit of the highest good. See also the contribution from Kisor K. Chakrabarti in this issue.

See for instance, the popular blog, Stoicist Today (http://modernstoicism.com), which promotes "Live Like a Stoic Week" every autumn.

Similarly, Alex Watson has written, "It is my hope—and there are some signs that it is not an unrealistic one—that Indian philosophy will soon begin a similar trajectory to that taken by Greek philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century, when it moved from being restricted to Classics syllabi to becoming a mandatory part of every philosophy degree" (Watson, "India's Past, Philology, and Classical Indian Philosophy").


22. Ibid., 435.

NOTES
1. For more on Matilal's biography, see the introduction to this issue as well as the articles by Ganeri, Ram-Prasad, Bilimoria, and Hayes.


3. Ibid., "Acknowledgements."


5. Matilal, Perception, 4-5.


7. Ibid., 373, italics in original.

8. For just a few examples, see the work of scholars such as Jonardon Ganeri (who also edited Matilal, Mind, Language, and World and Ethics and Epics: The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal), Dan Arnold, Jay Garfield, Arindam Chakrabarti, and Stephen Phillips as well as anthologies such as Tanaka et al., The Moon Points Back.

9. Matilal, Perception, 4. For a Matilal-inspired response to this objection and other objections to the very idea of comparative philosophy, see Ram-Prasad 1995.

10. Bilimoria and Mohanty, Relativism, Suffering, and Beyond: Essays in Memory of Bimal K. Matilal, 11.

11. This phrase is found in a comment on the cited blog post (Freschi, "A Plea for More Mutual Knowledge and Cooperation Among Scholars"). Mohanty discusses a similar objection (Bilimoria and Mohanty, Relativism, Suffering, and Beyond, 8-9).

12. See, for example, Coseru, Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy; Thompson, Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy; and Albahari, “Nirvana and Ownerless Consciousness.”

13. See the contribution from Neil Sims in this issue for an example of this strategy with regard to Yoga and phenomenology.


16. Julia Annas (personal communication) has expressed her personal interest in Indian philosophy, and scholars of Pyrrhonian skepticism are aware of historical Greek-Indian interactions as a possible inspiration for Pyrrho.

17. See also Dreyfus and Garfield, "Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism."

18. Ganeri ("A Return to the Self: Indians and Greek on Life as Art and Philosophical Therapy") makes an interesting comparison of Greek and Nyāya philosophers on the role of philosophy in the pursuit of the highest good. See also the contribution from Kisor K. Chakrabarti in this issue.

19. See for instance, the popular blog, Stoicist Today (http://modernstoicism.com), which promotes "Live Like a Stoic Week" every autumn.

20. Similarly, Alex Watson has written, "It is my hope—and there are some signs that it is not an unrealistic one—that Indian philosophy will soon begin a similar trajectory to that taken by Greek philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century, when it moved from being restricted to Classics syllabi to becoming a mandatory part of every philosophy degree" (Watson, "India’s Past, Philology, and Classical Indian Philosophy").


22. Ibid., 435.
Nyāya Ethical Theory

Kisor K. Chakrabarti
INSTITUTE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES AND ACADEMIC EXCHANGE

INTRODUCTION

B. K. Matilal observed that Indian philosophers very seldom discussed what is called moral philosophy now and labeled this as a lacuna. Matilal was a leading authority on Indian and comparative philosophy with in-depth knowledge of the original sources of Indian philosophy in Sanskrit. His writings are numerous and set a very high standard for others to try to follow. Without any doubt his remark about the lack of adequate development of moral philosophy in the Indian tradition and that this is a lacuna deserves serious consideration. The question is not whether moral dilemmas and ethical issues are discussed in the Indian tradition. Matilal himself has shown that there is plenty of such discussion. The question is whether classical Indian philosophers have made significant contribution to moral philosophy. For this we turn to selected philosophical writings. Since the space is limited, we confine ourselves mostly to the Nyāya that is one of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy (though the focus of the Nyāya is on logic and epistemology and to a lesser extent on ontology, and a fuller discussion should address contributions to moral philosophy in other Indian schools). Our brief account is based on the original sources in Sanskrit.

We first turn to the Nyāya-sūtra (NS), the founding work of the Nyāya school. The oldest available commentary is called the Nyāya-bhāṣya (NBH). According to NS 1.1.1, true awareness of sixteen topics like sources of knowing, the knowables, doubt, purpose, the steps of demonstration, the pseudo-probantia, and so on leads to the highest good. NS 1.1.9 gives a list of twelve knowables, viz., the self, the body, the external sense organs, the objects (i.e., objects of voluntary action, mainly pleasure, pain and their causal conditions), cognitive states, the inner sense, volition, failings, rebirth, fruits of voluntary actions, suffering, and liberation. NBH 1.1.1 glosses that true awareness of the knowables beginning with the self leads to the highest good. Thus, though knowledge of all sixteen topics listed in NS 1.1.1 is useful for the highest good, knowledge of the knowables such as the self, the body, volition, failings, and so on are directly relevant for the highest good. Of the knowables, again, the self is the most important and it is knowledge of the self that is the most directly relevant for the highest good (though knowledge of all knowables and indirectly of all sixteen topics is useful for that purpose). It is significant that for Nyāya knowledge of specifically sources of knowing, the method of proving, faulty reasons, and so on are critically relevant for the highest good. False beliefs about the self and so on are for Nyāya among the chief impediments to the highest good. False beliefs may be corrected by reliable beliefs (especially about the knowables above) grounded in accepted sources of knowing including inference. Accordingly, the study of the appropriate sources in which knowledge claims may be based, the fallacies to be avoided in making an inference, and so on is crucially important for that goal.

What is liberation, the highest good? According to NS and NBH 1.1.22, liberation is the absolute relief from suffering and this is the highest good.

NYĀYA ETHICS: CONSEQUENTIALISM

Similar ideas are voiced in what is often regarded as the sister philosophical school called the Vaiśeṣika. The Padārtha-dharma-samgraha (PDS, fifth century CE?), an influential work of this school, says that true awareness of similarities and differences of the six categories of substance, quality particular, motion, universal, ultimate differentiator, and inseparable inherence (on the part of at least one of the two relata) is the causal condition of the highest good. This early Vaiśeṣika work (among others) emphasizes the importance of generally binding (sāmānya) obligations like non-violence, care giving, truthfulness, etc. (and other observances and restraints) as well as true awareness for achieving the absolute end of suffering as the highest good (sṛṣṭisamhāraprakaraṇam, dharmaṇaḥpakaṇam, etc.). That knowledge is the means to the highest good is further the view of the Śāṅkya, the Advaita Vedānta, and others, though the highest good and the nature of knowledge are conceived differently. The connection between knowledge and virtue is also central in Buddhism and Jainism; also, that virtue is knowledge is famously discussed in Plato’s Meno and that the highest Form is the Form of the good that is the object of the highest knowledge is mentioned in Plato’s Republic. That liberation is the highest good is part of the widely held view in traditional Hinduism that there are four basic goods or values or purposes (purusārtha), viz. (in the ascending order) wealth, pleasure, righteousness, and liberation. These are basic values in the sense that all our voluntary actions are taken to be aimed directly or indirectly at some of these values. Other values like employment or marriage are means to some of these values. Among the four basic values, liberation is the highest value for the
following reason. It is part of a person’s nature to seek relief from suffering. The other three values do bring relief from suffering. Thus, wealth can bring relief from suffering due to starvation, lack of shelter, etc. Similarly, pleasure provides relief from suffering and does take place in intervals of suffering as NS 4.1.55 explicitly says. In other words, although suffering is pervasive, pleasure in intervals of suffering is directly experienced by us and cannot be denied as NBH 4.1.55 clarifies.3 This is important, for it would be a mistake to think that pleasure reduces to relief from suffering. NS 4.1.51 says that since pleasure belongs to the self, there can be no denial of pleasure and implies that pleasure cannot be denied as a fruit or end (phalā) of effort. NS 4.1.52 acknowledges that children, possessions, etc., too are commonly spoken of as fruits or ends. NS 4.1.53 clarifies that these other things are fruits or ends in an extended sense because of being related to pleasure. Thus, pleasure is accepted not only as an end but also as a basic end so that some other things that are means to pleasure may also be called ends in a derivative sense. Still, the Nyāya points out, pleasure never lasts long enough and is inseparable from and replaced by suffering and accordingly is not accepted as the highest good. (More on why pleasure is not the highest good later.) Again, righteousness is a necessary means to the absolute eradication of suffering and, being the means, is not the highest good.

While true awareness helps to set us free, false awareness traps us into bondage and suffering. A basic kind of false awareness is wrongly identifying the self with what is not the self, such as the body, the sense organs, etc. Statements like “I am dark,” “I am blind,” and so on are common examples of such misidentification. Mistaking what is not the self for the self is the root cause of egotism (ahamkāra); true awareness of the body and so on is needed for removal of such false awareness and egotism. False awareness leads to attachment to those that appear to be favorable and detestation for what appears to be inimical.9 Such attachment and detestation leads to failings (dōṣa) such as untruthfulness, jealousy, deception, and greed. Such failings lead to external and internal bad actions/dispositions. First, there are three kinds of external bad actions/dispositions by the body, viz. violence, stealing, and sexual promiscuity. Second, there are four kinds of external bad actions/dispositions by speech, viz. telling what is not true, speaking harshly, harping on the faults of others, and speaking incoherently. Third, there are three kinds of internal bad dispositions, viz. enmity towards others, coveting others’ property, and faithlessness. Side by side with these ten bad deeds/dispositions, there are ten external and internal good deeds/dispositions. First, there are three kinds of external good deeds/dispositions by the body, viz. giving, saving someone, and serving others. Second, there are four kinds of external good deeds/dispositions by speech, viz. speaking the truth, speaking what is beneficial, speaking what is pleasant, and speaking about the (true) self or self-study (that includes reciting and studying the scriptures). Third, there are three kinds of internal good dispositions, viz. compassion, ungreediness, and faith.10 NYH 1.1.18 goes on to say that besides attachment (rāga) and detestation (dveṣa) another third kind of failing is confusion (moha). All these three kinds of failings (and all failings are included in these three) lead to activities that are causal conditions of pleasure or suffering.11 Is one of these three kinds of failings more harmful than the other two? NS 4.1.6 answers the question in the affirmative and identifies confusion or false awareness as the most harmful kind of failing. NBH 4.1.6 clarifies that attachment and detestation that are the two other kinds of failing do not arise unless there is confusion; hence the latter is more harmful than the other two.12 In other words, confusion is the root of the other failings and is more fundamental.

How can one overcome the failings to pave the way for liberation that is the end of all suffering? According to NS 4.2.46, the right step in that direction is purification of the self (ātma-samskāra) with the help of restraint (yama) and observance (niyama). What is restraint and observance? According to the highly influential account in the Yoga-sūtra 2.30.32 (also endorsed by Nyāya), the restraints are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possession while the observances are cleanliness, contentment, penance, self-study, and devotion (surrendering one’s actions) to God. The moot point is that building a virtuous character through repeated and continued practice of restraint, observances, and control of failings is necessary for moral and spiritual progress.

We have seen that what is right, according to this ethics, is true awareness (that removes false awareness that is a causal condition of attachment, detestation, and confusion) and purification of the self through restraint and observance (that help to eradicate failings through various acts of commission and omission, reduce the burden of demerit, and increase the stock of merit). We have also seen that liberation as the end of all suffering is the highest good or value in this ethics. Thus, this ethics includes a theory of the right and a theory of the good as the key ingredients of an ethical theory. What is right is viewed and justified as being instrumental to achieving the goal of liberation as the highest good. In other words, the case for true awareness as what is right is in this ethics based on its being viewed as the means to liberation as the ultimate end and so is also the case for purification of the self that involves eradication of failings. Not only are these justified as the means to the accepted end, but further these different acts of commission and omission are accorded high moral status because of being the means to the same end. Since in this ethics what is right is justified as the means to the end and different acts are given similar or the same (depending on how directly or indirectly these are related to the end) moral values because of being the means to the same end, this ethics is consequentialist.

The main thrust of this ethics is on individual morality. Still, consideration for others is essential for individual moral progress. This is clear from the moral precepts mentioned above. Thus, the ten bad acts/dispositions that are causal conditions of demerit include violence, stealing, sexual transgression, false speech, harsh speech, harping on others’ faults, speaking incoherently, enmity towards others, and coveting others’ possessions that
are not only detrimental to oneself but are also harmful
to others. While one has an obligation not to indulge in
bad acts/dispositions, these may also imply that others
have rights to life, property, and so on. That is, the point
of these admonitions may very well be that one has an
obligation to safeguard the rights of others and violation
of these rights comes at a high moral cost. Further, the ten
good acts/dispositions that are causal conditions of merit
include giving, saving, service, true speech, beneficial
speech, pleasant speech, and kindness that are not only
beneficial to oneself but are also for the benefit of others.
Again, failings include infatuation for the other sex (kāma),
unwillingness to share with others what is not depleted by
use (matsara), greed for others’ possessions, and deception
that all have adverse consequences for oneself as well as
others.15 Mention is also made of compassion (kāruna),
understood as willingness to relieve the suffering of others
without regard to one’s own interest.16 Thus, this ethics
is also an ethics of engagement. The engagement is for
relieving suffering not only for oneself but also for others,
and one cannot reach the highest goal without engaging
in the service of others. If altruism means that everyone
should give up one’s interest for others, this ethics is not
altruistic. However, if altruism involves that serving others
is beneficial for everyone including oneself, that in some
situations one should sacrifice one’s possessions, even
life, etc. for others (and in a sense this is beneficial for
oneself too) and that sometimes working as a group helps
everyone including oneself more than working individually
alone (for example, NS and NBH 4.2.47-48 speak of the
value of fellowship), this ethics has an altruistic dimension
as well.

We have seen that liberation as the highest good is
conceived minimally as the absolute end of suffering and
not as a state of bliss or happiness or pleasure (even in
a sublime sense, though pleasure is often taken by some
to be the highest good, as NBH 4.157 acknowledges).
This is so because pleasure (even in an elevated sense)
is inseparable from suffering.17 Pleasure and suffering are
inseparable (1) in the sense that wherever there is pleasure
there is suffering and wherever there is suffering there is
pleasure. They are also inseparable (2) in the sense that
they both arise from the same causal conditions: whatever
is a causal condition of pleasure is also a causal condition
of suffering and vice versa. (This holds even though merit
is a causal condition of pleasure and demerit, of suffering).
They are further inseparable (3) in the sense that both
are co-located: both pleasure and suffering are invariably
located in the same person. They are again inseparable (4)
in the sense that both are experienced together: whoever
experiences pleasure also experiences suffering and vice
versa (successively or simultaneously even if cognitive
states are non-simultaneous).18 NBH goes on to clarify
that pleasure breeds hankering (paryēṣāṇā) that can never be
fulfilled. Sometimes pleasures come but are short lived.
Sometimes pleasures do happen but fall short of the
mark. Sometimes pleasures come at a very high price of
burdensome suffering. Further and more importantly,
pleasures typically lead to the need for more pleasure and
often for other pleasures; all these eventually turn into an
insatiable thirst (triṣṇā). NBH cites an old saying: even when
one who seeks pleasure finds it, one is quickly entrapped
for another pleasure.17 NBH cites another old saying: even
if one succeeds in acquiring the whole earth all the way
up to the ocean with all cows and horses, one is still not
satisfied (and thirsts for more). How can there be pleasure
(or happiness or satisfaction) from desire for possession?19
The point is well taken. If it is the very nature of pleasure
to drive us for more, pleasure inevitably leads to unfulfillment
and dissatisfaction and thus suffering. The paradox of
pleasure stares at us with ominous certainty. The irony is
that we often find pleasure when we do not pursue pleasure
but pursue other things, such as fishing, philanthropy, and
so on; but if we pursue pleasure itself, we end up empty
handed. Even if we find pleasure, there is always thirst for
more that brings dissatisfaction and suffering.

Since pleasure is inseparable from suffering, pleasure
must be discarded, just as milk mixed with poison must be
discarded to put an absolute end to all suffering.11 Those
who think that liberation as the highest good is not only
devoid of suffering but also a state of pleasure or happiness
suffer, in this view, from a dangerous clinging for pleasure
and a serious delusion. Pleasure or happiness can only
come with suffering and, therefore, is not the highest good.
This is not to deny that pleasure is a fact of life and can
be achieved. Our philosophers readily admit that pleasure
is a common experience, is real, and the body, etc. do
serve as the causal conditions of pleasure. Nevertheless,
the claim is that the causal conditions of pleasure are also
invariably the causal conditions of suffering. We naturally
abhorr suffering and nothing that involves suffering can be
accepted as the ultimate good or goal. Thus, a state without
suffering is higher than a state that includes pleasure and
also suffering.

Our philosophers are not here making a transition from X
is desired to X is desirable (and something is not desired
to something is not desirable) as Mill did.20 Philosophers
repeatedly point out that pleasure, etc. are commonly
desired but deny that these are desirable. Similarly, various
things enjoined in moral and spiritual progress may not be
desired by many, but that does not make them undesirable.
In fact, NBH grants as an example of false belief that
liberation as explained may appear to be terrifying (for
being shorn of things we commonly like) and not desired
by even some who are intelligent.21 Still, there is a gap
between what is desired and what should be desired as
also between what is not desired and what should not be
desired, and one does not follow from the other. Suffering
is undesirable not because it is not desired. If this were so,
pleasure would have been desirable because it is desired
(as Mill supposed). For our philosophers, both suffering
and pleasure are undesirable though the former is not
desired and the latter is (commonly) desired. Thus, being
actually desired or not being desired is not the proper basis
for being desirable or undesirable for our philosophers.
Rather, the proper basis for both pleasure and suffering
being undesirable is that both are harmful (ahita) and our
failings, viz. attachment, detestation, and confusion, are
causal conditions of both. Thus, being rooted in our failings
neither suffering nor pleasure can be desirable in a moral
sense. Accordingly, for moral as well as logical reasons
liberation or the ultimate good not only cannot be a state
of suffering but also cannot be a state of pleasure.
The moral viewpoint is similar to negative utilitarianism\(^2\) that the moral standard is minimizing suffering and not maximizing pleasure and that there is no symmetry between suffering and pleasure. Clearly, Nyāya holds that the highest good is the absolute end of suffering and rejects that this is a state of pleasure. However, for Nyāya pleasure is real and a good and even a basic good, though not the highest good as we have seen. To a limited extent, the Nyāya moral standard of being beneficial without causing more harm than good (see below) can accommodate pleasure. In other words, the Nyāya standard does exclude pleasure in the ultimate analysis but does not exclude necessarily pleasure in ordinary situations. (Although all pleasures are inseparable from suffering and fall short of the highest end) one in the householder stage (grhastra), for example, is not disallowed from enjoying good things in life such as food, children, etc. if these do not cause greater suffering.\(^2\)

Prābhākara disagrees and holds that the inducement is not directly from the state of awareness of the means to the end but from that of means to the end. The inducement is not from the state of awareness of the means to what is desired or beneficial as well as absence of the state of awareness of being achievable is the qualifier and the achievable act is the qualificand. And for such desire the state of awareness of being achievable is the causal condition, for the qualifier in the state of awareness that is the causal condition of a given desire is always the same as the qualifier of that desire. That is, a desire in which something is the qualifier is caused by a state of awareness in which that same something is also the qualifier.\(^2\)

The argument may be explained further as follows. When one has the desire for a mango, a causal condition of that is the state of awareness of a mango. No one has a desire for something unless one has experienced it (or something similar) before and is aware of it. In Nyāya terminology in the desire for a mango, the latter is the qualificand and mango-ness is the qualifier, i.e., this is a desire for what has or is qualified by mango-ness. In the same way, in the causally connected state of awareness of a mango, mango-ness is the qualifier. Thus, the qualifier is the same in the state of awareness that is a causal condition and the desire that is the effect. Prābhākara points out that when a state of awareness leads to volition, it first leads to desire to act or do or make in which what is to be done or should be done or being achievable is the qualifier. What is to be done then should also be the qualifier in the state of awareness that is the causal condition. It follows that what is to be done is the primary meaning of an injunction the state of awareness of which may lead to volition.

Prābhākara argues further that the state of awareness of being the means to what is desired or beneficial is not the causal condition as Nyāya claims, for then the desire to act or do or make could arise even for something that is not achievable. Indeed, one does not, for example, have the desire to make rain (even if there is drought); though rain is then desired and beneficial, it is still beyond one’s means.

Nyāya could reply that the state of awareness of being the means to what is desired or beneficial is still the appropriate causal condition. In such cases as rain above it does not lead to the said desire because of an obstruction, viz. the state of awareness of not being achievable.

However, if the above is accepted, absence of such obstruction too would have to be accepted as a causal condition and that is uneconomical. In the Prābhākara view the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable is the causal condition. But in the Nyāya view the state of awareness of being the means to what is desired or beneficial as well as absence of the state of awareness of not being achievable are then accepted as causal conditions. Clearly, compared to the Prābhākara view the Nyāya view incorporates many more components and lacks economy. Thus, the reply is without merit.\(^2\)
The Prābhākara view is highly developed as presented in TCM that remarkably happens to be a Nyāya work and a philosophical masterpiece. Since, however, a fuller treatment will take more time, we move on to how the Nyāya position can be defended.

One main argument offered against the Prābhākara view and for the Nyāya position is that it is an undeniable fact that although one may be aware of what is to be done or should be done or achievable, one may not always have volition for that. For example, one may not always have volition for telling the truth, although one may be aware that telling the truth is what is to be done. This suggests that the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable is not the sufficient condition for such volition. It may be granted that the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable is a necessary condition for such volition to account for cases where there is lack of volition for things one desires or is beneficial but are unachievable (such as rain). It may also be granted that the state of awareness of what is desired or beneficial is not the sufficient condition for such volition. Thus, the reasonable position is the following: both the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable and the state of awareness of the means to what is desired or beneficial are necessary conditions for such volition. As the common saying goes, even a dull person does not make an effort without a purpose (prayaṣānam anuddhīṣya mandah api na pravartate).25 “Indeed, the mere awareness of what is to be done, even if derived from the Vedas, does not suffice for motivation; without awareness of the means to what is desired or beneficial to one’s own self a thousand such states of awareness would fail to motivate.”26 It should be noted, however, one does not always have volition for something that is achievable as well as desirable or beneficial if that thing causes more harm than good. For example, one does not (usually) strive to get food that is mixed with poison. Accordingly, the causal condition of such volition should be amended as follows: the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable and the state of awareness of the means to what is desired or beneficial that does not cause more harm than good.27 However, for a negative injunction (such as one should not have illicit sex, etc.) the causal condition should be reformulated as follows: the state of awareness of what is to be done or should be done or achievable and the state of awareness of the means to what is desired or beneficial that causes more harm than good.28

Further, what is desired or beneficial and achievable should be understood as what appears to be so to someone at a given time. Thus, though a kingdom may be a big attraction, an infant prince does not (usually) care for it: the kingdom is neither what is desired or beneficial nor achievable to that infant prince at that time.29 Again, one who may be overpowered by emotion and unable to think clearly may strive for what causes more harm than good (such as having illicit sex, etc.) for to that person at that time that choice appears not to cause more harm than good.30 The above account also helps to show why one is not held to be culpable if, for example, someone accidentally drowns and dies in a well that one has dug up to relieve thirst, or if someone dies due to choking from the food served, or if a bystander dies from injury from a spear thrown at an enemy. In such cases there is no volition caused by a state of awareness of digging the well or serving the food or throwing the spear as the means to such death.31

Now, in the Hindu tradition certain activities (such as offering daily prayers) are viewed as constant (niḥya) obligations fulfillment of which do not produce any merit. Do such injunctions motivate merely from the state of awareness of what is to be done (as Prābhākara holds) without necessarily requiring the state of awareness of these activities as the means to a desired or beneficial end? No, says Nyāya. Even for constant obligations non-fulfillment is viewed as a sin and demerit. Thus, one is also motivated towards such fulfillment as the means to the desired and beneficial end of avoiding sin and not adding to the burden of demerit. Indeed, not adding and reducing the burden of demerit is accepted as necessary for making spiritual and moral progress towards the highest goal, viz., the absolute end of all suffering. Thus, fulfillment of constant obligation is a means to the ultimate goal of liberation as well. But again, though some Vedic injunctions mention a goal (such as one who seeks heaven should perform the sacrifice X), others (such as those that merely say that one should perform the sacrifice X) do not. Should the latter be held to motivate merely from the state of awareness of what is to be done as Prābhākara says? Not so, says Nyāya. Even in the latter cases either heaven or liberation should be taken to be understood as the implicit goal or purpose.32

RESPONSE TO WESTERN MORAL THEORY

Before concluding this short survey, we shall look at how some issues in major classical Western ethical theories may be addressed from the perspective of Nyāya ethics; this may also throw more light on the latter. There are three influential ethical theories in the West. First, there is Kant’s deontological theory that promotes duty for the sake of duty regardless of the consequences; claims that moral imperatives are categorical, unconditional, universal, and absolute truths of reason independent of observation; and holds further that each rational agent is an end in himself and never merely a means to an end. One well-known objection to this theory is that sometimes exceptions to such moral imperatives as that one should tell the truth should be allowed because not making the exception would likely cause more harm. For example (adapted from Kant himself who would argue that telling the truth is binding even in such a case), suppose that a Nazi officer asks one regarding the whereabouts of a Jewish family hiding in one’s basement. Since telling the truth is more than likely to lead to the loss of innocent lives, one should, many argue, make an exception and not tell the truth, though that would be in violation of an absolute moral imperative as maintained by Kant.

However, for Nyāya ethics, moral imperatives are neither categorical nor independent of experience. Further, not only human beings but also animals and even trees and plants have “rights,” not as ends in themselves but as the means to the common good. Again, in the above situation of one being confronted by a Nazi officer, not telling the truth is morally right. The standard of what is enjoined (vaidha) is being the means to what is desired or beneficial
and does not cause more harm than good and being achievable. Since telling the truth in that situation is likely to cause more harm than good by way of loss of innocent lives (including possibly one's own and even members of one's own family), it is not enjoined in that case; at the same time, since not telling the truth is more likely to be the means of what is desired or beneficial and is achievable, not telling the truth is enjoined in such a case.

Matilal has pointed out that a similar moral issue is presented in a story in the great Epic Mahābhārata. In the story, a hermit takes the vow to always tell the truth. The hermit is approached by some bandits about the location of some travelers whom the bandits intend to loot and kill. The hermit tells the truth and the travelers are murdered. Although the hermit keeps his vow, he is eventually denied entry into heaven for this action. The moral of the story seems to be that although telling the truth and keeping the promise are high moral priorities, saving innocent lives is a still higher moral priority; accordingly, one should make an exception to the duty of telling the truth in some situations, and making the exception in such cases is the right moral choice in this viewpoint that, as Matilal observes, is significantly different from that of Kant.

Second, there is utilitarianism that is a form of consequentialism developed by Bentham and Mill. In the utilitarian view, we naturally seek pleasure or happiness, which is the ultimate end. Pleasure should not be understood in the egoistic sense, for anyone's pleasure counts as much as anyone else's pleasure. The moral standard is choosing an act or a policy that makes life bearable or pleasant for as many people as possible and causes less harm to as many people as possible. Mill claimed that some pleasures are of higher quality than others as testified by those who are experienced in both higher and lower pleasures and we should choose to maximize higher pleasures for the greatest number of people. Morality is not based on a priori rational intuition that, according to some, is mysterious and also not on sentiment or feeling, which would make morality subjective. Rather, moral choices proceed from empirical cost-benefit calculations based on the best information we have and are subject to revision as more information becomes available. One powerful objection to utilitarianism is that it may fail to safeguard minority rights. Suppose that enslaving a small fraction of the population would ensure greater productivity and competitiveness and bring more prosperity to the vast majority of a nation. It seems that from merely utilitarian analyses it would not be easy to rule out that such slavery would not be morally wrong, though it would be in clear violation of the principles of equality, liberty, and justice for all.

Utilitarians have responded to the objection and a proper discussion would take a lot of space. Irrespective of whether this objection is fatal to utilitarianism, this objection, however, has no force against Nyāya ethics. First, such an institution of slavery will create an irreparable division and undermine the goal of social cohesion (loka-saṃgraha) and thus cause more harm than good. Second, such abuse of fellow human beings is precluded by the rules of restraint (yama) and observance (niyama) as well as the admonition of our failings (doṣa).

Third, there is virtue ethics that focuses not on right or wrong actions as the Kantian and utilitarian theories do but on the agent's character. In Aristotle's view people can build a firm, virtuous character by following the lead of the wise and repeatedly doing the right thing (and similarly, a vicious character by repeatedly doing the wrong thing) and one's action should proceed from virtuous character. A virtuous choice is rational choice from the disposition to choose the golden mean that can vary from person to person and avoids the extremes of excess or deficiency (e.g., bravery is the mean between rashness and cowardice) by responding in the right way, in the right amount, for the right reason, and not too much or too little. In this way one can achieve the highest good where one can flourish and excel in what one is meant to do and find happiness. One possible objection to this view is that some choices that appear to be extreme may be morally right. Suppose that a freedom fighter is promised by a corrupt and oppressive ruler a life of luxury and fame in return for his/her support, but the fighter turns that down and is executed. Has the fighter failed to make a rational choice from the disposition to choose the mean, made an extreme choice and, if so, a morally wrong choice? Another objection is that a clever and renowned lawyer, for example, who stays within the law and seems to be happy with his life but is not significantly concerned with helping others or the common good may fulfill Aristotle's definition of moral virtue. Such a lawyer may embody the vision of success for some, but for many is not morally virtuous. If Aristotle's account does not exclude such a lawyer, for many, it is too wide.

So far as Nyāya is concerned, it shares with Aristotle the importance of building a strong and virtuous character through practice. Much of the rules of restraint and observances and eradication of failings bears precisely on that. However, when it comes to some choices that may or may not be extreme for Aristotle's theory, they would not be excluded from the Nyāya perspective. Thus, the choice of the freedom fighter in the above case would be consistent with the norms of non-violence, non-stealing, and self-discipline emphasized in Nyāya ethics and would be an act of merit (dharma). Had that freedom fighter compromised with the unjust ruler that would have been inconsistent with these norms and been an act of demerit (adharma). Such acts of demerit are believed to lead to suffering in the hell (naraka) in the afterlife. Accordingly, they would cause more harm than good and fail to meet the standard of the means to what is desired or beneficial without causing more harm than good. The above norms of discipline would also exclude the lawyer in the given case from being accepted as morally virtuous. Talk about the hell, of course, is rare in contemporary ethics. However, such talk may be, for the limited purpose of ease of communication with the contemporary thinkers, interpreted, mutatis mutandis, to be about self-discipline.

It may now be seen that though Nyāya ethics is consequentialist, it may be labeled as soft consequentialism that is broad enough to incorporate aspects of both deontological ethics and virtue ethics. It recognizes a salient point of deontological ethics by accepting what is to be done or should be done as a necessary condition for inducement. It also gives credit to an important feature.
of virtue ethics by emphasizing the crucial role of building a good character through restraint and observances and control of our failings.

CONCLUSION

We have seen in this brief study of Nyāya ethics in what sense liberation as the absolute end of suffering is the highest good and true awareness and purification of the self are the means to it. We have also seen in outline how the kind of consequentialism developed by our philosophers has been defended against criticism and how such consequentialism may be useful for addressing some issues in modern moral philosophy. In Nyāya works ethical issues are intertwined with epistemological, ontological, religious, social, political, linguistic, and other issues. Nevertheless, if one carefully sifts through the vast literature produced by great thinkers, the ethical theory that would emerge is powerful and further exploration may yield new insight, clarity, rigor, and depth in ethical studies. Matilal, who wrote extensively and brilliantly brought out excellence of classical Indian philosophies in various fields, would certainly welcome such development.

NOTES

2. Different scholars have estimated the date of NS to be between the sixth century BCE and the second century CE and that of NBH between the second century BCE and the fourth century CE.
3. NBH, vol. 1, 197.
4. NBH, vol. 1, 22.
5. PDS, 15.
7. NBH, vol. 1, 4, 30.
8. NBH, vol. 4, 316-17.
9. NBH 1.1.2.
10. NBH, 1.1.2, vol. 1, 68–79.
11. NBH, vol. 1, 127.
14. PDS, 635.
15. NBH 4.1.54.
16. NV 1.1.2.
17. NBH 4.1.56.
22. Sometimes attributed to Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 548.
23. NS and NBH 4.1.44, 4.1.52, NBH vol. 4, 328, etc.
26. "Kāryatā-jñānam pravarttakam iti guṇavat" (TCM, 6-7).
28. TCM, 18.
29. TCM, 239.
30. BSS, 565-66.
31. BSS, 560. Kṛtisādhyatvatvāt sati balavadaniśta-ajanaka-īśṭajananakatvam. It may be noted that the Prabhākara-Nyāya debate is analogous to the so called is-ought controversy in modern moral philosophy. Prabhākara may properly be interpreted to hold that the ought cannot be derived from the is while Nyāya may roughly be interpreted to hold the counter position that the ought can be derived from the is. But the issues are complex and a proper discussion will take much more space and must be left out.
32. TCM, 197ff.
33. TCM, 172-73.
34. TCM, 197.
35. TCM, 212–20.
36. TCM, 224–51.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chakrabarti, Kisor K. "Nyāya Consequentialism" in Indian Ethics, edited by S. Ranganathan, 203–24. Bloomsbury, London, 2017. (Author's Note: This paper contains a fuller discussion of Nyāya ethical theory. The author is thankful to the publisher for granting permission to make use of the published paper for the present article that is a revised and shorter version of the published paper).
TCM. Tattvacintamani with the Māthūra. Edited by K. Tarkavagish Delhi: Chowkhamba, 1990.
TK. Śāṁkyakārīka with the Tattvakaumudi. Edited by Sivanarayana Sastri Bombay, 1940.
Bimal Krishna Matilal and the Enduring Significance of the Constructive Engagement Between Contemporary Analytic and Classical Indian Philosophy

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya
SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

Insofar as one can say that twentieth-century Western philosophy was dominated by the analytic tradition in England, America, and Australasia, one should also say that the dominant paradigm for engaging in comparative Indian philosophy with the Western tradition required engaging comparisons between analytic and Indian philosophy. B. K. Matilal was by far the greatest architect of this approach. However, one might ask, was it a good thing? Looking to the future, should it continue to be this way? I think there are good reasons to go beyond this approach and perhaps embrace reflections on Indian philosophy through the continental traditions, such as phenomenology, or even through the history of philosophy by looking at ancient Greek philosophy through a comparative lens with classical Indian traditions. Nevertheless, I want to argue that there is an enduring significance that exists in the constructive engagement between analytic philosophy and Indian philosophy that is impossible to move beyond.

My first point for retaining the engagement derives from taking note of the fact that the terms “Indian philosophy” and “contemporary analytic philosophy” do not function in exactly the same way.

“Indian philosophy” refers to a set of doctrines that have been reinterpreted and can continue to be reinterpreted in a number of different ways. In other words, “Indian philosophy” is what we might call an anchor term. Specific texts from the Indian subcontinent are anchored. What floats on the tether to that anchor are the many schools of interpretation that anchor on those texts.

“Contemporary analytic philosophy” can also be interpreted to be an anchor term for specific texts, but it can also be interpreted as an anchor term to a certain methodology that is not tied to any single tradition.

On the anchor to text notion what one would be anchoring on to is the Anglo-American philosophical tradition that grew out of Frege, Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein, and various members of the Vienna Circle and the Oxford Ordinary Language School of philosophy. While it is clear that one can go in for comparing Indian philosophy to that notion of analytic philosophy, one need not, when they say that they are engaging in comparing analytic philosophy to Indian philosophy. For there is another notion of analytic in which what one means to single out is that a certain kind of style of philosophy is being done, something where arguments are made clear and they are analyzed in various ways. One that uses conceptual analysis, but does not take on conceptual analysis in anything like the way it was conceived of in the early twentieth century by figures in the

“analytic” tradition. In addition, the use of “contemporary” in “contemporary analytic philosophy” makes it the case that the phrase must be time sensitive. What is contemporary now was not twenty years ago and won’t be thirty years from now. So there is a sense in which one cannot really move beyond engaging comparatively with contemporary analytic philosophy since what is being engaged is shifting on one side. The only sense in which one can move beyond engaging comparatively with contemporary analytic philosophy has to derive from some kind of push against the methodology which stays constant while what is developed in that methodology shifts. So, unless we are prepared to say that we want to move beyond engaging the analytic methodology when we compare Indian philosophy with shifting contemporary work, we should not. But why hang on to that methodology?

My second point for retaining engagement derives from an answer to this question. The answer is simple, yet powerful. The analytic methodology we find in contemporary analytic philosophy, which derives from Anglo-American philosophy, but moves beyond it, through divorcing itself of certain claims, is also found in classical Indian philosophy. So, if we want to move beyond comparisons between contemporary analytic philosophy and classical Indian philosophy, we would, in effect, simply want to move beyond classical Indian philosophy altogether. If we reject the methodology of contemporary analytic philosophy, we reject the methodology of classical Indian philosophy. They are both analytic.

Some scholars of Indian philosophy might reject my argument by pointing out that analytic methodology is not at the heart of classical Indian philosophy. And that the idea that it is rests on taking certain schools, perhaps even ones that Matilal was partial to, such as the Nyāya, more seriously than others, such as Yoga. I have two responses. First, one can simply guard the claim and say that a majority of classical Indian schools accepted the analytic methodology, and concede that, in fact, there were some that did not use this methodology. Second, and more powerfully, one can argue that even the schools that one thinks are non-analytic are, in fact, engaging in analytic methodology as part of their way of doing business, even if it was not the only way they did business. The Yoga Sūtras are full of aphorisms, but those aphorisms, when analyzed, contain powerful analytic arguments. In addition, āsana practice is, in fact, analytical, when one thinks of the relata of “analytic” as taking not only statements or concepts, but also body and breath.

Matilal was a great architect of comparisons between analytic philosophy and classical Indian philosophy. Perhaps we simply do go beyond the comparisons that he did because the terrain has been exhausted. But I doubt we can go beyond comparisons between classical Indian philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy. While the former is anchored textually and the latter is shifting, both share a common methodology whereby moving beyond analytic philosophy would lead to the end of contemporary Indian philosophy. They used to say Indian philosophy is just history. Let’s not make that true by moving beyond comparisons between contemporary analytic and classical Indian philosophy.
Expanding Matilal’s Project through First-Person Research

Neil Sims
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

B. K. Matilal (1935–1991) believed that Indian logic and epistemology had not received the recognition they deserve, and that Indian philosophy has too often been “presented as mystical and non-argumentative . . . at best poetic and at worst dogmatic.” To correct these views, he developed a strategy of making important comparisons between Indian and Western thought, and engaged modern analytic philosophy using Indian insights and argument, showing their relevance to modern discussions.

Matilal’s interest in continental philosophy developed late in his career, and thus the potential of his promising strategy for engagement with that tradition remained largely unexplored. Engaging with this modern tradition, of course, requires considerable emphasis on phenomenology, and Indian phenomenological insights are often even more likely to be criticized as “mystical” than other aspects of Indian philosophy. Here, as elsewhere, this criticism is often largely mistaken, and Matilal’s kind of corrective response seems especially appropriate.

Phenomenological descriptions are regularly used as data supporting positions in debates within and between Indian traditions. These descriptions are often based on experiences gained through systematic meditation procedures not often considered in the West. Thus contemporary philosophy of mind would benefit from a critical evaluation—using modern scientific and philosophical tools—of the relevant meditation procedures, phenomenological reports, and arguments found in Indian sources, especially since some of these procedures appear to avoid well-known criticisms of first-person research methods.

What follows is a brief illustration of how this phenomenologically oriented expansion of Matilal’s overall project might look. Examples of the proposed methodology are offered, with suggestions of how it might be applied, in this case to a specific experience central to Patanjala Yoga, often referred to as “pure consciousness.” Section I suggests criteria for evaluating the experiential reports. Section II considers a potential criticism of this kind of first-person approach: concerns that the experiences in question are “mystical,” deviating too far from standard discourse to be philosophically useful. Section III suggests potential applications of the phenomenological insights gained, using the experience of pure consciousness to bring new perspective to two related philosophical problems.

I

Bringing meditative procedures and associated experiential reports into modern philosophical discourse effectively will require scientific evaluation of the traditional claims. To assess the objective value of such claims, we ask standard scientific questions such as the following: Which meditative practices aim at which experiences? Which reach their aim, and how can we tell? Of the ones that do, which are most effective? Are different procedures more suitable to different populations? How does the yogin arrange her instruments, in this case her mental and physical tools, in order to have the experience in question? Are there consistent physiological correlates of the experience? Does the experience lead to changes in the yogin’s ability to report her experiences afterward? If so, are these changes neutral, negative, or positive? Many of these questions are addressed in the ancient literature, and often in ways that are testable using the tools of modern science.

Patañjali’s first three sutras, along with Vyāsa’s commentary, make it clear that a central aim of Yogic practices is the cultivation of a state of pure consciousness, devoid of mental fluctuations, where all phenomenological content (including affect, etc.) has been removed from the yogin’s awareness.

While this experience seems highly unusual, a variety of reasons exist to take reports of it seriously. One is that the experience appears to have unique physiological markers. It is, for example, traditionally associated with significant reduction of various markers of metabolic activity, including complete cessation of perceptible breathing, an association corroborated by various laboratory studies. Other physiological markers unknown to pre-scientific societies, such as an EEG signature apparently characteristic of pure consciousness, have also been noted in the modern literature. We also find strong agreement among meditative traditions about the existence of this phenomenologically contentless experience and its observable physiological correlate, despite the traditions’ varied and often competing metaphysical contexts and interpretations. This suggests that the experience can be separated from, and is not the product of, mere metaphysical speculation. Thus, for example, Yoga’s “pure consciousness” appears phenomenologically identical to the experience often referred to by Buddhists as “pure emptiness,” and correlated with respiratory suspension.

We can also note that the experience, as completely contentless, appears to be unimaginable before one has had it, since anything one might imagine would necessarily involve content foreign to the experience itself. Such phenomenological and physiological agreement across competing metaphysical systems, especially when the experience cannot be imagined beforehand, seems unlikely to have been fabricated.

The eight “limbs” of Yoga (ethical constraints, physical postures, etc.) are offered as means for tuning our objective instrument for experiencing, the nervous system, to have and stabilize this contentless experience, and others leading to it. Further, Patanjali’s third chapter describes a practice called samyama that incorporates the last three limbs of Yoga together into one practice. Samyama is described as 1) dāhāna (directedness of attention), 2) dhyāna (unwavering flow of attention inward), and 3) samādhi (states without extraneous fluctuations, moving from grosser through subtler object-oriented states, and culminating in non-fluctuating, contentless experience).
The potential benefits of this kind of practice are easily imagined. Practice directing attention internally might well be expected to improve one’s ability to focus on internal contents. Habitual experience of states without extraneous fluctuations might help minimize noise within one’s experiential and cognitive mechanisms, especially if, as Patañjali suggests, these states eventually become stabilized, persisting throughout ordinary activity. Such putative effects are, of course, testable using modern scientific protocols.

II

The above discussion of Patañjali’s text suggests that Yogic practice might well be able to address some of the general criticisms raised against introspective psychology by logical positivists and behaviorists at the beginning of last century. They questioned the very possibility of systematic, scientifically significant introspection. One major concern was that introspective practices modify, and therefore necessarily distort, the objects or states they are meant to explore.

Yoga is one of many traditions to suggest that regular experience of pure consciousness makes one’s experience in general clearer, along with one’s capacity to report one’s experience, by removing potentially distorting noise from one’s experiential and cognitive mechanisms. Even if some distortions turn out to be inevitable, the traditions reporting pure consciousness often suggest that such distortions can be minimized by reducing (and perhaps eliminating) extraneous fluctuations in one’s awareness through proper training. This suggestion, as noted above, is objectively testable, using precisely the kinds of research—supplemented by modern neurophysiological insights and technology—that led many at the beginning of last century to conclude that introspection must be unreliable. If research supported the traditional claims that one can minimize potential distortions of experience, the question would become not whether meditation and the associated phenomenology could ever be a valuable first-person research modality for exploring consciousness, but where, and to what degree they might be. Further, since the relevant experiences are said to lead to greater clarity of mind, the additional question arises whether training in techniques shown to effectively produce the experience of pure consciousness might serve scholars as a valuable adjunct to other phenomenological procedures.

Matilal’s observations about how Indian philosophy is commonly presented might lead us to anticipate complaints here of mysticism, even from scholars engaged with Asian philosophy. For instance, in his Buddhism as Philosophy, Mark Siderits quotes a major Indian Buddhist commentary, where Sthiramati describes an “extra-mundane non-conceptual cognition that is alike without object and without cognizer.” Though this may be a description of an experience of pure consciousness, it is the thrust of Siderits’s objection, not the specific experience he is considering, that is my interest here.

Siderits’s objection does not appear to be to the phenomenological description, but to the “extra-mundane” character of the purported experience. He suggests that this extra-mundane character takes us beyond what most of us can evaluate, saying,

Are we brushing up against the mystical here? Are we being told to take on faith what only yogins can actually know through their faculty of non-rational intuition?

What does he mean by “brushing up against the mystical”? He seems to emphasize three factors: 1) whether we are being asked to accept some claim on “faith,” because 2) only some restricted population (yogins) has access to the requisite “intuition,” which is 3) “non-rational.” Let’s consider each of these, starting with point two.

A yogin is a kind of specialist, engaging in specific practices for the sake of gaining specific experiences. Specialists exist in many fields, and no in-principle argument against their claims arises due to this fact. Moreover, no barrier prevents scientists and philosophers from participating in Yogic practices, especially with the dissemination of many such practices in the last half century or so. Practicing many of the relevant procedures requires no more “faith” than replicating any other scientific study. Once the experience is (presumably) gained, the phenomenological description need not be taken on “faith,” either.

Next, it is not clear that an intuition’s being “non-rational” is a problem, especially in cases like this where “intuition” appears to simply mean “experience.” Take the experience of a red patch. Is that experience rational? It seems not. And it would seem odd if someone were to suggest that a test subject who reported experiencing a red patch was somehow deviating from the proper discourse of science or philosophy by reporting something “non-rational.” The content of an experience may relate to some rational procedure, such as when one does a math problem in one’s head, but the fact that the content is experienced at all is not a product of this rational procedure. All experiences, insofar as they are experiences, involve something other than, in fact more than, cognitive rational content. If this were not the case, empiricism would offer us nothing extra over and above reasoning, and our attempts at knowledge could rely on old-style rationalism.

A semantic issue related to the word “mystical” seems to be at issue here. When we talk of experiences, be they mundane or extra-mundane, we make empirical claims. We have sophisticated, objectively useful tools to help us interpret the significance of any given experience, and standards of reasoning to ensure that our claims do not unreasonably leap beyond what the evidence supports. In the case of such unreasonable leaps, we might call the conclusions “mystical,” but then we mean irrational, rather than merely non-rational. Many modern concerns over “mystical” claims seem to conflate these two uses of the term.

III

Once they have been critically evaluated in modern terms, experiential claims drawn from the Indian traditions can be applied to questions in modern philosophy in ways that, while sometimes inspired by Indian analyses,
nevertheless remain in accord with modern criteria. For instance, we still debate questions of the existence and nature of the self. The Yoga Sūtra ¹⁶ says that the experience of pure consciousness is the experience of self. Rarely are arguments made explicit in the sūtra form, but one supporting Patañjali’s claim is not hard to construct.¹⁷ For it seems natural to think that for an experience to be mine, I must be present at the event, especially if I can remember the experience afterward. Since there is no thing, no content in the experience, it also seems natural to conclude that this no-thing-ness must somehow reflect what I am as an experiencing being, independent of the kind of content my experience is ordinarily filled with.

We can also look to well-known philosophical analyses of self for clues.¹⁸ For instance, Kant logically (rather than phenomenologically) concluded that the self must be without qualities. When discussing his transcendental unity of apperception, Kant argued that it must be a “pure” or original, unchanging consciousness, without any “special” empirical designation.¹⁹ Phenomenologically, the experience of pure consciousness seems uniquely capable of fulfilling Kant’s criteria.²⁰ Only one experience can be completely devoid of empirical content. Any other experience, to be distinguishable from pure consciousness, would have to have some content.²¹

The character of pure consciousness might also help explain why Hume could not find his “self.”²² In his Treatise²³ he wrote, “I can never catch myself at any time without a perception,” and that he was “certain there is no such [simple and continuous] principle in me.”²⁴ He was left with his famous bundle-theory, associating self with whatever bundle of perceptions he encountered upon introspecting.²⁵ Perhaps access to an effective procedure for experiencing pure consciousness might have led him to a different conclusion.

Similar analyses might prove useful for other problematic notions in Western philosophy. For instance, while offering his line of reasoning about self in the appendix of his Treatise, Hume makes a link between the notion of self and that of substance. He says,

But ‘tis intelligible and consistent to say, that objects exist distinct and independent, without any common simple substance or subject of inhesion.²⁶

And a few paragraphs later,

Is the self the same with substance? If it be, how can that question have place, concerning the substance of self, under a change of substance? If they be distinct, what is the difference betwixt them? For my part, I have no notion of either, when conceiv’d distinct form particular perceptions.²⁷

He concludes that

Philosophers begin to be reconcil’d to the principle, that we have no idea of external substance, distinct from the ideas of particular qualities. This must pave the way for a like principle with regard to the mind [or self], that we have no notion of it, distinct from the particular perceptions.²⁸

Hume’s discussion here proceeds on phenomenological grounds, moving from the general notion of substance, which he relates to external objects, to the particular notion of a substantial self. This link between the third-person and first-person problems, in terms of the notion of substance, offers a new starting point from which we might begin to re-address his problem. The experience of pure consciousness arguably seems well suited to help us phenomenologically ground the notion of a substantial self, and thus ground the notion of substance in general, independent of qualities.

**CONCLUSION**

Similar methodology can be used to explore numerous meditative experiences reported in the relevant literature. Even limiting the discussion above to one experience, and touching only on a couple of interrelated philosophical questions, the potential usefulness of this approach should be clear. Matilal’s project, with his interest in overcoming misunderstandings about Indian philosophy, has informed me throughout. If our aim is to develop philosophy—especially a philosophy of mind/consciousness—to include the insights and lived experience of everyone, approaches like this will be necessary.

**NOTES**


2. The Sanskrit phrase for the experience is “asampāraññā samādhi.” “Pure consciousness” is a modern phrase useful to abstract discussions of the experience from the many religious and philosophical contexts within which it is considered important. See the work of R. C. K. Foreman, Jonathan Shear, etc., cited below. Also see Walter Stace’s discussion of what he calls the “introspective mystical experience,” in Feinberg, J. Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems in Philosophy, sixth edition (Wadsworth, Inc.), 77-85, originally published in W. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics (New American Library of World Literature, 1960), 12-28.

3. Thousands of studies have now been published in various scientific venues. See, for example, E. Cardeña and M. Winkelman, eds., Altering Consciousness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Volumes I and II (Praeger, 2011).

4. Vyāsa is the name traditionally associated with the major commentator. Though there is considerable scholarly debate on this point, I will not engage that debate here.

5. Yoga Sūtra 1.2.


8. The Buddhist Jñānas (progressively deeper stages of meditation), as described in the Vissudhimagga, culminate in a state that is said to be “without perception or non-perception” (B. Buddhaghosa, Vissuddhimagga – The Path of Purification: The Classical Manual of Buddhist Doctrine and Meditation, trans. B.
Nanamoli (Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), 330). Buddhists do not generally refer to this as the experience of “self,” because they reserve that term for the ego/personality, and deny its existence as more than a construct. Zen Buddhists are a notable exception, since they will use the term “self,” or “self-nature” to refer to the experience in question. The general Buddhist denial of a continuing self can arguably be related to technical aspects of Buddhist soteriology. I will not explore this point here.

9. Some scholars will insist that the experiences had within different traditions must for that very reason be different experiences. One example of this is Steven Katz who, taking a Neo-Kantian perspective, insists that the content of one’s experiences are built up of conceptual and sensory artifacts from one’s acculturation (S. T. Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, ed. S. Katz [Oxford University Press, 1978]). But the pure consciousness experience has no content to be built up of anything, and any instance of it would thus have to be identical with any other. These facts seem to provide prima facie evidence against any universalized form of Katz’ claim. He seems to have accepted that no such rule can be applied to experiences at the most “infantile and sensate” level (S. Katz, “On Mysticism,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion LXII, no. 4 (1988): 755). For an extended discussion of many of these points, see J. Shear, “On Mystical Experience as Empirical Support for the Perennial Philosophy,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion LXII, no. 2 (1994). See also, R. K. C. Foreman, ed., The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 1990).

10. Compare C. C. Chang, The Practice of Zen, (Rider & Co., 1960), 163–64, where the author says, “Another major characteristic of samadhi is the stoppage of breath. Without complete cessation of breathing, the progressive thought-flow will never cease its perpetual motion.” The term for this is “stopping the breath (chih shi).” His italics.


14. Siderits refers to Sthiramati’s commentary on verse 28 of the Trīṣṭikā (“30 verses”) section of Vasubandhu’s Viśvāmitrānātha-sūtra. Part of the description here, “no cognizer,” suggests nobody is present to even have the experience.


16. Yoga Sūtra 1.3.


20. Kant, of course, believed that because there was nothing in this “pure consciousness” for the mind to represent, it could not be experienced by humans. He seems to have simply been wrong. To his credit, he left open the possibility that some other type of mind might be capable of the experience. Critique of Pure Reason, B138-9.

21. Or at the very least a spatial structure within which content might appear.

22. Stace hints at a similar analysis, saying: “But now a vast body of empirical evidence, that of [the experiences of] mystics from all over the world, affirm that Hume was simply mistaken on a question of psychological fact, and that it is possible to get rid of all mental content and find the pure self left over and to experience this.” (Stace, loc. cit., 82).


24. Here Hume also accepts that some other person may be able to find such a “principle,” but that he could then “no longer reason with him.”

25. Hume makes it clear in the appendix of his Treatise (634–36) that his bundle-theory must be inadequate, because it fails to account for the unity of experience.

26. Ibid., 634. All italics here and in the two quotes that follow are part of the original.

27. Ibid., 635.

28. Ibid.
From the Editor

Serena Parekh
Northeastern University

This issue includes a new section entitled “Musings,” which includes a talk recently given by Ásta. It is her reflection on what’s come to be called the “Hypatia Affair” and seeks to shed light on what the Affair means for feminist methodologies going forward. Because the mission of this newsletter is to provide a space for thoughtful discussions of issues that are relevant to feminist philosophers, I’ve included it in this issue. About the Affair, she writes, “Note that we are not talking about freedom of speech here. At issue is not whether an author can argue for offensive claims or be insensitive in their argument. At issue is what academic excellence in feminist philosophy scholarship consists in.” This is certainly an issue of great importance to the feminist philosophy community.

In addition, the newsletter contains ten reviews of recent feminist scholarship. The books reviewed here reflect the diversity of approaches in contemporary feminist scholarship: Anglo-American/analytic, continental philosophy, history of philosophy, and non-Western philosophy among others. Many thanks to all those who submitted articles, reviewed books, and to those who acted as reviewers of submissions for this issue of the newsletter. Please consider submitting an article for publication in this newsletter and/or volunteering to review a book.

Submission Guidelines and Information

1. Purpose: The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The newsletter contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. While articles published are usually around ten pages, we can also publish longer ones. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor at s.parekh@neu.edu. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow The Chicago Manual of Style.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the newsletter, please email the editor a flyer of your book and the name and contact information of your publisher. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the editor a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Dr. Serena Parekh, Northeastern University, s.parekh@neu.edu. Please also send any announcement or CFPs you would like to include in the newsletter.

4. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding September 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

About the Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy

The Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of newsletter articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

News from the Committee on the Status of Women

Committee Members for 2017–2018
As of July 1, 2017, the CSW comprises Charlotte Witt (chair), Peggy DesAutels (ex officio), Serena Parekh (ex officio),
NEW CSW POSTERS
We are delighted to announce that two new posters will be available for purchase soon on the CSW website. Each is a large photo montage of a different design, but both bear the title “Women of Philosophy.” The designs, by Chad Robinson, are a must buy for departments and offices.

CSW WEBSITE
The CSW, at http://www.apaonlinecsw.org/, continues to offer posters featuring contemporary women in philosophy as well as news about women philosophers. Links to excellent resources include one to a database on teaching, with articles and readings; another to the crowdsourced directory of women philosophers; and one to the APA Ombudsperson for Nondiscrimination, who will receive complaints of discrimination and, where possible, serve as a resource to APA members regarding such complaints.

SITE VISIT PROGRAM
The director and associate directors of the program led a day-long Site Visit Training Workshop on Saturday, April 15, during the 2017 Pacific Division meeting in Seattle WA.

CSW SESSIONS AT APA MEETINGS
The Eastern Division session sponsored by CSW was “Women Do History of Philosophy—Recent Scholarship,” with talks by Agnes Callard, Marta Jimenez, Chris Meyns, and Jessica Gordon-Roth. The CSW also co-sponsored (with the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers) a session on “Women of Color Feminism,” with presentations by Naomi Zack, Joy James, Tommy J. Curry, and Celena Simpson.

At the Central Division meeting, the CSW sponsored “Celebrating Sandra Lee Bartky,” with talks by Samantha Brennan, Tom Digby, Linda Heldke, Jeanine Schroer, and Lynne Tirrell. Their talks are posted at http://www.apaonlinecsw.org.

At the Pacific Division meeting, the CSW sponsored a book symposium on Elizabeth Barnes’s The Minority Body, with speakers Leslie Pickering Francis, Dana Howard, and Eva Kittay. The CSW also co-sponsored several sessions: “Institutional and Attitudinal Barriers,” “Outreach and Issues of Recruitment/Retention,” and “Inclusiveness in Crisis: How Do We Address Social and Political Flashpoints in Philosophy Courses?”

MUSINGS
To Do Metaphysics as a Feminist: Reflections on Feminist Methodology in Light of the Hypatia Affair
Ásta
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY, ASTA@SFSU.EDU

Thank you all for being here today. I thought I would give a different sort of talk today. I thought I would talk about doing metaphysics of the social world as a feminist. I would have talked about how most metaphysicists of the social world think our job is simply to describe our social world in a value-free way and how most metaphysicists of the social world focus on social phenomena such as institutions and notions such as joint intention, commitment, and attention, whereas if you are a feminist like me (or engaged in other liberatory projects), then you might be more interested in the part of the social world that isn’t about the intentional, or about explicit commitments.

But I’m not going to talk about that today. And the reason for that is that my views about how to do metaphysics as a feminist are undergoing a radical transformation, and chiefly because of the Hypatia affair.

A disclaimer is in order here. I’m on the Board of Associate Editors of Hypatia. But what I say here today are my personal reflections, not that of the board or the journal.

I’m going to allow myself to be a bit personal here. It is unusual for me. My talk is entitled “To Do Metaphysics as a Feminist.” And I am a metaphysician by training and temperament. My talk could just as well have been called “Confessions of an Analytic Philosopher” because my training was analytic, although I have for a long time considered myself a post-analytic philosopher.

What attracted me to analytic philosophy was the focus on clarity: What precisely is the claim? What is the argument? I had been studying mathematics but was interested in different questions than those mathematicians study. I was frankly more interested in the sorts of questions many in the continental tradition focus on. But my training was, in terms of methods, very analytic. And one of the attractive and powerful aspects of the practice of analytic philosophy that I came across in my training is that no claim and no argument is too holy to touch, none too offensive. Clarity and precision is a sharp knife for cutting through the obfuscation of demagoguery, ideological manipulation, and plain confusion.

The violence of the knife imagery is intentional: I experience the practice of doing analytic metaphysics as brutal: we dissect arguments (perhaps like frogs? I don’t know about your background, but I have many friends in the US whose science education seems to have consisted mostly in dissecting frogs; we don’t have frogs in Iceland). Another image is slicing and dicing: we slice and dice up the conceptual space as the best sous chefs. And then...
the third violent image: when it comes to constructing arguments, we beat words and ideas into submission.

A friend of mine, who is a poet, once described our different relationship to language: I was like the classical ballerina beating my body into submission every day for the occasional performance in which I seemed to float around effortlessly in the most unnatural of poses.

She, on the other hand, didn’t think of herself as a master of words or body. She wasn’t trying to tame them or beat them into submission. It was a different sort of dance. Words were connected to the gut and the unconscious, and her aim was to bring to light what was hidden in the words, their histories, and their associations.

I am still attracted to the product of the brutal regimen. But there is no mercy in the production.

Another thing that attracted me to analytic philosophy in the beginning is related to this lack of mercy. It is the idea that it is the claim or argument that matters, not who makes it. This was particularly attractive to me, coming from Iceland, where there is a certain tendency to accept uncritically the word of authority figures.

Judy Thomson describes insightfully in an old interview how this commitment was woven into the way philosophy was practiced in the MIT philosophy department: You may give a good paper on Friday afternoon, but when you are back in the department on Monday there is no resting on the laurels received on Friday. Your Monday morning argument doesn’t get the halo effect of your triumph on Friday: it stands or falls on its own. You and your track record cannot ease its path to acceptance. (Even if you are Judith Jarvis Thomson, I might add).

I was, and am, attracted to this radical egalitarian potential of analytic philosophy. It isn’t practiced everywhere, of course, but I was lucky enough to be at some places where that is the norm.

I may be in the minority at this conference, but I think of analytic philosophy as having huge radical potential: no question is off the table, and it is claims and arguments that are evaluated, not people. Analytic philosophy has radically anti-authoritarian aspirations.

The question just is, who gets to sit at the table?

I’ve been a feminist for a long time, perhaps because I was often the only girl engaged in various activities like sports or math and physics competitions. I don’t know. But for a long time it wasn’t exactly clear how my feminist commitments were expressed in my work, apart from the choice of the subject matter itself, and it is only recently that I have started to articulate more clearly how my feminist commitments are reflected in my methodological commitments. Even as recently as January, I gave a talk where I characterized my book on social categories, Categories We Live By, as feminist, because it was motivated by feminist social justice concerns. How that was reflected in my methodology, as opposed to the subject matter, was unclear.

Then came the Hypatia affair.

I probably don’t have to provide much context here, so let me be very brief: a philosopher published a paper in Hypatia, the flagship feminist philosophy journal, in which she stated that arguments for the possibility of changing gender apply equally well for changing race, and that therefore people should be able to change race.

A month or so after the publication of the essay, a social media storm began. People were hurt and outraged for a myriad of reasons. Some people were offended by the question or the conclusion; some were offended that a seemingly white, heterosexual, cisgender person was tackling these questions. But there were also more substantive criticisms, including that the author ignored the trans and critical race theory literature on related topics.

I’m on the Board of Associate Editors at Hypatia, which is the board that advises on policy and selects editors, but isn’t responsible for the day-to-day running of the journal.

My first reaction to the publication was that this paper was an example of a certain way of doing philosophy that is very prevalent (and accepted) in the discipline of philosophy today. I may think that working on these topics without engaging the trans and critical race theory literature is doing bad philosophy, but I think similar thoughts about a lot of philosophy that doesn’t engage what I take to be relevant considerations (I think that way about a lot of current philosophy of language, for example).

This paper is a product of the kind of training most analytic philosophers in the US get, feminist or not (I am interested to hear what non-US-based philosophers think about the training in their countries). It isn’t a bad example of its kind, although I think its kind is bad for the reason that it doesn’t engage what I take to be relevant literature and considerations.

But we are a pluralist feminist philosophy journal. This paper was anonymously refereed by at least two expert colleagues of ours. I might not have accepted it myself, if I had been asked to review it, but that is the journal process.

So my first reaction was this: I don’t think the paper as it stands passes muster for being a good feminist philosophy paper, publishable in Hypatia, because it doesn’t engage the relevant literature. But we are a pluralist feminist journal and some colleagues of mine may apply different standards of excellence and find this a good paper, because it is the sort of paper, apart from its subject matter, that typically gets published in mainstream philosophy journals.

Note that we are not talking about freedom of speech here. At issue is not whether an author can argue for offensive claims or be insensitive in their argument. At issue is what academic excellence in feminist philosophy scholarship consists in.

But the emails and Facebook messages and phone calls continued. And I started to listen. What exactly is going on?
I am neither trans* nor a person of color. Some of the features I identify with are recognizable socially in the US or Germany, some not. For instance, I’m a lesbian (recognizable). I’m from a very small country (Iceland) that was a colony (the Danes were the lords for some centuries). We speak a minority language and have various minority practices (including naming practices)—none of that really registers.

I thought: OK, I’m missing something here. Perhaps it’s like when people write about the value of language without engaging work on minority languages. Or perhaps it is like when people liken homosexuality to pedophilia. Or, as Richard Swinburne did recently, argue that homosexuality is like disability (seemingly offending homosexuals, people with disabilities, and even those who care about both).

I get that those would be offensive and make me or others mad. But being mad isn’t the issue. People can be mad for all kinds of reasons, including, precisely, when someone who makes you mad is right. A case in point is when Rebecca Solnit wrote a piece in Harper’s magazine, published in 2008, about, among other things, how the Icelandic democracy wasn’t functioning. I was royally offended (I thought it worked much better than the American one, for example) and invited her to tea. We became fast friends and the Icelandic economy crashed a week later (largely because of the failure of our democracy).

People can be offended for all sorts of reasons. Hypatia as a journal is not an offense police. Our job is to produce excellent feminist philosophy scholarship, and our refereeing policies and procedures are to reflect that commitment.

But the response to the publication wasn’t all offense, or even hurt. Among all the offense, the hurt, and the outrage was something that I could recognize as having real critical bite: it was the sense of betrayal.

Amidst the turmoil Lori Gruen reminded me of a passage from an essay María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman published together. It is in Lugones’ voice that they ask:

What are the things we need to know about others, and about ourselves, in order to speak intelligently, intelligibly, sensitively, and helpfully about their lives? We can show respect, or lack of it, in writing theoretically about others no less than in talking directly with them . . .

When we speak, write, and publish our theories, to whom do we think we are accountable?

There are two main questions here. The first question is how we should theorize about other people’s lives, and the second is the question to whom we are accountable in our theorizing. This second question is the same question as who gets to sit at the table of my radically egalitarian analytic philosopher.

There is a limited number of seats at the table because of the physical limitations of the room, size of table, and so on. And there is a limit to how many communities of people one can hold oneself accountable to because of limited intellectual, emotional, linguistic, material, and temporal resources.

So who are we feminist philosophers, including feminist metaphysicians, accountable to?

Publishing the essay in Hypatia without engaging the trans* and critical race theory literature about passing, identity, and related topics sends the message that the author is not accountable to those communities. But what is worse, it sends the message that the journal is not accountable to those communities. And therein lies the betrayal.

Let me be perfectly clear: I am not blaming the author. I think it could have been an earlier version of myself. We have talked a lot about ideology these past couple of days. The author was badly served by our review process. The paper is a perfectly respectable piece of analytic philosophy in the sense that it is a product of the sort of training most Ph.D. students in the US get. I am also not blaming our editor. Our editor carried out our policies and procedures to a T. Those were the procedures we had at the time. They were shown to be inadequate. That’s why the Board of Associate Editors, which is the board responsible for policies and changes to them, issued an apology. Hypatia, the feminist journal, cannot publish essays specifically about the experiences and identities of people in its own community that ignore the scholarship on those very topics by that community.

Doing so is to say to those members of our community: You don’t get to sit at our table. We are not accountable to you. We treat you as mere objects of reflection, not as people, living and breathing, and not as theorists to engage with.

It is to enact epistemic marginalization. It is to enact epistemic harm.

The journal is not the offense police. But it is the have-you-engaged-the-relevant-literature police. And given our feminist commitments, we as a journal are in the make-sure-we-are-not-enacting-marginalization-of-our-own-community police. We failed.

The associate editors apologized to take responsibility for that failure and commit to doing better in the future. We did not express support for a retraction. I did not think that was an option at all: the paper went through our process.

I regret very much the harm the failure of our process caused our author, not to mention the subsequent attacks in the media on our author. She did not deserve any of this. I have no doubt that she had the best of intentions. She has my support, as does our editor.

I, for one, was trying to listen to and learn from members of our own feminist philosophical community who felt betrayed. But I know many other members of the Board of Associate Editors did not need to be similarly educated.
Struggles over who gets to sit at the table are not new in the feminist community. Not all that long ago lesbians weren’t allowed at the feminist theory table, for instance, or black women, or working-class women. The ideal of the feminist in the seventies was a middle class, educated, white, heterosexual woman. She was cisgender, of course, but no one would have even recognized that as one of her features.

A variation of this struggle is, to my mind, going on in feminist philosophy today. Feminist philosophers aren’t all white, middle class, het, cis, or even women. And, I’ll add, we aren’t all native speakers of English, based in North America, Christian, or trained in a certain way of doing philosophy.

The *Hypatia* affair brought all of this to light and showed the need for many difficult conversations in the feminist philosophy community. As feminist philosophy has become more mainstream, there are now pressures on our community to do the ongoing work to examine ourselves and our practices and have them truly reflect our feminist commitments.

Let me now step back a little.

I’ve described a transformation that I went through as a result of the *Hypatia* affair. It is a transformation regarding what it means to be accountable to a certain community. And I’ve described how I think such accountability should be reflected in the methodological commitments of a feminist philosophy journal like *Hypatia*.

But what about my own transformation? And how do I square my commitments to radically egalitarian analytic philosophy with my feminist commitments?

To approach that question I want to go back to the quote from the Lugones and Spelman essay. The essay, you may remember, is called “Have we got a theory for you!” The other question in that quote is how we are to theorize about other people. I actually think it also applies when we theorize about ourselves, but let’s not linger with that now. Their suggestion is that we should theorize with respect and take cue from how we talk with each other across difference, especially when much is at stake. We tread carefully. We listen. And we ask questions before we make statements. We are epistemically humble.

Can the analogy help us with how to theorize about other people? How are we to theorize in a respectful way? And, in particular, how are we to theorize when much is at stake for the people we are theorizing about?

There is a feminist public policy practice called “gender mainstreaming,” which was introduced at the third world conference on women in 1985 and has been adopted in various countries in the world, including developing nations and Scandinavian countries. The idea is that for any proposed action, an investigation should be conducted into the likely effect on women versus men and a decision as to whether to carry through the action be informed by the potential difference in the effect on the two groups.

I’m not advocating incorporating an analogous mainstreaming practice for theorists. But I think we need to think about whose lives are affected by our theorizing and take great care in engaging their own theoretical perspectives on the issues. These are the people with “skin in the game.” The idea of theorizing with respect by engaging people’s own theoretical perspectives, then, also has epistemological implications.

I’m not advocating that only people with skin in the game talk about a certain issue. I’m also not claiming that people with skin in the game have privileged epistemic access to certain issues in such a way that others cannot, in principle, understand them. That would be a strong interpretation of standpoint theory, and I do not subscribe to it. But I think that people with skin in the game often have perspectives on, and experience with, things that others don’t. This is soft standpoint theory, and it is compatible with radical analytic egalitarianism.

We need to listen and we need to engage. This means that analytic philosophers like me cannot continue to do theorizing about people as we have done until now.

I say “we” here, although there are a number of analytic philosophers who have long ago stopped doing philosophy in that way, and a high proportion of them is in this room.

What does this mean? This means that we have to read and engage with work in related scholarly fields more than we do. We should be very wary of the old “that’s not philosophy” trick to push someone off the table in a climate where the discipline of philosophy is extremely white, male, het, cis, and so on. There is gatekeeping going on in philosophy, masked by the ideology of philosophical talent and the associated philosophical genius. There are pressures that direct people who are philosophically inclined and address philosophical questions away from philosophy and to related fields. The reach of our reading, listening, and theoretical engagement needs to take account of that.

It’s not going to be easy. While a lot of feminists incorporate work in adjacent fields, including empirical work, philosophers doing metaphysics and related subjects generally do not, and it may require a balancing act to meet the sometimes competing standards of mainstream metaphysics and feminist philosophy.

What can I say? Philosophy is hard. Good philosophy is harder.

NOTES

1. This was a talk given under the title “To Do Metaphysics as a Feminist” at a conference on feminist philosophy and methodological commitments at Humboldt University in Berlin, July 13–14, 2017. The conference was organized by Mari Mikkola, Hilkje Hänel, and Johanna Müller (http://feminist-philosophy-berlin.weebly.com/). Of course, no one associated with the conference, or mentioned in the talk, is responsible for the views expressed herein.

2. I resigned from the Board of Associate Editors of the journal *Hypatia*, along with my colleagues, on July 22, 2017, after the Board of Directors of the non-profit entity Hypatia, which owns the journal *Hypatia*, had suspended the governance document for the journal.
Feminist Interpretations of William James


Reviewed by Seth Vannatta
MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, SETH.VANNATTA@MORGAN.EDU

A central lesson gleaned from this admirable, multi-authored volume is that we need to be rigorously self-reflective about our own unarticulated cultural assumptions and prejudices. Even as we extol a methodology that should bring these presuppositions to the surface for examination, we often fail. William James, himself, offers a feminist-friendly philosophy of experience in moral reasoning, epistemology, and social philosophy, but falls well short of letting his methodology interrogate his own problematic assumptions about women’s lives and potential liberation from patriarchy. Most of us fall short as well, and the lessons of the chapters in this volume remind us to be more vigilant and thoroughgoing in our self-analysis. I will try to do so in my review of this work and, more importantly, in my life’s work.

With a feeling of warmth and at-home-ness I read and review this book, a most recent contribution to Penn State University Press’s series, Re-Reading the Canon, because I know most of the contributors through our interactions in professional philosophy and I happened to be at the session in the Summer Institute in American Philosophy in Eugene, Oregon, where some of the preliminary feminist interpretations of James were presented. Further, I regularly teach Charlene Seigfried’s Pragmatism and Feminism, from which the opening chapter is taken and reflected on by its author, nine years after its publication. But with its central lesson in mind, I must read and respond with fresh eyes, allow myself to experience perplexity in my reading, and dispassionately offer some helpful criticism.

Its editors, Erin Tarver and Shannon Sullivan, remind the readers in their introduction that for feminists (and all philosophers) a blank slate is not a profitable starting point. We must take the history of philosophy seriously, but balance our charitable readings of it with the criticisms it deserves. William James’s place in the history of philosophy deserves more than a modicum of charity, but as these authors unmistakably establish, he deserves the criticism they proffer. I begin with a summary of such criticisms.

Seigfried shows readers that James defined women in relation to men and in relation to their ability to fulfill men’s needs (28). Jacob Goodson provides an alternative to Seigfried’s reading of James’s reviews of Bushnell’s natural law argument against women’s suffrage and Mill’s utilitarian and sentimentalist arguments for women’s equality. Goodson shows why James was critical of Mill’s reasoning and highlights the virtues of James’s relational and anti-rationalist moral reasoning, even while conceding that James missed the opportunity to declare support for women’s equality (68–69).

Erin McKenna furthers Seigfried’s critiques of James by reminding readers that James’s beliefs should be found in his habits of action, and when we investigate his habits of interacting with women, we find real problems in his professional, personal, and familial relationships—James regularly backgrounded women’s work and value, ignored their concrete desires for liberation from only domestic life and work, and was insensitive to the ways his words and actions hurt women, including his wife, Alice (81, 87). Further, much of the scholarly work on James has perpetuated this problem by ignoring his interactions with women, including Jane Addams, and the potential influence they had on his thinking (83). Tarver uses Simone de Beauvoir to unpack the sexist implications of James’s use of feminine metaphors to represent philosophies, including Lady Pragmatism, that “we” (men) might choose as the mistress mostly likely to serve our needs. The implications of this analysis and Tarver’s critique of James’s assertions about great men, philosophically inconsistent with his otherwise relational view of the self, are far reaching and exceedingly well written—Tarver takes James to task for the sexist damage his texts inflict but manages to do so “as a friend of James” (110).

The bulk of the text is devoted not only to critiques of James’s feminist shortcomings, but to a mining of the subversively feminine and feminist themes in his writing for appropriation. To these I now turn thematically. It is important to note that every author who engages in this “modern feminist philosophical appropriation” realizes and admits the difficulties and potential problems of looking past James’s gender biases (142). The authors in this volume do not traffic in the assumption that such biases are irrelevant. The first theme for which James’s philosophical tools are mined is care ethics. Susan Dieleman and Maurice Hammington rely appropriately on the primary and secondary resources of contemporary care ethics to elicit the themes in James’s work useful to the advancement of a non-essentialist project of an ethic of care, which emphasizes the plurality of emergent, contextual values and obligations in an ongoing effort to widen the scope of the circle of caring (128, 145). Both give useful and brief histories of care ethics and rely on James’s “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” and “The Moral Equivalent to War” to illustrate the role of relations, emotions, and habits in an ethic of care, which, like James’s moral philosophy, refuses both the abstract notion of the autonomous and independent moral agent as the center of moral decision-making and the process of applying universal principles to particular morally problematic situations.

I read the chapters in the volume’s third part on embodiment and emotion anticipating a big, feminist cash-value moment. Reflecting on my feeling that the chapters did not deliver in that way, it struck me that what constitutes a “feminist interpretation” varies widely. And in this section, Megan Craig, Shannon Sullivan, and Jeremy Carrette highlight that in...
James's corpus, including reflections on ways to ameliorate the stresses of American life incrementally, the philosophy of emotion, and mystical experience, which much of mainstream American philosophy, although not feminist philosophy, has tended to marginalize. These chapters adeptly balance textual and historical analysis to make clearer to the reader central Jamesian insights regarding the cultivation of healthy habits, a philosophy of emotion that identifies emotion with the body, and an emphasis on James's proto-feminist “more,” including its refusal of closure and its fluidity of forms (227). These chapters also offer unique strengths. Craig's chapter is rare in that it delivers more relevant contemporary denotative references for James's philosophy (something I wanted more of from the other chapters). This includes the application of his emphasis on openness and habit cultivation to ameliorate the stresses, some unique to women, of fast-paced, digital lives (175). Sullivan's chapter is unique in its germane connection of contemporary research on the sociality of emotion and affective transmission to James's philosophy of emotion (203). Carrette's chapter convincingly shows that James's use of women's religious experience in the Varieties is caught up in the web of religious and scientific understandings of women's bodies that underwrite patriarchal domination (226).

My strongest criticism of the volume is that several chapters give a nod to Elizabeth Spelman's claim that too much feminist thought operates according to the "tidy and irrefutable" unstated assumption that "all women are women" and then proceeds to re-center the race-less, able-bodied, straight, middle-class woman in their discussion of feminism (125). However, the penultimate chapter by José Medina, and the last by Lorraine Code, helped assuage this concern. Medina builds on the scholarship of Cornel West, Harvey Cormier, and others to show how "the critical potential of James's pragmatism became impaired by a bourgeois individualism" in ways that weakened its ability to tackle issues of injustice, privilege, and oppression (237). The chapter shows the ways in which James's pragmatism and standpoint theory converge. However, using the work of Patricia Hill Collins and others, Medina uncovers what is lacking in James's corpus to make each of these convergent points radical and critical enough to tackle patriarchal privilege and other epistemic injustices. On my reading, only Medina interrogates anything beyond the male as the assumed center. He writes, "We need to center the queer [. . .] by queering the center," this a feature of his guerilla pluralism, a strategy to develop tools of unknowing in response to James's failure in epistemic responsibility (245).

Code reads James alongside Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin to give life to James's claim that "novels of a deeper sort" must ally themselves with more traditional forays into ethics. Code contends that Stowe's novel opens an analogous conceptual space for connecting women's feminist emancipatory issues with slavery/antiblack racism, and with the promise James evinces for acting "as if" — showing that "faith in a fact can help create the fact" (264–65). Stowe's work makes evident the difference between propositional knowing (that S is P) and the imaginative, situated, and felt knowledge that can serve as epistemic resistance to oppression (273). Stowe's novel fulfills the promise Code finds in James's moral reasoning and insights concerning the will to believe.

Beyond the criticism registered above, somewhat appeased by Medina's and Code's contributions, the main shortcoming I felt after finishing the chapters concerns the difference the scholarship makes in our contemporary daily experiences. I began by articulating the central lesson of the volume—we need to realize failures to interrogate our own practices which may benefit from or participate in patriarchal privilege and habituate the practice of more rigorous self-analysis. For example, I have read much of James's corpus, including his problematic gendered metaphors about Lady Pragmatism, with a certain blindness. This book will succeed in making me a more sensitive reader. But I anticipated more authors applying James's feminist-friendly tools to experiences and practices including, for example, pedagogy or serving on hiring committees in ways that confront rather than reinforce patriarchy. With few exceptions, the authors' laudatory flights into critical analysis and feminist appropriation, on my reading, failed to perch sufficiently on the realities of patriarchy and privilege in our daily work.

That said, the authors in this volume analyze James's texts adroitly, eloquently, and sensitively. They make a meaningful contribution to the history of American philosophy, to our understanding of William James's philosophy, American Pragmatism, and feminism. I recommend it without reservation to scholars of each and to other interested lines of research including womanism, religious studies, and psychology. Tarver and Sullivan managed a talented set of scholars in a way that paid tribute to James's pluralism, but the book also serves as a warm and deserved acknowledgment of one of the pioneers in pragmatist feminism and William James scholarship. Seigfried's chapters open and close the volume in a rich and satisfying way. Her charitable contributions of the first chapter and the afterword fashion the plural perspectives into an edifying unity.

ENDNOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Philosophizing About Sex


Reviewed by F. Vera-Gray
DURHAM UNIVERSITY, FIONA.VERA-GRAY@DURHAM.AC.UK

In Philosophizing About Sex, Laurie J. Shrage and Robert Scott Stewart have set out on a valuable endeavor, offering a clearly written textbook covering current philosophical debates on human sexuality. With an inquisitive and conversational tone, the book covers such often polarized and polarizing questions as “Are we born gay or straight?” “Who should be allowed to marry?” “Is sex always harmful for children?” And “Can sex or porn be addictive?” The approach taken by the authors is one of philosophical curiosity, providing enough information about the various positions within the debates, and their philosophical backing, to generate both lively discussion among students and a desire to find out more. Given that both of these outcomes should form the intention of a textbook such as this, the authors successfully navigate what could be troublesome terrain.

The book is divided into 12 chapters, each taking a general topic for discussion, most often through a range of associated questions. The following topics are covered: Defining Sex; Sexual Attraction; Sexual Objectification and Autonomy; Sex and Violence; Sexual Perversion and Sodomy Laws; Sex and Marriage; Sex and Children; Sexual Speech and the Freedom of Expression; Sexual Privacy; Sex and Responsibility; The Scientific and Medical Study of Sex; and Sex and the Limits of Tolerance in Secular Democratic Societies. That the authors have managed to incorporate such a diverse range of topics necessarily limits the depth with which each can be explored. This means the philosophical problems thrown up by some of the questions raised are not always fully fleshed out in all their depth and complexity. Rather, they are to be better understood as a tasting plate, an excellent introductory resource to philosophizing about sex destined to inspire inquisitive minds to search further. The text itself is written in such a way that it includes many practical examples and US cultural reference points, such as various movies, case law, and examples such as comedian Daniel Tosh’s ill-advised defense of rape jokes in 2012 (167), or advice columnist Dan Savage’s position on the need to be “good, giving and game” (212) in relation to fulfilling a partner’s sexual desires. This approach will make not only for engaging reading, but also helps to ground the philosophical discussion in its everyday implications, ensuring we never stray too far into abstract, theoretical territory. This, together with its subject matter (it is a book on sex after all!), will inevitably help to spark—and maybe even keep—the interest of even the most easily distracted students.

Each chapter is followed by discussion questions and further reading, a useful combination of popular open-access articles such as those in the New York Times or Huffington Post, as well as more traditional academic journal articles. This combination makes the book a great resource for stand-alone lessons based on the chapter topic, both within and outside of philosophy. Indeed, the authors are to be commended for the gender balance in their further reading lists, something particularly necessary for redressing the historical imbalance in philosophy, though there is the occasional puzzling absence of in-text references to key figures in the debates under consideration. I’m thinking here of the discussion on intersectionality in Chapter 2, which does not cite Kimberlie Crenshaw (though it does reference an organization she leads), the discussion of rape as a weapon of war made without reference to Catharine MacKinnon, or the discussions of intersubjectivity and sex in Chapters 1 and 3, as well as the female orgasm in Chapter 11, made without reference to Simone de Beauvoir (though a secondary reference developing Beauvoir’s position of “erotic generosity” is included in further reading for Chapter 1). These absences, however, are a small price to pay for an ambitious text that tackles a large range of topics in such a compact and accessible manner.

There are some definite standout chapters and topics. Chapter 3 provides an important and timely exploration as to whether consent is a sufficient condition for moral sex. Chapter 5, on sexual perversions, sodomy laws, and masturbation, based on one of the author’s previously published papers, provides a detailed yet succinct historical account of the development of the “perversion” framework. This helps establish the background to the debates the chapter aims to spark, such as whether, for example, there should be laws against sodomy. Both the discussions on sexual harassment as wrongdoing (Chapter 4) and on the wrongness of “outing” someone’s sexuality (Chapter 9) are particularly well structured and demonstrate the skill of the authors in balancing competing arguments in such a way that neither are reduced or dismissed entirely. This is further evidenced in the discussion of abortion in Chapter 10, and the authors should be particularly proud of condensing extremely complex arguments here into a clearly written and easily digestible format. This skill in weighing the issues underpinning opposing perspectives equally is a core strength in the book at large, sure to spark many a heated classroom debate as well as to encourage readers to evaluate and form their own positions in relation to those presented.

It is in coming to the book with the sense of critical evaluation that is embedded in the text itself that I would suggest informs its pedagogical use with students. It is particularly important in a general overview such as that offered by the text to invite discussion about what is included/excluded, what is given more or less space, and what positions the students see are endorsed throughout the text—that is, to use the text itself to invite discussion challenging the notion of an objective or “general” overview. As evidenced across some of the topics mentioned above, in many places the authors give a balanced view of contesting and contested perspectives, leaving it up to the reader to inquire further. In others, the authors’ argument is made explicit, such as that made in Chapter 5, that intentionalist views of sex have resulted in its over-medicalization, or that in Chapter 6, which locates authors’ position as pointing out weaknesses in the opposition to equal marriage. In a small minority of...
places, however, the discussion unduly simplifies complex arguments and empirical claims in order to prioritize one interpretation over another without explicitly stating this is an argument crafted by the authors. The one place I found this most distracting, given my own interests and location, was in the discussion on whether sex offender laws are just, given in Chapter 4.

Here, arguments for the negative position are overwhelmingly considered to the detriment of the balance presented across other, equally controversial, topics. It is striking that the notion of what is just or “justice” from the victim’s perspective, an area of investigation that finds elements of justice including retribution, punishment, and address through the criminal law, is absent here, when its inclusion could have significantly deepened the grounds for debate. In addition, while many of the questions posed in this section are useful, an interrogation of what is violent about sexual violence is absent. Had this been included in a similar way to the introductory discussion of privacy in Chapter 9, the term “non-violent” sexual offences, used here presumably to refer to non-contact offenses, would not have been more clearly problematized, or perhaps avoided completely. Empirical claims such as that the publication of sex offender records online “essentially [make] anyone on these a social pariah, subject to social ostracism and isolation” (50), are made without evidence and sit perhaps most uncomfortably in today’s context given the election of a US president accused of sexual assault during his candidacy. Accusations and convictions of sexual offenses simply do not have the suggested consequence of social ostracism, and it would be more within the spirit of the book to invite questions on, for instance, whether this is something they should do, rather than to uncritically reproduce a claim that is commonly held but rarely evidenced. Finally, laws on public registration are critiqued as not providing support for victims living with offenders, and yet the use of the law to protect these same victims (such as non-contact or non-molestation orders or protection orders) are not mentioned here, only to be addressed in a later discussion about laws that need greater enforcement.

My argument here is not that sex offender laws are in fact just, nor that the discussion should (or could) be made “objectively.” It is simply that one of the competing positions is reduced to such a point as to erase the need for debate, a similar issue in the discussion of prostitution in Chapter 3, disappointing given Shrage’s previous work in this area. Fortunately, the tone of the book works well to encourage students to interrogate even seemingly balanced positions, and as such the limited places where the author’s positions are not made explicit and yet deeply inform the arguments presented can be used to invite further exploration. The question for students here would be not only where are you located in relation to the positions articulated, but where do you think the authors are located? What evidence is given more weight, literally more space in the text, and what does this mean for your response to the arguments presented? Rather than forming a weakness, then, such subtle positioning can form part of classroom discussions itself, along with the many varied and useful questions posed within the text.

Overall, Shrage and Stewart have created a well-written and accessible introduction to current issues in philosophizing about sex. Their book offers an invaluable tool for anyone looking to bring some of the many conversations about sexual violence and harassment on campus in general (and in philosophy in particular) into the learning environment, and as such should be a welcome addition to core reading lists across a range of courses.


---

**Moral Aims: Essays on the Importance of Getting It Right and Practicing Morality with Others**


Reviewed by Lisa Tessman

**BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY, LTTESSMAN@BINGHAMTON.EDU**

Because I have long been a fan of Cheshire Calhoun’s work, many of the essays published in Moral Aims were already familiar to me. I thought that reading the collection would be like visiting old friends. Instead, it came with many “ah-ha” moments of discovering new connections amongst what I had previously thought of as Calhoun’s distinct ideas. The collection fuses once-separate essays into what is essentially a wonderful new monograph. Meanwhile, each essay is still worth reading on its own; every single essay contains an important, original insight, and is carefully argued, extremely clear, thought provoking, and a pleasure to read. I can’t comment individually on every essay here, but I will focus on the overarching theme and make some remarks about a few of the essays.

The Introduction lays out the preoccupation of the book, which is also one of the main points of the lead essay, “Moral Failure.” Morality, Calhoun believes, can be conceived either, on the one hand, as the grasping of correct moral principles, or, on the other hand, as a set of actual (but often misguided) social norms and practices. The strong, organizing theme of the book is the importance of both and the tension between them. The essays tend to emphasize the second way of conceiving of morality—as a social practice—as if written for an audience that holds the first conception (morality as correct moral principles) and needs to be convinced not to dismiss the second conception (morality as a social practice). Personally, I hold something closer to the second conception, and Calhoun never fully convinced me that the difficulty faced by moral agents can be captured only if one accepts both conceptions, and in particular only if one accepts a premise of the
first conception, namely, that there are moral principles whose correctness must be ascertained through rational justification. It is in the introduction that Calhoun argues most explicitly for the importance of both conceptions; in “Moral Failure” she vividly portrays an instance of the tension between the two, which arises when someone who resists the moral norms of her community in the name of “getting it right” (i.e., grasping correct moral principles) nevertheless fails morally precisely because she fails to be able to practice her correct moral principles socially, which is the only way they can be practiced and thus the only way they can even be.

In arguing for the importance of the first conception, Calhoun focuses on what the moral theorist (or anyone who is critically reflective in the right way) does to access correct moral principles, part of which is “going hypothetical” in the sense of imagining, counterfactually, a context in which people endorsed only those moral norms that there is reason to endorse; in contrast to the moral practices that people actually require of each other in the real world, where their endorsement of moral requirements may be mistaken, “genuine moral requirements will have to be conceived as ones that are endorsable by all within a hypothetical social world populated by people who are capable of accessing the good reasons there are to endorse those requirements” (3).

We get a more specific sense of the form that this critical reflection should take in Part III of the book, which is on “conventionalized wrongdoing”; proper critical reflection must take place even (or especially) when wrongdoing has been conventionalized in social norms, for it has the potential to expose and correct such wrongdoing. This part of the book includes an especially brilliant chapter on “Kant and Compliance with Conventionalized Injustice,” in which Calhoun proposes an interpretation of Kantian universalization that involves a hypothetical world in which all parties to a cooperative scheme are, unlike actual people, self-respecting in such a way that their response to moral wrongs would be resistance rather than acquiescent cooperation; thus when one attempts universalization in such a world, a contradiction “results from free, equal, and rational beings’ response to the conditions created by universalizing an impermissible maxim” (178). The other chapter in this part of the book, “Responsibility and Reproach,” also takes the perspective of those, such as feminists, who, presumably through this kind of critical reflection, have come to reject dominant norms, and thus find themselves in an “abnormal moral context,” namely, a context “at the frontiers of moral knowledge when a subgroup of society . . . makes advances in moral knowledge faster than they can be disseminated to and assimilated by the general public. . . . As a result, the rightness or wrongness of some courses of action . . . is, for a time, transparent only to the knowledge-acquiring subgroup and is opaque to outsiders” (196). In such a context, the knowledgeable subgroup might both excuse and reproach those who have not caught up with the new moral knowledge—excuse because it is very difficult to be good in abnormal moral contexts, but reproach because it is not, after all, impossible, and because reproach helps to publicly disseminate the new knowledge.

But no matter how crucial it is to grasp correct moral principles, this first conception of morality, Calhoun insists, can’t stand alone as what morality “really” is, for there can be no moral requirements without actual people engaged in actual “requiring activities” (10); “there are no shared cooperative schemes, no treatments of others, no moral identities, no reactive attitudes that effectively hold people responsible—other than in actual social practices of morality. . . . Absent a social practice, there is no morality, although there might be moral knowledge” (13). Persuaded of the soundness of the second conception of morality, one might think that all there is to morality is what we engage in as practitioners, “where our concern is with making what we are morally up to and who we morally are intelligible to others, reaching shared moral understandings, and communicating moral attitudes and demands to co-participants” (13). Those who are familiar with Margaret Urban Walker’s expressive-collaborative account of morality will recognize how strongly Calhoun has been influenced by her; this is evident both in Calhoun’s characterization of this view of morality and in her acknowledgment of the importance of it. But Calhoun departs from Walker: while for Walker the key point is that the authority of morality resides in actual practitioners’ well-placed confidence in it—and that there is nothing more to morality—for Calhoun there is something more: “getting it right.”

I want to interpret Calhoun as charitably as possible as I try to figure out exactly what “getting it right” amounts to. She never comes right out with what I would have to take to be a moral realist’s line—that there are (“mind-independent”) moral truths out there in the world that we might be able to access but that we certainly don’t construct through our own activities. Because I find moral realism to be extremely implausible, I don’t want to read Calhoun as taking this position; but it is also not totally clear to me that she rejects moral realism. What she does say about “getting it right” is that it is not a matter of constructing the “rightness” of moral norms by reaching social agreement about them. Instead, the rightness of a norm is found in its endorsement in a hypothetical world of people who have access to the good reasons for endorsement . . . it is the goodness of the reasons, not the fact of actual agreement, that is doing the work” (5-6). Good reasons depend on the “correctness of the justificatory argument” (6). But because I believe that our judgments about the goodness of reasons or the correctness of justificatory arguments are dependent upon what we actually value, I don’t think that what Calhoun calls “getting it right” really is something beyond what we do as the actual, situated, socially engaged people that we are.

So while Calhoun doesn’t accept Walker’s contention that a morality that is socially constructed and practiced is all the morality that we’ve got, I stand with Walker on this one—and yet, in deep appreciation for what Calhoun has identified as the tension experienced by the critic of social norms, I don’t want to be left unable to recognize this tension as real. However, I believe that the tension can be fully accounted for without ever supposing that there is such a thing as “getting it right.” I continue to believe that all of morality is constructed by us—practitioners of morality—through our evaluative and critical activities. But these very activities take place socially and they are how practitioners
come to do not exactly what Calhoun calls “getting it right,” but rather what I would simply describe as arriving at better, but still socially constructed, moral understandings. In Neurathian fashion, to repair our ship while we are at sea, we must stand on one plank of the ship while critically assessing and fixing other planks. There is nowhere to stand off the ship to “get it right” or even to determine that one moral understanding is better than another, so we do this from our perspective on other planks of the ship: from the perspective of some of our other values. Nevertheless, when we (typically some subgroup, rather than a lone individual) lose confidence in our society’s moral practices and understandings, or become confident that something different is morally required of us, we run into the tension Calhoun describes: we can’t both do what we judge is morally required of us, and do so in the only way that may be possible—namely, socially—with others who do not, or at least do not yet, share our judgments.

Another reason that I question whether there is such a thing as “getting it right” is that I don’t think that there is a single right morality to get; along the lines of David Wong’s version of pluralistic relativism, I believe that values are not only plural but also, in many cases, conflicting and incommensurable. There will be a variety of ways of prioritizing irreducibly different values in the face of conflict, and no single standpoint from which to correctly determine that one priority ranking is better than another. Actual people, or communities, will have different priorities simply because of what they care about, or what they care about more. Given some features of evolved human nature, and given the sorts of problems that human social groups must solve in order to live cooperatively, there will be some contingently universal constraints on the moral practices that could possibly help us cooperate and live well, but within these constraints there will be more than one good moral scheme. Thus moralities that are constructed from what people actually value will be plural, and there will be no way to stand apart from this and grasp a single correct morality or “get it right.” Within the social group that is expressing, communicating, and negotiating shared practices, there will always be disagreement, and—again—nowhere off the Neurathian ship to stand and determine who has gotten it “right.”

The relativity of values, norms, and moral schemes brings me to another point, focused on Part II of the book, which contains three essays, each of which is about a virtue (civility, decency, and integrity) that is social in some particular way. For instance, “The Virtue of Civility” emphasizes the importance of the second conception of morality—morality as social practice—because civility requires that one conform to certain social norms just because they are norms. Civility is about communicating a moral attitude of “respect, tolerance, and considerateness” (79) rather than about being “genuinely” respectful, tolerant, or considerate, so all that really matters is mutual understanding of which behaviors communicate this. I agree with Calhoun’s characterization of this virtue. But its practice is more complicated than Calhoun acknowledges, in any multicultural context in which there is a lack of consensus about which behaviors communicate which moral attitudes. Consider this simple example: I (American) and my partner (Israeli) run into an (American) acquaintance whom we don’t like very much; the acquaintance, behaving according to American norms of civility, finishes our conversation by saying she’d love to get together sometime. I give the obligatory American response: “yes, I’d love that too.” While we both know perfectly well that we don’t actually want to get together, we have behaved according to shared norms of civility, communicating consideration for each other by abiding with a norm of not directly stating the reality that we’d rather not have to spend any time in each other’s company; according to our shared norm, stating this directly would communicate a desire to humiliate the other. My partner witnesses the interaction as violating norms of civility: the acquaintance and I have just flat out lied to each other! We have communicated an utter lack of respect! Neither of us is “right” (it has, of course, taken us many years to realize this) because it is not a matter of what “genuinely” constitutes considerateness or respect (even if there were such a thing, which Calhoun seems to think there is). Either norm could work because it is just a matter of convention to determine the behavior that is meant to signal a certain attitude. But the norms don’t work when they aren’t shared. As Calhoun emphasizes, these are norms that require consensus. But—and this is the point to which Calhoun doesn’t give enough weight—they are exactly the kinds of norms about which there is enormous cultural variance. Furthermore, it is not enough for us to know intellectually that someone who differs culturally from ourselves may be signaling respect differently from us, for much of this kind of communication takes place below the level of consciousness; whatever we know intellectually, the unfamiliar or unshared norm won’t feel right—it might even feel insulting—and can’t serve the purpose of a norm of civility. This isn’t an argument against Calhoun’s characterization of what kind of a virtue civility is; it is just a comment on how difficult it is to practice this virtue socially, in a diverse society.

Calhoun’s well-known essay, “Standing for Something,” completes Part II by insisting on the importance of the social for what has seemed to some other theorists to be a personal virtue related only to one’s own individual judgments: integrity. Individual judgment matters to integrity, Calhoun argues, precisely because “it is only within individual persons’ deliberative viewpoints, including one’s own, that what is worth our doing can be decided” (150). Integrity is the social virtue of contributing one’s own judgment to collective considerations and being willing to stand behind it. However, Calhoun rightly notes, “when what is worth doing is under dispute, concern to act with integrity . . . calls us simultaneously to stand behind our convictions and to take seriously others’ doubts about them” (152).

Part IV is more loosely connected to the rest of the book, but its two essays are well worth reading. The final essay, “Changing One’s Heart,” is a particularly beautiful and compelling call to understand other people sympathetically—even when they are morally culpable—by recognizing that their moral goodness is not all that matters about them. The fact that they cause moral harm is best understood when situated in the larger (auto)biographical story that they build to make sense of their lives. Switching to this perspective “assumes that what gets said by persons
through their actions is often something about themselves and their lives, not just about their moral views}; even when we have been morally wronged by someone, we might be able to forgive them if we take this perspective, which "charitably assumes that wrongdoing is less likely to be a blow directly aimed at us than to be shrapnel from something else more complicated and more interesting in the person's life" (242). With this I wholeheartedly agree, and find it, like much of what Calhoun says, to be wise advice not only for practicing morality with others, but for living socially with the richness of all of our values, moral and otherwise.

**Existential Eroticism. A Feminist Approach to Understanding Women's Oppression-Perpetuating Choices**


Reviewed by Mara Marin
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, CENTRE FOR ETHICS, MARA.MARIN@UTORONTO.CA

Shay Welch's new book is motivated by a familiar yet enduring problem in feminist theory; that of the biases of privilege. The problem is that feminist theorists, while claiming to speak on behalf of all women, are prevented to do so by their privileged position that limits their understanding of the experience of marginal women. While this problem is endemic to philosophy more generally, it is particularly embarrassing for feminist philosophers, who position themselves as critics of privilege and of its biases. In spite of these claims, Welch posits, feminist theorists continue to be restricted by their own racial and class privilege.

Welch's project aims "to fill at least one gap that exists in the space between lived oppression and theoretical analysis" by focusing "on feminist analyses of women's oppression-perpetuating choices to draw out how such biases in theorizing can undermine liberation" (1-2). To do so, Welch moves away from the example of the middle-class, generally white woman who chooses between homemaking and work outside the home to the choices faced by Western women in the sex industry and in abusive relationships. These choices reveal "women's oppression qua beauty and sexuality," which Welch calls "existential eroticism" (2).

The focus on theories of oppression-perpetuating choices is not accidental. It is motivated by the second problem that motivates the book: the problem of anti-oppression solidarity between women of different class, race, ethnicity, and experience with violence. As Welch puts it in the first, introductory, chapter, her aim is "to draw out how such biases in theorizing can undermine liberation" (2). Mainstream accounts of blame and moral responsibility—and the feminist theories that rely on them—are inappropriate for the evaluation of women's self-perpetuation of oppression (191), and thus become complicit in blaming women in the sex industry and women in domestic abusive relationships for their situation, thus undermining the possibility of solidarity and common political action among women from different backgrounds and with different experiences. The ultimate aim of the theoretical analysis is, then, a practical, political one: healing the divide between women of different social positions.

To the end of understanding the experience of non-normative, under-class women, Welch offers a three-pronged methodology: narrative, articulation of new concepts, and critical assessment of particular feminist arguments and positions. Welch makes use of rich, detailed narratives (both her own and from the lives of others) in order to give us access to the perspective, voice, and experience of the women usually left out of feminist theories. In order to articulate theoretically these narratives, she argues, we need a new theoretical vocabulary, which she proceeds to offer. Finally, with the narrative accounts of marginal women's experiences and the novel conceptual vocabulary that could capture them in place, Welch takes issue with particular feminist arguments and positions.

After a first introductory chapter, the book is organized in two parts. The first part, comprised of four chapters, "aims to articulate and explicate the non-normative lived experience through both theory and narrative" (21). In this way, Welch aims "to represent particular voices that are marginalized and that have either been ignored or misrepresented in feminist philosophy" (21). The second part, comprised of three chapters, aims to provide new theoretical language that can match the task of evaluating these silenced experiences. Moreover, throughout the book, Welch draws on, shows the limits of, and extends the analyses of feminist theories of domination (MacKinnon 1987, 1989), autonomy (Meyers 1989 and Friedman 2003), psychological oppression (Bartky 2001), oppression (Cudd 2006), adaptive preferences (Khader 2011, Nussbaum 2001), moral responsibility (Isaacs 1997, 2011, Walker 2006, 2007, Smiley 1992, Card 1996) and the connected issues of blame (Houston 1992; Superson 1995) and forgiveness (MacLachlan 2009).

Chapter Two, "Existential Eroticism and Autonomy," provides a nuanced account of the relation between (heterosexual) women's "existential eroticism" ("woman's existence as beauty and sex object for men," (36)) women's choices, their agency and power, and their autonomy. Welch frames the discussion in MacKinnon's terms of heterosexual sexuality as male dominance, but connects this account to one about women's choices and their autonomy. She articulates several psychological mechanisms that explain how women are coopted in their own oppression. Drawing on Cudd's account of stereotypes, she argues that behind existential eroticism in general and the sex industry in particular lies women's desire to be part of the "in-group" of women who are "successful at femininity," the group of "successful women" ("women's desire to be part of the "in-group" of women who are "successful at femininity," the group of beautiful and sexually desirable women") that is both constituted and rewarded by a woman's relation to a man and by the attention he confers on her (40-41). Drawing on Bartky's account of narcissism and the pleasures of feminine existence, she argues that women internalize
not only the eroticization of violence, but also "women's euphoric, rapturous, blissful infatuation with and mania over their beauty beyond false consciousness or rational material incentive" (43). In this way, by internalizing the male gaze, women become their own erotic object and achieve "profound erotic satisfaction" (43), a satisfaction that Cudd’s (2006) and Superson’s (1995) accounts lack the theoretical resources to capture. Welch concludes that existential eroticism severely hinders women's autonomy because women's own sexual desires are for male dominance.

But I think that this is the wrong conclusion to draw from this analysis. The evidence that Welch provides seems to me to point in a rather different direction. Rather than showing that under conditions of domination women's autonomy is hindered, it shows that the notion of autonomy itself is inadequate to the task of illuminating the nature of women's domination because of the close relation between autonomy and ideas of authenticity. Welch suggests precisely this when she asks, "If masculinist objectivity obtains as MacKinnon so clearly argues, and the male gaze is the "objective" social perspective, is the male gaze not then actually constitutive of the erotic woman's authentic self since, as feminists have argued, there is no metaphysical true self?" (52). Unfortunately, she does not answer her own question.

As part of the book's project is to distinguish between individual moral responsibility for individuated acts and complicit, systemic contributions, Chapter Three, "Forms of Restrictions and Systemic Patriarchy," aims to distinguish between systemic patriarchal and individual forms of restriction and to theorize their relationship to one another. It does so by offering an analysis of patriarchy as a system of coercion with different levels of restriction—duress, necessity, and coercion—that obtain in different contexts. This sort of analysis, Welch thinks, has two theoretical advantages. First, it allows feminists to "capture widely divergent phenomenological experiences of injustice" (56) among the oppressed while at the same time, I would add, continuing to speak of a common oppression. Secondly, by "parsing out context-specific tiers of restriction in terms of choice permitted and potential to do otherwise, feminists can then better parse the questions of blame and responsibility for women who choose oppression-perpetuating options" (56).

Chapter Four applies this analysis to existential eroticism by making ample use of narrative and examples of the varied type of restrictions that operate on women working in different parts of the sex industry. This is a rich, nuanced analysis. Welch shows how the restrictions literally operate through the psychology of the women that are faced with the choices available to them in an industry in which the satisfaction of male desire determines financial rewards.

Chapter Five, "Trauma as Desperation," argues that trauma is a coercive condition because the psychological damage suffered by victims of trauma leaves them no exit options from their point of view. Although Welch does not say this explicitly, I read her argument to be that, given the psychological character of trauma, the idea of exiting the relationship is brought from outside by relatively privileged women, and used to make both moral judgments and judgments about the rationality of the abused women, who are seen, as a result, as both irrational and to blame for their own situation when they seem to refuse to leave the abusive situation.

To counter this narrative of the abused women as irrational and/or to blame for their situation, Chapter Six, "Desperate Rationality," draws on rational choice and game theory to develop a notion of rationality appropriate for the context of traumatized subjects. On Welch's account, desperate rationality is the rationality developed and deployed by those who inhabit a "globally desperate state of affairs" (130), a rationality that is responsible for women's survival under这些 conditions (129). For women who have no choice but to comply, there are still a variety of "ways in which they can and do comply" (130), and this is the area where desperate rationality is exercised. Thus, the notion of desperate rationality enables Welch to separate rationality and moral responsibility and, as a result, to recognize women living under abusive conditions as rational agents without blaming them for their situation. In Welch's words:

"But if feminists can delve deeper into decision theory frameworks from a perspective of trauma they can discern that the subjectivity of interdependent rationality permits traumatized individual to make bargains and strategic maneuvers within objectively coercive, no-choice contexts without carrying the baggage that choice sans coercion generates. That is, the point becomes clear that such individuals truly have no choice other than submission but that there is considerable variation in the ways in which they can and do comply. . . . The absence of moral responsibility attaches to the coercive borders and the rationality attaches to the actions taken within the strictly coerced domain. It is because rational strategy can be utilized within the permeable bounds of desperation-based coercion that rationality and moral responsibility can be separated without reducing the actor to a defeated automaton. (130)

This is a nuanced, rich, and compelling argument. And it enables Welch to set up her view of the levels of moral responsibility (Chapter Seven) and, importantly for her aims, of the forgiveness among different groups of women that is essential for forging real and effective solidarity among women (Chapter Eight). I find the main claims of this argument compelling.

However, I am left wondering if the book fulfilled the promise it started with: the promise that, in considering the lives and experiences of marginal women, the book shows the conceptual biases and limits of feminists theories, thus proving them insufficient or unsatisfactory for analyzing the lives of marginal women. Not only does Welch's analysis draw on established approaches in feminist theory, such as Ann Cudd's (2006) analysis of stereotypes, her analysis of how women's choices perpetuate the oppressive constraints they experience, or Khader's (2011) analysis of adaptive preferences, it also leaves them..."
unchanged. In utilizing these theories to understand the situation of traumatized women or sex workers, one is left with the impression that they are capable to account for the complex situations Welch describes. It is true that Welch shows that these feminist theorists have not been developed in light of the examples she offers and that they have not directed their attention to understanding the experiences of the women she focuses on. She also shows that when we do so—when we focus our attention to understanding these silenced, invisible experiences—we gain surprising and important insights into the nature of human rationality and into the relation between rationality and moral responsibility, among others.

This is no small achievement. As I read the book, these insights are important because they apply more generally than just to the experience of marginal women. Take the notion of “desperate rationality.” It shows, it seems to me, that it is always the case that even when we have no choice but compliance, we continue to act rationally. But it does not show what it promised, that the concepts that feminist theory provides to us are not able to capture the silenced experience of marginal women. Instead, I think it achieves something more remarkable, which is to show that reflecting on invisible, marginal lives illuminates the experience of the privileged.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self


Reviewed by Katrina England

BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY, KENGLAND@BINGHAMTON.EDU

"I am multiplicitous. Multiple and one. Psychic restlessness. Intimate terrorism. Cactus needles embedded in my skin and in my words. Latina, de las otras, daughter, sister, lover, student; teacher, philosopher. English. Spanish. Other languages, but not of words. Of worlds, many of them. In—confusion, pain, paralysis, creation, transformation—BETWEEN" (49, epigraph to chapter 2, emphasis Ortega’s).

Mariana Ortega, thinking with Heideggerian existential phenomenology and Latina feminist phenomenology, offers an account of selfhood to provide consolation in explanatory power and modes of resistance for those who find themselves constantly in-between worlds. To fully articulate the lived experience of immigrants, exiles, and other inhabitants of borderlands, for Ortega, is to understand the experience of selves as both belonging and not belonging—a complex process that includes disclosure, memory, interpretation, and reinterpretation of everyday experiences (8).

Ortega’s book has multiple aims: to provide an account of selfhood that “does justice” to the lived experience of immigrants, exiles, and others who live life in-between worlds; to engage with a rich and underrecognized body of Latina feminist phenomenology, and invite others to follow; and to embody a hometactic, a “production of a sense of familiarity in the midst of an environment or world in which one cannot fully belong due to one’s multiple positions and instances of thin and thick not being-at-ease” in the field of philosophy that still privileges the work of white men and women (203).

What is Latina feminist phenomenology? Ortega’s primary interlocutors are Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones, and Linda Martín Alcoff. Ortega also engages a longer list of Latina feminists (a label Ortega uses cautiously knowing that many may not endorse it) including Norma Alarcón, Edwina Barvosa, Cristina Beltrán, Aimee Carrillo-Rowe, Jacqueline Martinez, Cherrie Moraga, Paula Moya, Juana María Rodriguez, Chela Sandoval, and Ofelia Schutte. While recognizing heterogeneity in Latina identities, Ortega posits six significant characteristics of Latina feminist phenomenology: *(1) attention to the lived experience of Latinas/os in the United States, including those born here or in Latin America and the Caribbean; (2) emphasis on concrete, embodied everyday experience; (3) attention to the intersection of, as Lugones describes it, the intermeshedness of race, sex, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, ethnicity, and so on; (4) disclosure of the way in which the gendered or racialized (mestizaje/ mulañaje) aspect of Latina/o experience is covered up by traditional philosophical discussions that take white male
experience as the norm; (5) attunement to historical and cultural processes that recognize the heterogeneity of Latinas/os; and (6) critical deployment of experiential knowledge in order to contest or reimagine established notions of Latinidad” (10).

In chapter one, Ortega reads Anzaldúa’s account of self—new mestiza and la nepantlera—as a precursor to her own: a mestizaje of both multiplicity (of a self with various social identities) and oneness (in the existential sense of being an “I” with the potential for not just fragmentation but also healing and integration) (46). Shapeshifting and continually in flux, yet also deeply tied to the material conditions she finds herself within, Anzaldúa captures the experience of contradiction, ambiguity, and anxiety of being an outsider/border walker self—a self, Ortega says, that is multiple and one.

Ortega posits a conception of selfhood in chapter two woven from threads of Anzaldúa’s mestizaje, Lugones’s account of world-traveling, and Heidegger’s Dasein. As in her 2001 essay, “‘New Mestizas,’ ‘World-Travelers,’ and ‘Dasein’: Phenomenology and the Multi-Voiced, Multi-Cultural Self,” Ortega draws similarities between Latina feminist phenomenological accounts and Heideggerian concepts of a self always in the making, “thrownness,” the mood of anxiety, rejecting the subject/object dichotomy, temporality, and the hermeneutic dimension of the self. What Heidegger and other existential phenomenologists fail to account for, however, are selves like the new mestiza who constantly experience ruptures in the fabric of daily life that prevent them from inhabiting the world in a nonthematic or nonreflective way. Drawing from Lugones’s concept of ease, Ortega describes this phenomenon as “not being-at-ease.” Selves can experience not being-at-ease in thick senses (ruptures in everyday norms, practices, and experiences that lead to existential crises regarding identity) and thin senses (ruptures of everyday norms and practices that “are usually transparent and taken for granted by those familiar within the culture and the environment”) (63). Ortega favors a self of multiplicity (one self with different aspects “highlighted” in different material contexts) over plurality. Her multiplicitous self is characterized as being-in-worlds and being-between-worlds: the former characterizing the capability of inhabiting and accessing various worlds, and having a sense of how oneself fares in these worlds, and the latter describing the self “in various worlds while, at the same time, traveling from world to world” (66–67). Different multiplicitous selves can occupy the same spaces and, because of their different social identities, these multiplicituous selves will fare differently in those spaces depending on the dominant norms, practices, and relations of power present.

Unlike Lugones’s view of world-traveling, which Ortega critiques for its appeal to ontological pluralism to describe the shift of self in different worlds, Ortega posits an existential pluralist view of world-traveling in chapter three. Ortega adopts Lugones’s conception of worlds as neither worldviews, cultures, utopias, nor possible worlds, but intertwined material spaces that overlap and stand in relations of power to each other (92). One of the issues Ortega sees with Lugones’s account of world-traveling, however, is Lugones’s basis for envisioning resistance in oppressive worlds: an appeal to memories of oneself in other worlds as having different resistant possibilities in oppressive worlds (97). Although Lugones’s conception relies heavily on memory, it does not say enough about memory for Ortega. “What does it mean to say that the ‘I’ in [Lugones’s] first-person perspective is noninferential and at the same time hold these first-person claims as being significant in remembering and self-understanding?” Rather than attempt to answer this and other puzzles, Ortega posits the multiplicitous self that can access openings or apertures to different worlds. Existential pluralism can describe world-traveling as an opening for the self to different worlds in which the self experiences different aspects being highlighted or animated depending on the power relations to which it is exposed. Further, Ortega’s multiplicitous self recognizes the way in which the self fares or is in different worlds. Ortega’s existential pluralism is satisfying but for as closely as she cleaves to Lugones’s theory elsewhere, Ortega’s criticism of what she calls Lugones’s self-traveling left me hungry for further work in Latina feminist phenomenology.

Chapter four is where Ortega elucidates the risks of world-traveling and argues for a critical world-traveling characterized by the world traveler’s vigilance to her practice. To explain her conception of critical world-traveling, Ortega draws from Heidegger’s public and the authentic self that overcomes the leveling practices of the former, and Lugones’s playful world traveling as liberatory practice. Ortega emphasizes the seriousness of world traveling in the sense of life-or-death and survival that she says is missed by Lugones’s “playfulness.” Ortega also discusses contemporary feminists’ interpretations of world traveling as methodology for members of dominant groups. She cautions contemporary feminists against instrumentalizing world traveling as a mere methodology for scholarly work nor cultural tourism. Here Ortega engages Sandra Bartky (whose 1970 text marks the first explicit feminist engagement with Heidegger’s thought) to point out that world-traveling is not a neutral activity, for “one always travels with baggage” (137). For a member of a dominant group to effectively use world traveling as a tool against domination, the self must be aware of the baggage—the “presuppositions”—we bring along, and aware “of the way in which what is learned in world-traveling can be used to change worlds” (137). For Ortega, critical world traveling offers resistance in reflective moments when a world traveler, between worlds, sees where these perspectives overlap and can interpret each world differently. Ortega also imagines further self-reflection for the critical world traveler, more specifically, a vigilance about “what we bring into [the practice of world traveling], what we derive from it, and what we can reimagine and refashion with it” (142).

In chapter five, Ortega confronts issues of the self and identity as she thinks through coalition-building based on identities with Martin Alcoff’s account of identity as interpretive horizon. For Ortega, multiplicituous selves have multiple horizons that highlight the intersubjective aspects of the self. With multiple horizons, the multiplicituous self has multiple shared social meanings. Identity understood as interpretive horizon includes positionality
addition to the honest epigraphs she placed before each with which Ortega crafted her book cover-to-cover: in itself as a hometactic in the discipline of philosophy. Here, I onto one deemed inferior. Finally, Ortega offers her book do” but an insistence in arrogantly imposing your world not employ hometactics; his ways are not merely “making (207–8). Ortega clarifies that the colonist oppressor does comfort us by making our current context easier to navigate Her examples include painting walls colors that remind us are praxis already undertaken by multiplicitous selves, and being home without falling into traps? (206). Hometactics to one’s multiple positions and instances of thin and thick environment or world in which one cannot fully belong due to one’s multiple positions and instances of thin and thick not being-at-ease” (203). Unlike strategies, hometactics are opportunistic and need not follow prescriptive rules. How do multiplicitous selves “make do” and create a sense of being home without falling into traps? (206). Hometactics are praxis already undertaken by multiplicitous selves, and such a praxis does not preclude critical world-traveling. Her examples include painting walls colors that remind us of childhood, eating a nacatamal (a Nicaraguan tamale) in Cleveland, befriending a neighbor, and code-switching. These practices are unplanned, occur in the moment, and comfort us by making our current context easier to navigate (207–8). Ortega clarifies that the colonist oppressor does not employ hometactics; his ways are not merely “making do” but an insistence in arrogantly imposing your world onto one deemed inferior. Finally, Ortega offers her book itself as a hometactic in the discipline of philosophy. Here, I would be remiss not to mention the eye to interdisciplinarity with which Ortega crafted her book cover-to-cover: in addition to the honest epigraphs she placed before each chapter, Ortega created her book’s vibrant, mixed-media cover art as well.

I found Ortega’s book keenly attuned to the textures of everyday experience and deeply aware of itself as both a contribution to feminist philosophical conceptions of self and a call to critical engagement with Latina feminist theory. It is this invitation—to take seriously and advance interventions in the study of selfhood and identity by Latina feminists—that I felt on each page.

A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and Other Social Identities


Reviewed by Tina Fernandes Botts
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, TBOATS@CSUFRESNO.EDU

In Lauren Swayne Barthold’s subtle and satisfying new book, the author develops a hermeneutic account of social identity that she distinguishes from both Linda Martin Alcoff’s “horizontal” account and Georgia Warnke’s “coherence” account to advocate instead what the author sees as her own, more purely Gadamerian, “dialogical” account of social identity. According to Barthold, while Linda Martin Alcoff’s account of social identity is in line with Gadamer’s hermeneutics to the extent that she maintains that social identities are like horizons, Alcoff parts ways with Gadamer to the extent that Alcoff accepts an objective account of gender that Barthold calls “identity realism.” Similarly, for Barthold, while Georgia Warnke is in line with Gadamer’s hermeneutics to the extent that Warnke analogizes the identities of persons to the interpretation of texts, Warnke’s hermeneutic account of social identity is nonetheless out of step with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, and also flawed, according to Barthold, in three specific ways. First, Warnke’s account does not adequately account for how we can and should understand the integration and interaction among our various identities. Second, Warnke’s account downplays the role of first-person perspective in forging identities, and third, Warnke’s account does not provide a way for us to critically evaluate social identities so as to avoid relativism and work for social change. Barthold sees her own, “dialogical” account of social identity as an improvement over both Alcoff’s and Warnke’s, not only because the “dialogical” account is more true to Gadamer’s own hermeneutics, but also because the “dialogical” account serves as a workable means of creating meaningful and vibrant communities. In this way, Barthold contends, her own account of social identity defends hermeneutics itself, and hermeneutic accounts of social identity, against charges of both political irrelevance and anti-feminism.

IDENTITY REALISM: BARTHOLD ON ALCOFF
Barthold is on board with Linda Martin Alcoff’s utilization of Gadamer’s concept of horizon to defend the epistemic and social viability of identities. In brief, Alcoff argues that identities are socio-historically situated, epistemically salient, and (problematically for Barthold) ontologically real. The reality of certain identities, specifically “visible” identities like gender and race, for Alcoff, often comes
from the fact that these identities are visibly marked on the body. Owing to this visibility, such identities are rooted in embodied existence. Although rooted in embodied existence, however, identities are neither essential nor natural for Alcoff. Instead, the body is a dynamic and real site of meaning-making. As Barthold describes Alcoff's account, "identities emerge out of the fluid and circular process of how others (as well as ourselves) conceive of our bodies" (12). This does not mean that identities are socially constructed (as this terminology is commonly understood), however, for Alcoff. It is more accurate to say that identities are socially emergent. Identities, on Alcoff's view (according to Barthold), serve as "dynamic conditions of knowing that require activity on the part of the subject and thus provide a positive epistemic orientation to the world" (12).

These ideas gel well with Gadamer's concept of horizon for Barthold. For Gadamer, the concept of horizon captures the view that all knowledge is situated. In contrast to the Cartesian idea that true knowledge emerges from an unembodied, Archimedean point in the void, true knowledge is inescapably tethered to location. In addition, the concept of horizon entails the idea that knowing is productive, "fecund," as Barthold calls it, in virtue of the limitations of the horizon(s) from which it springs (14). In more basic terms, a Gadamerian horizon is simply a context. The idea is that nothing can be seen except from a point of view. There is no such thing as a-positional seeing (sometimes called the "view from nowhere") for Gadamer. We never just see things, full stop. Instead, we see things as things. Barthold explains, "It is the horizon that makes this possible by delimiting the context" (14). For Alcoff, identities are like Gadamerian horizons. They provide the necessary perspective from which to see and experience and know. In addition, and in a very Gadamerian way, Alcoffian identities-as-horizons result from our social interactions. These include both the feedback others provide (how they see us) and our responses to that feedback. For Alcoff, then, identities are, in an important sense, embedded. They are neither only that which is given to us from outside (purely socially constructed) nor inherent within us (essential, "natural"). Instead, identities function as mediation points between self and others. An identity I call "mine" (personal) is also "ours" (collective). With all of this Barthold agrees.

Where Alcoff veers off track, however, for Barthold, is in her insistence that identities-as-horizons are "real." Alcoff's motivation for defending the reality of identities-as-horizons, according to Barthold, is political. Without "real" identities, for Alcoff and many feminist thinkers, we cannot account for the way people in the world utilize and respond to social identities, and if we cannot do this, we cannot effect social change. Without the ability to establish sexed identities as objective and materially real, on this view, there can be no legitimate basis for overcoming sex-based oppression. But Alcoff provides not only a political but also a philosophical basis for accepting social identities as real. First, we can salvage the reality of gender by understanding that it is not necessary to equate appeals to nature with appeals to objectivity or metaphysics. In other words, we can salvage the objectivity of gender, for Alcoff, while leaving behind that it is "natural." The objectivity of gender can be retained, on this view, by both acknowledging the ubiquity of (social) mediation and recognizing that this acknowledgment need not entail that nothing is independent of human beings.

Barthold's response to Alcoff is that even if there were a reality that is independent of human beings, this fact would be "epistemically and politically uninteresting and irrelevant" for feminists (25). Realism, for Barthold, in other words, is completely useless if we understand meaning and not "reality" as the criterion for truth. In other words, whether or not there is a human-independent reality, the ubiquity of linguistic mediation is still with us. Accordingly, if we have no direct access to reality, which Alcoff concedesthen "reality" is meaningless and useless. ""Reality,"" says Barthold, "is a concept that is used empirically to designate what our best practices indicate as true; as a derivatively applied concept it can never hold any argumentative force on its own" (31). As a consequence, "[w]e need more than 'reality' to win arguments," Barthold concludes. What feminists interested in socially trenchant critiques need instead is "coherence of interpretations" (31). Enter Georgia Warnke.

IDENTITY PLURALISM: BARTHOld ON WARNKE

Fortunately for feminist accounts of hermeneutic social identity, according to Barthold, Georgia Warnke provides us with a version of Gadamerian-based social identity that focuses on coherence. For Warnke, our identities are like texts in that they are situated, purposeful, and partial. Accordingly, just as there are multiple interpretations of a text, whose degrees of legitimacy are a function of context, similarly, each of us has multiple identities whose degrees of legitimacy are a function of the different situations or contexts in which we find ourselves, and the degrees to which those situations or contexts coherently incorporate those identities. So, rather than one identity, each of us has multiple identities. And importantly, these identities are ascribed from without (by others). A given identity is legitimated by its ability to cohere within a situation. Because Warnke's account entails multiple identities, as opposed to just one, Barthold calls Warnke's approach to social identity identity pluralism. For Barthold, one reason Warnke's coherence-based identity pluralism is an improvement over Alcoff's horizon-based identity realism is that it better explains the nature of oppression. If identities are interpretations of who we are, and if what makes an identity viable is its coherence with a given context, then phenomena such as "driving while black," for example, become intelligible as sites of oppression. Within the driving context, someone driving is a "driver" but, owing to racial oppression, such a person becomes "black" rather than a driver. Warnke's account of social identity is a third-person account and has the added advantage, for Barthold, of not relying on realism.

But, for Barthold, although Warnke's identity pluralism is an improvement over Alcoff's identity realism in terms of identity pluralism's potential for achieving feminist (anti-oppressive) objectives, Warnke's account of social identity is still lacking in three ways. First, Warnke's account does not adequately address the integration of
and interaction among our multiple identities. Second, identity pluralism problematically downplays the role of the first-person perspective in forging identities. And third, identity pluralism’s advancement of coherence as the main criterion for judging the adequacy of a given identity does not provide a way to critically evaluate social identities. Barthold’s response is to retain Warnke’s emphasis on coherence in forging social identities and to add the importance of dialogue, ritual, and, particularly, festival in forging what Barthold calls “true” identities, or identities that cohere with and strengthen healthy, vibrant communities.

DIALOGICAL IDENTITY: BARTHOLD’S THEORY
As mentioned above, offered as an improvement over both Alcoff’s and Warnke’s (hermeneutic) accounts of social identity, Barthold’s account is, in her view, more firmly based in Gadamerian dialogue, and therefore more authentically hermeneutic (in the Gadamerian sense). For Barthold, while Warnke’s identity pluralism has the advantages of (i) accounting for the fact that social identities are situated, purposeful, and partial, and (ii) not being based in metaphysical realism, identity pluralism has the disadvantage of being susceptible to charges of “identity incommensurability—a type of metaphysical ‘disassociated identity disorder.’” (67). Identity pluralism, in other words, for Barthold, problematically provides us with no way to integrate our multiple identities. To combat this “disorder,” Barthold suggests that we think of our identities as integratable dialogically. The starting point for the development of this dialogical approach to integrated identity is recognizing that “there is no single overarching identity” (67). The next step is to place our various identities into dialogue with each other.

Toward this end, Barthold develops three key components of a good identity-productive dialogue: (i) openness, (ii) attention to questions, and (iii) listening. The criterion of openness is a moral imperative to allow that which is to be interpreted or understood to be or say that which it will. The criterion of attention to questions requires us to understand identities as answers to specific questions posed contextually, rather than as essences attaching to nature or so-called reality (77). And, finally, the criterion of listening calls our attention to the requirement of not allowing voices to be silenced in advance of the dialogue by sustaining a preemptive and proactive willingness to listen to the plurality of voices. In summary, for Barthold, dialogue premised on openness, a plurality of questions, and listening “encourages not only a recognition of the way in which we are co-creators of our identities but also an awareness of the fact that we can never predict in advance what our identities will turn out to be” (91). The result, according to Barthold, is that a dialogical model of identities is crucial “if we are to refuse both the ideal of a single, unified identity [à la Alcoff] and identity incommensurability [à la Warnke]” in order to accurately map how integrated personal identities are generated.

In addition to providing an explanation of how integrated personal identities are generated, however, Barthold’s dialogical theory of identity contains two more crucial components: (1) a discussion of the role of application and play in identity production, and (2) a mechanism for assessing the adequacy of a given identity, namely, through the utilization of a “socio-politically relevant” account of intersubjectively-generated agency based in ritual and, ultimately, “festival.” Affirmative acknowledgement of the role of play in identity formation, for Barthold, is central to an authentic account of hermeneutic social identity because it affirms the circular nature of identity and suggests that identities are formed at the “rotary” of one’s psychic desires and one’s socio-historical traditions (that is, in a “playful” dialogue between these two). The process of identity formation, in other words, borrowing from Gadamer’s notion of play, is co-constitutive. After all, for Gadamer, all interpretation (all meaning, really) is applicatory, which means that all interpreters (all of those in search of identity) must proactively render the contextual meaning of who they are in their own words within the confines a given context.

In addition, Barthold’s account of social identity formation entails a mechanism for assessing the adequacy of a given identity through a new account of agency. “We need an answer [to the question of how we can adequately assess the truth of identities] that construes identities as neither freely chosen by an autonomous individual nor dogmatically assigned by others (or ‘nature’)” (127). Citing Wendy Brown, Barthold writes that “the modern tendency to conceive of identities as grounded in an autonomous ‘I’ . . . results in political impotency” (127). For Barthold, following Brown, we can think of agency from the standpoint of the “we” instead of the “I.” We can deploy “identity democracy” rather than “identity aristocracy,” and we can do this by replacing the universal norms of modernity with postmodern, Gadamerian judgments. Political change and good political judgment do not require, as much of feminist politics seems to indicate, according to Barthold, truth with a capital T or knowledge with a capital K (about identities or anything else). Instead, all that is required is what Gadamer calls practical philosophy, or phronesis, “that is, the ability to make good judgments in light of the ever-changing particulars of the situation at hand” (131). Conversation with others, on this model, is privileged over a procedure internal to one’s own mind, “a procedure that may guarantee one’s own existence yet fails to do justice to communal existence” (131). “In other words,” writes Barthold, “the proposal is to cease understanding identity as attaching to some core essence or nature of an individual and instead take it as an interpretive relation between self and other that promotes solidarity” (emphasis added) (134).

To conceive of social identity in this way is to move “from choice to ritual,” according to Barthold (136). By this, she means that one way of understanding how identities can create meaningful connections with others is to conceive of them ritualistically. Identities ritualistically construed, for Barthold, have the potential for contributing to community creation. Construing identities in terms of their “ritualistic potential” allows us to see the positive potential of identities construed as communal and, perhaps more importantly, to “account for the possibility of social change without relying on a full-blown subject” (136). The way this works is as follows. First, action is seen as emanating from the
intersubjective attempts to order experience that occur as part of a ritual (a given practical context). So, for example, "a woman's attempt to make sense of a given gender norm for herself involves her in ritualizing that norm, that is, participating in the not-fully-cognized gender ritual in such a way that creates meaning not only for herself but also for others" (137). The "anti-subjective emphasis" contained within ritual, on this view, replaces the "Cartesian obsession with certainty, and its resulting inward turn" (138).

According to Barthold, rituals help us to confront the "chaos and fragmentation of existence" with a coming together with others to create something entirely new. What constitutes society, on this view, is a "mutual illusion of the sort that all rituals create" (138). Still, ritualized identity formation does not mean that a guaranteed harmony is generated that "vannishes difference, ambiguity, and chaos once and for all" (143). Instead, identities ritualistically created "do not constitute any 'real' part of ourselves" but just make possible our interaction with the world, "creating a subjunctive world, a world as we would like it to be" (143). Barthold explains that claims like "this is how things have always been done and they've worked pretty well so far" create a "hermeneutically sealed space with no possibility of change. Leaving no room for improvisation, creativity, and a multiplicity of voices, they have no place in vibrant ritual" (143). The upshot of thinking of social identity as a product of ritual rather than choice, for Barthold, is that identity formation depends not on individual willful efforts but on communal repetition. "The point," says Barthold, "is to challenge the status quo that assumes that the only way to bring about change is to offer a critique born of an autonomous subject" (146). Instead, the "truth of an identity," for Barthold, "can be ascertained in so far as it fosters belongingness" (149).

The specific Gadamerian ritual of "festival," according to Barthold, is particularly informative on the topic of how true or legitimate (social) identities are formed. Gadamerian festivals, according to Barthold, (1) allow no separation between one person and another, (2) are a communal experiences, and (3) are meant for everyone. Gadamerian festivals are intersubjective social encounters that, while directed toward some end (like a harvest), have their true value in the experience of intersubjective communication that they foster and embody. Once begun, a festival has a kind of mind of its own that is generated inadvertently by the sincere and wholehearted, collective participation of the festival attendees. Festivals thus defined, for Barthold, entail and embody what Barthold calls "inclusive play" that, for her, provides a criterion of adequacy for social identities that neither Alcoff's nor Warnke's accounts provide. Writes Barthold, "The truth of an identity can be ascertained in so far as it fosters belongingness" (149). While the "successful" festival is going on, Barthold seems to be saying, that is, while groups of people are playfully and "buoyantly" interacting with each other in a kind of non-self-conscious way during the course of some collective activity, true social identities emerge. Importantly, true social identities are not chosen. Rather, they emerge from genuine and playful interactions among persons. Even more importantly, however, the festival operates as a means of discerning more "adequate" identities from less "adequate" identities. The extent to which an identity is "adequate" (Barthold's term for legitimate or true) is a function of the degree to which the collective deems it so, and the degree to which the identity reinforces community. Where an identity fosters connections between people and is a product of robust play, it is a more adequate identity. Where an identity undermines connections between people and is a product of oppression, power dynamics, or will, it is a less adequate identity.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Barthold's book is subtle because it caringly and responsibly articulates what is good and right about current feminist thinking in the hermeneutic vein on the topic of social identity, while at the same time gently highlighting the ways in which this thinking diverges from Gadamer's own thinking. The book is satisfying because it then goes a long way toward filling in the holes of current feminist thinking on the hermeneutics of social identity, such that the existing good work already done can be salvaged and used more productively to accomplish feminist projects. The result is an account of the hermeneutics of social identity that is simultaneously true to Gadamerian hermeneutics, an enhancement of current feminist thinking on the topic, and useful for achieving feminist goals. Along the way, Barthold's robust grasp of Gadamerian hermeneutics is vividly displayed through her lucid and clear articulation of key hermeneutic concepts (dialogue, ritual, play, festival), and in this way her book operates as a kind of instruction manual for those interested in knowing more about hermeneutics.

Getting into specifics, Barthold's identification of those aspects of Alcoff's and Warnke's takes on hermeneutic social identity that gel best with Gadamer's own take on social identity is outstanding. In particular, Barthold's firm grasp on Gadamer on his own terms is evident in her careful comparison of Alcoff's horizon and Warnke's coherence to Gadamer's own take on these concepts. Barthold is correct that Alcoff's horizontal account is out of step with Gadamer to the extent that it embraces identity realism, and Barthold is also correct that Warnke's coherence account is out of step with Gadamer to the extent that it fails to provide us with a way to integrate our multiple identities. After all, the task of Gadamerian hermeneutics is not to defend objectivity, nor to defend a multiplicity of equally viable interpretations. Instead, Gadamer's task is to develop an account of how a legitimate interpretation (of a given phenomenon) can be ascertained within a given interpretive moment. Accordingly, Barthold deftly identifies that a hermeneutic approach to social identity that more closely maps Gadamer's own interpretive enterprise will both eschew identity realism and provide a way to either integrate our multiple identities or at least to coherently prioritize one (or more) identity (or identities) over others.

Toward the end of providing a methodology with which to integrate or prioritize our multiple identities, Barthold rightly begins with Gadamerian dialogue, which is the heart of Gadamerian hermeneutics. The goal of Gadamerian dialogue is an "understanding" that is a product of all participants in the dialogue being open to their dialogical partner(s), paying careful attention to the "question" that
Feminist Experiences Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations


Reviewed by Chris Jingchao Ma
VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY, JINGCHAO.MA@VILLANOVA.EDU

In her new book Feminist Experiences: Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations (2016), Johanna Oksala offers an examination of the relation between language and experience and an insightful discussion of feminist political subjectivity. Oksala’s project can be read as a rejoinder for some of the much debated topics in our current feminist political discussion: if we emphasize the discursive construction of gender and gendered experience, does it discredit our lived experience and undermine our collective political agency? If post-structuralism, especially the work of Michel Foucault, insists that subject is constructed in power relations, does that mean that the constructed subject is not capable of understanding itself without or beyond the power relations, not to mention change the power relations? Oksala addresses these concerns about post-structuralist theories within feminist politics and suggests that the discursive analysis of the power structure and the construction of subjectivity in our neoliberal society is theoretically important and politically relevant.

To begin with, Oksala asks whether feminist philosophy and feminist metaphysics are feasible projects. If feminism is understood to be a political stance, while philosophy is understood to be a discipline of critical inquiries, then it seems that they might jeopardize each other. Oksala argues that metaphysical schemas “organize both our experience of reality and the empirical sciences that produce facts about it” (4). Feminist philosophy and feminist metaphysics are possible and critical in that they make transcendental inquiry into conditions of our experience. If we understand ontology in a Foucauldian sense as a historical ontology or ontologial of the present, we should seek “a series of limited, historically specific analyses of contingent practices” that makes the structure of reality possible, where possible subjects and objects of practices emerge (29).

Oksala identifies the linguistic turn in philosophy in the twentieth century and argues that after the linguistic turn of
to the world constitution (91), Oksala argues, we will be taking into account the event of one’s own birth as constitutive. Feminism can challenge phenomenology as a method. By discussing birth and gender in phenomenology to show how complementary materials and becoming a subgenre. She and should do more for phenomenology than offering experienced is already imbued with meaning. Furthermore, phenomenologists would contend that their lived experience could not be reduced to discourse analysis. Oksala refers to Joan Scott’s essay “The Evidence of Experience” for the former position and to Linda Martin Alcoff’s critique of Foucault for the latter. Scott is concerned that feminist politics seems to rely on the “female experience” not only because of its exclusivity as an identity category, but also because the experience in the dominant discourse cannot challenge the dominant discourse. She hence calls for a turn from experiences stemming from fixed and naturalized identities to examination of discourse and their political effects. Oksala argues that we are constantly negotiating with the existent conceptual schema as well as using it to articulate our experience, and by referring to our experience, we can problematize the normalized conceptual schema. Alcoff accuses Foucault for ignoring bodily experience of survivors of sexual assault and reducing it to an example for the dominant medical discourse of sexuality. Oksala acknowledges that Foucault’s writing is often male and European centered, but she argues that Foucault’s contribution is to show us that sexuality has no a priori bodily meaning. Rather, “one has to analyze a field of experience in which subjects and objects form and transform” (58). This does not imply that subjective reflection is impossible, and we are all merely products of the dominant discourse: on the contrary, Oksala insists that a self-reflexive subject does not contradict the Foucauldian ontology and is rather necessary for Foucault’s critical project to be possible.

To study experience carefully, Oksala turns to phenomenology in the second part of the book. She suggests that we should use a modified phenomenological method, or as she calls it, a post-phenomenological method. Instead of understanding phenomenology as a unique method that allows us to access the pre-discursive experience, Oksala examines Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology of language and argues that phenomenology can be a study of meaning constitution. According to Heidegger and Dan Zahavi, life experience is not a chaos waiting for consciousness to give it meaning, nor is it distorted by linguistic representation. Rather, life experience is already imbued with meaning. Furthermore, Oksala suggests that feminist phenomenology can and should do more for phenomenology than offering complementary materials and becoming a subgenre. She discusses birth and gender in phenomenology to show how feminism can challenge phenomenology as a method. By taking into account the event of one’s own birth as constitutive to the world constitution (91), Oksala argues, we will be pushed to see the prerequisite of procreation, i.e., “sexual difference as a transcendental, constitutive difference” that underlies any phenomenological investigation (93). As to gender, Oksala is concerned that phenomenological investigation of feminine corporeal experience may risk essentialism “if any first-person description by a woman is understood as a phenomenological account and then generalized by thrusting it into a description of eidetic female embodiment” (99). Oksala suggests that the phenomenological method should be modified and that we consider epoché to be endless and always partial so that we can examine the specific historical and social construction of gender as concepts.

The third part, “Feminist Politics,” examines the social and historical construction of subjectivity in terms of contemporary feminist politics. Oksala inspects and responds to some contested discussion: How do we conceive the dilemma between social discipline and individual subjectivity? Does cultural politics ignore economic structure? And How do we take up history of oppression and suffering? Oksala offers Foucault as an important resource for us to think through these questions, and she points out that Foucault’s biggest contribution to feminist politics would be his theory of the formation of the subject in power relations; subjects are “materially constructed through concrete and detailed disciplinary habits” (111).

Following Sandra Bartky’s analysis of the discipline of feminine subjects, Oksala points to disciplinary habits and the docile feminine subjectivity, and she notes that “disciplinary power does not mutilate or coerce its target, but through detailed training reconstructs the body to produce new kinds of gestures, habits, and skills” (113). While some feminists claim that women are emancipated from social discipline if they pursue their own interest, Oksala points out the risk of such a reading of neoliberal free choice discourse. As Foucault has shown, neoliberalism does not mean the free market is completely without governmentality; rather, it is another form of governmentality. Individuals are a product of this new mode of governmentality, and their pursuit of their “own interests” does not make them unruly, but rather makes them predictable. Oksala further argues that we cannot easily assume the distinction between free market choice and socially constructed subjectivity. Following Foucault, she suggests that we should pursue the genealogy of governmentality that establishes economics as a realm of science and a locus of truth. Therefore, the line between an economic matter and a cultural matter is not natural or neutral, but a politically contested distinction and calls for careful examination. Finally, Oksala turns to the problem of history and poses Wendy Brown’s question: If feminism defines itself by sharing the inheritance of a history of injury, how can it avoid being a politics of passive or reactive ressentiment? Drawing from Walter Benjamin’s theory of history and Jacques Derrida’s theory of living with the ghost, Oksala urges us to think of history as non-monolithic and heterogeneous; in the same manner of a Foucauldian genealogy, “Feminist politics must acknowledge the radical heterogeneity of the tradition from which it emerges” (157). We can cultivate a connection with our history of injury as
a remembrance and as incomplete so that we can connect the inheritance of the past to our political actions in the present.

One may be tempted to push the phenomenological project a little further along the lines of Oksala’s inquiry into the conditions of social reality. When we take birth into consideration as an integral part of the world-constitution, instead of attributing birth immediately to procreation and then sexual difference, perhaps we should further ask, what ontology underlies this taken-for-granted knowledge of procreation or sexual difference? Just as Oksala contends that women and feminine experience should not be an afterthought or a compliment to phenomenology, trans and queer experience are not exceptions, but rather reveal the social and historical construction of gender and sexual difference per se, as Gayle Salamon brilliantly demonstrates in her Assuming A Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality. Furthermore, Oksala reads Sonia Kruks and Iris Marion Young as appealing to their individual corporeal experience as the lived experience of women, without addressing the social, historical, or contextual conditions. However, other readers of Kruks and Young might contend that they have not overlooked these conditions; rather, here lies precisely the distinction between the “lived” body in phenomenology and the ahistorical anatomic understanding of bodily experience. Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Young contends that the feminine corporeal subjectivity is a production of its specific social and historical becoming. In other words, many feminist phenomenologists are aware of the risk of essentialism, and their work examines the condition and production of gender and sexual difference, as Oksala also calls into question in this book.

Oksala has published extensively on Foucault’s theory and political philosophy. In this book, she makes a unique contribution in contemporary feminist political discussions by locating her theoretical and conceptual framework and offers her theoretical intervention, following the theory of genealogy, critical ontology, and subjectification of Foucault. She offers these discussions with tremendous clarity and insight, and she has shown that Foucault and post-structuralism are indispensable for today’s feminist politics. Readers of feminist political philosophy and readers who are concerned with contemporary feminist politics would find in this book a clear and nuanced discussion of many contested topics, and readers of Foucault, post-structuralism, and phenomenology would find out how these theories make a unique contribution to contemporary feminism.

Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from the Hunger Games to Campus Rape


Reviewed by Summer Renault-Steele

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, SRENA001@GWU.EDU

Kelly Oliver’s Hunting Girls interrogates the link between representations of girls in popular film and the scourge of sexual violence against young women that reaches its peak on the American college campus. Oliver’s book is designed to speak to the very audience it discusses: undergraduate students and consumers of popular culture. She accomplishes this through concise prose and topical references supplemented with stills from the films she analyzes. In this way Oliver effectively invites readers of all levels to consider the urgent aesthetic-political problem of how entertainment and misogynist violence are entwined. And yet despite the book’s accessibility, the arguments at its heart remain both sophisticated and compelling for scholars of feminist philosophy, film, and media theory. These arguments include an exploration of the relationship between the aesthetic experience of mass spectatorship and rape culture; the role of medium in that relationship; a critique of the liberal notion of consent-as-contract that governs campus sexual assault policy; and a new theorization of consent, conceived through what Oliver calls “response ethics.”

The book begins with the conundrum evoked by the dual meanings of its title: Hunting Girls can refer to the act of preying upon a girl, but it can also refer to a girl herself who shoots for the kill. In her discussion of the former, Oliver points to multiple studies revealing the enormity of sexual violence that occurs on American campuses. For example, a 2009 study from the Journal of Applied Communication Research suggests, “Every two minutes in the United States, someone is raped, and the chances of being that victim are four times greater for a college female student than for any other age group” (Oliver 13). A 2014 estimate from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control suggests, “one in five women are raped in college” (Oliver 13). Furthermore, studies from 2000 and 2006 suggest women in college are at greater risk of rape and sexual assault than women from the same age group not in college (Fisher et al., Armstrong et al., Oliver 13). Thus, college campuses in particular appear to be grounds wherein girls are hunted.

In an odd contrast to these horrifying circumstances, Oliver notes that contemporary popular film features an explosion of strong, young female icons that wield weapons and kill to survive. Specifically, she describes the proliferation of what she calls “Artemis characters,” who brandish bow and arrow and are not to be messed with. Characters such as Turiel in The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug (2013), Katness Everdeen in The Hunger Games (2012), Neytiri in Avatar (2009), and Guinevere in King Arthur (2004) all meet the Artemis archetype on Oliver’s account (15–17). These young women are hardly reduced to prey; they
are instead hunters themselves. “So,” Oliver asks simply, “What gives?” (18). In other words, what accounts for this apparent paradox between a culture that is plagued by sexual violence against young women but also consumes images of young women as formidable combatants?

Oliver resolves this contradiction early on by claiming that “One thing is certain, images of teenage girls being repeatedly beaten and battered on screen normalizes violence toward girls and women, including sexual violence. While these films feature tough girls who can fight off their attackers and protect themselves, they also contribute to our acceptance of sexual assault” (18). Oliver contends the spectacle of girls engaged in combat serves to endorse violence against women, or at least habituate audiences to the sight of young women bloodied and battered. At the heart of this resolution is an assertion about the relationship between the aesthetic experience of spectatorship and how that translates to a politics of gender. Oliver claims that “life imitates art, and vice versa [. . .] art often revolves around the objectification and assault of girls and women.” Thus, while recognizing the strength of Artemis characters, Oliver ultimately locates them in a long legacy of misogynist imagery—from classical Western fairy tales to Hollywood blockbusters to Internet pornography and social media—that aestheticizes violence against women, thereby “anesthetizing” the audience to it (Oliver 22).

The connection Oliver makes between the aestheticization of violence and the anesthetization to violence is compelling. However, it is not clear that imitation alone exhausts the complicated relationship between spectatorship and rape culture. Oliver herself points to this in her analysis of social media, wherein she finds the next generation of aestheticized violence against girls and women. What the reader learns from Oliver’s discussion is that social media itself has a role in the perpetration of sexual violence. Accordingly, the distinction between violent image on one hand, and violent act on the other, becomes more difficult to parse.

Oliver explores this difficulty with her section on “creepshots,” which recruit the virtual world for the purposes of sexual humiliation and violation. A creepshot is a photograph or video of a nude or semi-naked woman who is unaware of the photographer (Oliver 5). In some cases, the subject is unaware of the photograph or video because she is drugged and literally unconscious. In these cases, she may be put in a compromising position or violated for the sake of the picture or video (Oliver 5). Quoting social media creepshot communities on Tumblr and Metareddit, Oliver notes that for a creepshot to qualify as such, the lack of consent from the subject of the photograph is essential (103). In this way, the creepshot itself functions as a tool of invasion: amplifying its violation every time it reaches a new audience. Oliver quotes psychologist Rebecca Campbell, who notes that because sexual assault is a crime of power and domination, “distributing images of the rape through social media [. . .] is a way of asserting dominance and power to hurt the victim over and over again” (90). In this case, the medium does more than anesthetize its audience to violence. Rather, consuming a creepshot online activates participation in the continued violation and humiliation of the victim. It therefore becomes almost impossible to determine if life is imitating misogynist imagery here; for in the case of the creepshot, looking itself collapses the distinction between violent image and violent act.

The creepshot is an example of a kind of sexual assault that is only possible because of social media. This insight adds another layer to Oliver’s critique of Artemis characters in popular film. In The Hunger Games, for example, Oliver notes, “the Capitol watches as Katniss fights for her life and hidden cameras film her first kiss. Her every move is under surveillance” (112). New media is worked into the story like a panopticon: the heroine experiences it as a source of remote exploitation and coercion. However, as Oliver notes, it is also Katniss’ own manipulation of the medium that “turns the tide” in The Hunger Games (Oliver 113). Katniss uses her access to the ubiquitous communication network to spark a revolution against the Capitol (Oliver 113). This Artemis figure therefore uses more than her bow and arrow to go to battle. This seems like an appropriate lesson for female audiences today. Skill with bow and arrow might not make a lot of sense for young women who need to protect themselves in the twenty-first century, but a savvy awareness of weaponized social media seems crucial.

Turning back to the college campus, Oliver discusses how we might begin to rethink consent in a time of rampant campus rape and the creepshot. She acknowledges the recent administrative shift on many campuses to require affirmative consent from both parties to ensure sexual activity is desired (Oliver 68). This is understood to be especially important in judging cases of campus party rape, where there may be drugs or alcohol and incapacitated or unconscious women cannot say “no” to sexual advances (Oliver 68). Although this measure is an improvement, Oliver contends, it is not enough: “While there are advantages to requiring affirmative consent over mere negative consent in the form of resistance, we must be skeptical of affirmative consent policies that turn sex in a contract and consent into a single discreet moment” (74). This is because—unlike a contract for services—sex is an ongoing negotiation. Therefore, consent must be continually given as the sexual activity takes place. Oliver’s adroit insight is that consent is not a moment, but a process (74).

In order to begin reconceiving consent as a process contiguous with sexual activity itself, Oliver returns to the Latin roots of the word. Con means “together,” while sent comes from sentire meaning “feel,” but also “perception” or “knowledge” (157). Consent is thus an agreement of feelings, perception, and knowledge. Further, the root of sentire is sentio, meaning to go, to head for, as in a path, a way, or a journey (Oliver 157). The full meaning of consent, then, is “being sensitive to one another, sensing and perceiving the agreement of the other [. . .] a journey together, with thinking as much as feeling” (Oliver 157). To consent is therefore to participate in a process of continued communication, whereby each partner is necessarily responsive to the other. Oliver calls this response ethics (161).
At the very end of her book, Oliver concludes that taking responsibility for sexual assault in terms of response ethics entails considering the ways in which our culture encourages the assault of girls and women: from fairy tales, to Hollywood Blockbusters, to creepshots and rape on the college campus. That is, doing response ethics means taking account of the ways that popular imagery, mass media, campus culture, and policy foreclose consent or impoverish our understanding of consent. Thus, beyond serving as an introduction to feminist philosophy, film, and media theory, Hunting Girls is also a model for ethical critique: a guide for how we might begin doing response ethics ourselves.

**Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights**


Reviewed by Lynda Lange
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, LANGE@UTSC.UTORONTO.CA

Feminist thought about gender justice in a global context is a relatively new field. This book is a welcome addition. It responds to the change of tone in discussion of global poverty away from the focus on purely economic development to a realization that human rights and empowerment will have to be part of any sustainable solution to poverty. The United Nations 2015 Sustainable Development Goal to “empower all women and girls” exemplifies this change. This collection of essays, edited by feminist philosopher Diana Meyers, tackles the question of poverty from the point of view of both epistemology and ethics. We assume that poverty is a bad thing, but just what are the harms done by poverty? Of equal importance, given the vast literature on how poverty reduction and aid schemes have gone wrong, how can knowledge about poverty and its relief best be gained?

The focus of this book is global poverty. However, it begins with a terrific essay by the late Claudia Card, based on poverty in the United States, reflecting on the various meanings of poverty to those who suffer it, and a nuanced analysis of what it may mean to survive it. At many points, Card notes how domestic poverty can be both similar to and different from extreme global poverty.

In point of fact, greater and greater inequality within countries of the West/North (especially the U.S.) has developed at the same time as the development of global inequality and the persistence, and even increase, of extreme poverty in the global South. One can only imagine how this fact may impact on opinions in wealthy countries about development aid. If citizens feel poor themselves, in spite of being better off than the global poor, how sympathetic are they going to be to increasing aid for global poverty?

For those with a taste for the big epistemological picture, David Ingram offers a theory-laden but incisive analysis of approaches to “poverty knowledge” that have emerged since the mid twentieth century in the North/West. In a committed dialectical manner, Ingram elucidates the common roots in rational choice theory and methodological individualism of Rawlsian welfarism and Nozickean libertarianism. These approaches may blind us to what has been called “background injustice,” that is, the effects of social and economic structures that in effect coerce “rational” choices, either by obscuring possibilities or by literally limiting the options that face individuals. This is why poor people with little power may make what appear to others (for lack of understanding of how the situation looks from inside it) to be choices not in their own best interests. Since experts in poverty knowledge are seldom poor themselves, it is easy to see how focus on the behavior of individual poor people from the perspective of rational choice theory has generated paternalism and condescension. Ingram outlines the history of the social science movement away from economic and social structural analysis of poverty to analysis of the alleged “culture of poverty,” i.e., how the “war on poverty” became the war on the poor. Although Ingram does not discuss this, it has mostly been in the service of neo-liberal policies of reducing government spending.

Ingram advocates for a better approach regarding solutions to poverty that is dialogical, and is inspired by early work of Habermas on social epistemology and critical social science, an approach meant actively to engage the poor. However, his method for finding out what might actually empower the poor arguably returns us to the behavior of the poor in the sense that the goal still seems to be understanding (albeit more thoroughly and empathetically) how things appear to the poor. Presumably this would illuminate the presence of forms of coercion behind suboptimal choices by the poor. According to Ingram, there should be a balancing of novice and expert viewpoints, through first person narratives, for example, while experts can offer “more comprehensive explanations” to poor interlocutors. The goal is “empathetic understanding,” which seems to be a fine goal in itself, but which is saddled unnecessarily, in this reviewer’s opinion, with Hegelianism and psychoanalysis. Actual solidarity and interdependence as the basis of social epistemology seems to be presumed, although since this is generally unrecognized (for reasons Ingram himself has made very clear) it must be advocated for. It is unclear if it is the poor or the rich or the poverty experts who might need therapeutic intervention for their beliefs about poverty, but regardless who needs it, who would provide it?

The section on “ethical responses to poverty” is very strong, including essays by Elizabeth Ashford, Gillian Brock, and Alison Jaggar, all of whom have track records of publication in this area. Each of these authors takes the arguments of Thomas Pogge’s World Poverty and Human Rights (2008), which Ashford correctly terms “an immensely important argument” (p. 98), as a starting point, and each offers either further development of some aspects of it, or some modification or expansion of aspects of it. These essays make the volume very useful as a textbook for senior students or as an introductory volume for those unfamiliar with the field. This section perhaps should have been the first section.
Ashford does what philosophers in particular can do well, that is, she spells out clearly the argumentative steps that lead, ponderously it may seem, but inexorably, to a striking conclusion. From unobjectionable premises we arrive at the conclusion that placing the profit of ourselves, the company we own or work for, or our country above any consideration of the effects of our behavior on others is morally wrong. It may be objected that we already know that. But do we? Ashford points out that this behavior, widely taken for granted as rational and legitimate, actually has no more moral standing than that of a social norm. As such, conformity to it causes no embarrassment. However, when one examines the actual processes that produce and perpetuate global poverty—from consumer choices, to the actions of national governments, to the policies of global financial institutions—it appears that at every turn there are choices made which are not determined simply by what is reasonable or putatively normal seeking of profit. We are actually able, virtually always without the risk of ruining ourselves, to make choices that lessen the suffering of poverty by taking less for ourselves so that more can be available to others, including distant others. The other essays in this section examine quite a range of what these choices might be and as such are very informative.

There are several essays on the topic of aiding development without undermining the agency of the people affected, and these are a rich mine of discussion possibilities. Ann Cudd offers, rather surprisingly, a defense of globalizing free trade. Studies by Narayan, Okin, and others have found that what the poor find the worst about their situations is their sense of powerlessness, when there is little they can do to better their lot, at the same time as others can do many things that affect them, whether for better or for worse, or in other words, their lack of agency. Cudd argues that the poor can have agency if they can engage in “free and fair” trade, including joint ventures with the non-poor. She offers some moral arguments why the non-poor would want to be bothered with this, which she admits are weak, alluding to the arguments of Pogge and Brock for duties to the poor as stronger, but also offers some “instrumental” harms of poverty to the non-poor. Acknowledging that the non-poor would have to put up resources for any joint ventures, she argues that not doing so “deprives the non-poor of opportunities for mutually beneficial interaction.” Cudd offers an excellent discussion of the kind of harms that the poor can experience through development aid and gifts, even when well intended, making it clear why she recommends commercial enterprise as the best option for enhancing agency. However, one wonders if she is aware that her general arguments for “free trade” pretty much echo the neo-liberal thinking that has so shaped globalization since the early 1980s, and has so failed to bring prosperity in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, free and fair trade is just what has not happened in much of the global South, and if there were really “mutually beneficial” ventures to be undertaken between the poor and transnational corporations, it seems likely that the ever-hungry world of investment would already be doing it. Nonetheless, her argument should not be discounted, for why should the poor not seek to better themselves through enterprise, if they possibly can? There is so much room for the “rules of the game” to be made more free and fair.

Micro-credit has been controversial in feminist thinking about women’s poverty for some time. Serene Khader addresses the paradox that some research has uncovered, that a successful woman borrower, rather than gaining more social equality, may retrace the practices that signify her subordination, particularly by resuming purdah, or female seclusion. A woman can do this if she can use her micro loan for some sort of business that she can do from her home, and not be compelled to go out to work, which in her social milieu may be considered shameful, something a good woman would avoid if she possibly can. I was reminded of one of the themes of Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex, which was one of the things that earned her a bad reputation with the “second wave.” Beauvoir held that middle- and upper-class women are partly responsible for their own subordination because by conforming to male expectations they could have easier lives with more material advantages than if they struck out on their own and/or refused to conform. It was the idea of non-victimized responsibility that offended some back then, for are women not oppressed in their feminine roles? More fodder for lively debate.

Like Khader’s essay, several others discuss the permutations of coercion and agency and the difficulty of knowing what really improves peoples lives with respect to their ability to choose. As John Christman explains in his discussion of trafficking, even implementation of rights, without attention to the narratives of the individuals affected, can compel outcomes that are problematic rather than liberating.

Just as there is much room for analysis of the meaning of poverty, there is a huge literature on the meaning of development, which we may presume has the goal of alleviating or even eradicating poverty. But what is development? Amy Allen’s lucid discussion of the history of development? Amy Allen’s lucid discussion of the history of debates around the United Nations declarations of the Right to Development is packed with information and references on the global politics of rights and development since the second world war.

---

Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice


Reviewed by Mechthild Nagel

SU NY C OR LT AND, ME CK HILD.N AGEL@C OR LT AND.EDU

World renowned public philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s new book grew out of her presentations at the John Locke Lectures at Oxford University in 2014. The ethico-political explorations focus mainly on the topic of anger and what she calls transition-anger. The book reads a bit as an homage to Auerbach’s Mimesis given her skillful use of classic literary texts. Nussbaum opens with a discussion of Aeschylus’ Oresteia to discuss the archaic Greek world embroiled in blood feuds and revenge killings encouraged by fateful Furies, ancient goddesses of revenge, and
circling back to this mythic literary history throughout all chapters. It is actually an appeal to transformative justice in a dual sense: from a lawless outlaw people into an orderly law-abiding citizenry and the Furies themselves agree to a metamorphosis into Eumenides, The Kindly Ones (1–3). By installing the law anger is transmuted into safety and care; if law is forward-looking, namely, through deterring criminal acts, rather than backward-looking, the retributive “road of payback” and humiliating “road of status” can be bypassed (5). A kindly predisposed lawmaker will avoid anger, steadfastly refusing “magical thinking” about the rewards of payback and deserts, since it would lead to more violence. Spiteful punishment cannot undo the harm committed by the wrongdoer, and shaming is a strategy to “down-rank” their status and elevate the victim’s status. Such angry sentiments are mired in the pre-law society of the Oresteia, and Nussbaum shows cogently why they have no place in a decent society.

The first part of the book discusses the various functions of anger and forgiveness, while the remaining chapters focus on stoicism and the political realm of justice, including the value of generosity and apology. Finally, there is an appendix section where she revisits claims from her earlier book, Upheavals of Thought (2001), on emotion theory and presents a more nuanced view on anger in conjunction with blame. For her new book, Nussbaum notes (178, note 37) that she no longer defends the “blame game” that is part of the liability notion of justice, thanks to Iris Young’s posthumous book Responsibility for Justice (2011).

The chapter on anger also shows Nussbaum reversing her earlier support of (Aristotelian) just and justified anger. The mainstream tradition focuses on the retaliatory nature of anger, and in her case study scenario, a victim’s friend’s rage directed at her rapist, Nussbaum boldly asserts that anger creates fantasy of payback and compensation for pain and is unproductive (23–40). The stranger-rape case’s various scenarios should be of interest to feminist readers who might take issue with Nussbaum’s analysis that anger is a sign for demanding down-ranking of the wrongdoer. Furthermore, a common scenario of helplessness and anger against a heteropatriarchal and racist criminal justice system or an on-campus judicial system that seems to empower the rapist is not being discussed. However, Nussbaum reads mythic Medea’s rage against her husband as a sign of helplessness against a system that denies basic rights to women (45). Nussbaum introduces the special case of Transition-Anger, which actually is forward-looking and best symbolized by Martin L. King’s famous Dream speech. Here, anger is instrumentalized in order to note the ills of racism and segregation, but it is surpassed by a hopeful, non-retaliatory vision of a postracial just society (35–39).

The chapter on forgiveness presents this attitude as mostly transactional, and what may surprise many, Nussbaum disavows conditional as well as unconditional forgiveness. They are contrasted by unconditional love and generosity (58–60). She finds a certain scorekeeping both in Jewish and Christian traditions on forgiveness, and Christian stance on penance is mired in fear and shame (71). The latter tradition is troubled by both errors (payback and status-focus) that already put anger in disrepute (74). Even unconditional forgiveness is troubled by the following: “narcissism, aggression, and assumed superiority” (87).

In her chapter on conflicts in intimate relationships between couples and parents and children, her analysis takes again a surprising turn. She notes again that anger is only favored as Transition-Anger and instead of forgiveness, one might turn to empathy and playfulness as life-affirming values, which completely lack in the “dance of anger” (109). The following chapter on “the middle realm” explores a qualified stoicism, in the sense of down-playing self-interrogation, and instead engages in more humor (147). Seneca’s philosophy is preoccupied with anger in everyday (Roman) life, and Nussbaum’s chapter sorts out the irritating behavior of others and coping strategies employing Transition-Anger to help us to “mourn and move on” (141).

In the chapter on everyday justice, Nussbaum deftly critiques both leading scholars who defend retribution and even on the other side of the punishment spectrum a notable restorative justice pioneer, John Braithwaite, carefully noting how he addresses objections to his invention of reintegrative shame (203). However, his model cannot address feminist critiques that suggest it “privatizes” domestic violence (204). I agree with Nussbaum that Braithwaite’s term, a tempered version of shame practices, is a misnomer and does not serve his restorative justice model well. Nussbaum’s critique of shaming approaches to punishment is very helpful in responding to the recent contributions to the shame literature which vigorously defend it. Another notable exception to the trend is Bonnie Mann’s book Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror (2014). Nussbaum presents a welcome contribution to justice theories that critique current prison regimes and struggles thoughtfully with effective approaches to forward-looking practices. As a public philosopher, Nussbaum emphasizes the role of empirical studies while normatively engaging with justice paradigms. Still one gets a sense that while the prison system of the U.S. is quite ghastly, there is really no alternative to it. Nussbaum favors public procedural justice, not family conferencing practices à la Braithwaite, which she calls privatized solutions. (He also concedes that those who plead not guilty will have to go through the regular court system and the due process it promises.)

In the remainder of the review, I pose a few questions that seem worthy of being addressed in a book that centers on anger in the context of justice. What if the ideal of the abstract rights individual nor equal dignity for all are not serving all defendants equally? What can philosophers learn from the Movement for Black Lives that has questioned the core of the criminal justice systems and its systematic failure to consider Black life on par with white life? Nussbaum does mention hate crimes and problematic legal responses, but she is silent on how to deal with unintended consequences of hate crime legislation. I have in mind the proliferation of cases where Black individuals have been punished for the propagation of anti-white language.

Furthermore, the focus is mostly on individual “deviance” and a trust in “the law.” Almost cheerfully, Nussbaum suggests
that in the case of non-intimate relationships, one should "turn matters over to the law" because "ill law can deal with the idea that something must be done about the offender, thus rendering garden variety anger redundant" (140–41). She faults the ancient Greeks for not having a public prosecutor, even for murder cases (281, note 6). While there is no need to note the power of the American prosecutor, a cursory discussion on flagrantly biased, and, indeed, partial, procedural (in)justice, often resulting in death penalty convictions where the culpability is in grave doubt, would have been appropriate. Have we really progressed all that well, specifically in American jurisprudence, since the Civil Rights era beyond the fateful judgment imposed on Socrates by a jury of his peers? A public prosecutor who has no conflict of interest with the victim's family nevertheless can be engaged in payback emotions, and an appeal to impartial procedural justice does not respond to the messiness of a non-ideal contemporary prison-industrial complex. However, Nussbaum might retort that the book is not really about punishment (cf. 183), but it is noteworthy that two of the eight chapters deal with the topic of everyday justice and revolutionary justice in the political realm and other chapters point to public adjudication of crimes in order to avoid payback scheming by grieving victims or victims' families. Furthermore, in the chapter on intimate relationships, she laments the fact that the law in family relationships escapes enforcement mechanisms (135).

Nussbaum showcases South Africa's apartheid regime and the necessary rewriting of its constitution in her chapter on revolutionary justice. Undoubtedly, it is to the credit of charismatic leader Nelson Mandela that South Africa did not spiral into a civil war and setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a notable achievement to deal with aspects of state violence. The key political figures chosen all have renounced anger in favor of the forward-looking ideal of unconditional generosity. To be sure, all the movement leaders mentioned in the book, Gandhi, Mandela, King, have iconic status as peacebuilders and mobilizing millions for principled opposition to state injustice. However, it would be good to show them in their complexity. Gandhi has been in the news in recent years for a controversy that has been overlooked for a century. How do we account for his overt (and angry!) anti-Black racism, not only during his time in South Africa but also as an elder in India? Nussbaum foregrounds Gandhi's movement's decisive rejection of caste status and thus praises Gandhi for confronting the British, not with angry preoccupation with status, but with sympathy (223). None of that really mattered to status-preoccupied Gandhi in South Africa, when he demanded that Indians be better treated than Africans whom he referred to in spiteful and degrading terms (Desai and Vahed, 2015). Social protests demanding the toppling of Gandhi statues have occurred in South Africa and on a campus in Legon, Ghana.

With respect to the need for revolutionary justice, how might we feel about the post-1865 convict lease system and Jim Crow injustice in the U.S.? Nussbaum notes that the Civil Rights Movement made possible important legal reform, and a complete overhaul of the Constitution was not necessary (unlike in the other settler colonial states, India, and South Africa). Space constraints don't permit me to contest this assessment. Just briefly, since Nussbaum defends a welfarist (or consequentialist) approach to political justice, dignity plays an important role in "knitting together" economic goods and basic rights and liberties, in short, her famous capabilities theory (173), and U.S. citizens enjoy constitutional protection of equal dignity (200). However, where is dignity addressed in the U.S. Constitution? Dignity shows up implicitly and only in the negative, namely, in the Eighth Amendment prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. It would stand to reason that this clause is still mired in pre-law society of the Furies, which she disputes (177), rather than in the explicitly dignitarian philosophy of the United Nations. And her treatise is silent on the defense of capital punishment, a sanctioned practice by the courts on the basis of the Eighth Amendment. However, Nussbaum notes that the Eighth Amendment does not apply to prisoners asserting their right to equal dignity. It is true that the courts have not favored prisoners’ petitions for relief from sexual assault and other forms of torture, although beginning with Estelle v. Gamble (1976), they barred "unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain" in prisons and Farmer v. Brennan (1994) clarified the "deliberate indifference" standard as being similar to criminal recklessness (Robertson 2016, 374).

I failed to see any attentiveness to corporate criminality or state violence. She notes that violent offenders should be incapacitated, "we can all agree on that" (190). What about state actors who are violent offenders and go free on a regular basis? Black Lives Matter took off precisely because the state had to be put on notice for hardly ever indicting its police officers (or prison guards) for violent murder, and, recently, Justice Sotomayor took issue with such "benign neglect" of prosecution and proper judicial review in a provocative dissent (Utah v. Strieff, 2016). But I appreciate Nussbaum’s critique of mainstream philosophy’s treatment of punishment in narrow terms; her careful defense of welfarist concerns that deal with prevention strategies, including in early childhood; and her condemnation of racism (180–83). Overall, Nussbaum’s book is a welcome addition to the philosophical literature on emotion theory and justice paradigms and will also appeal to a diverse audience of readers and experts in the fields of critical justice studies and in restorative justice.

REFERENCES
CONTRIBUTORS

Ásta is associate professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University, where she teaches courses and seminars in metaphysics and epistemology, philosophy of language, social philosophy, and feminist philosophy. Recent work includes a monograph, Categories We Live By, in which she offers a metaphysics of social categories (under contract with Oxford University Press). http://astaphilosophy.com

Seth Vannatta is associate professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD. Seth writes in the areas of American Pragmatism, philosophy of law, philosophy of education, and popular culture. He is the author of Conservatism and Pragmatism in Law, Politics, and Ethics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). His most recent journal article is “A Fallibilist Conservatism,” Anamnesis 6 (March 2017). He is currently working on an edited volume, The Pragmatism and Prejudice of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. with Lexington Books.

F. Vera-Gray is a research fellow in the Law School at Durham University, UK, interested in drawing together feminist phenomenological conceptual approaches and empirical research on violence against women and girls. Her first book, Men’s Intrusion, Women’s Embodiment: A Critical Analysis of Street Harassment, was shortlisted for the BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize, and her current project, www.womenonporn.org, looks to be the largest ever study of women’s views and experiences of online pornography in the UK. She is currently working on a new book on women’s embodiment and safety work entitled The Right Amount of Panic.

Lisa Tessman is professor of philosophy at Binghamton University. She teaches and does research in ethics, moral psychology, feminist philosophy, and related areas. She is the author of When Doing the Right Thing Is Impossible (Oxford University Press, 2017), Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality (Oxford University Press, 2015), and Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles (Oxford University Press, 2005). She has recently begun a monthly blog for Psychology Today called “I’m Only Human: Ethics for Real People” (https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/im-only-human).

Mara Marin, a postdoctoral associate at the University of Toronto’s Centre for Ethics, is a political theorist with interests in feminist theory, critical, social theory, and legal theory. Her work focuses on issues of structural injustice, oppression, and domination as they relate to the organization of care, work, and the law. Her book, Connected by Commitment, is forthcoming.

Katrina England is a doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy at Binghamton University. She teaches and assists courses in the Philosophy, Politics, and Law program. She is also the founder and director of the Critical Thinking Lab. Her research focuses on social, political, ethical, and legal philosophy.

Tina Fernandes Botts is assistant professor of philosophy at California State University, Fresno. Her research areas are philosophy of law, philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, and hermeneutics. Her most recent publications are “Boylan’s Agency Based Justification for Natural Human Rights and Group Rights” in the Journal of Applied Ethics and Philosophy and “The Genealogy and Viability of the Concept of Intersectionality” in The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy, published in 2017 by Taylor and Francis. Her edited collection, Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience, was published by Lexington Books in 2016 and was recently reviewed in Hypatia Reviews Online. She is also the author of a forthcoming monograph, The Concept of Race, Aristotle’s Proportional Equality, and the Equal Protection Clause, and is the co-author, with Rosemarie Tong, of the fifth edition of Westview’s Feminist Thought (July 2017).

Chris Jingchao Ma is a doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy at Villanova University. Her research interests include feminist philosophy, queer theory, and contemporary continental philosophy. Her dissertation draws from psychoanalysis and phenomenology to examine the social formation of the gendered and racialized self.


Lynda Lange is professor emerita at University of Toronto at Scarborough. Her teaching has been in courses in feminist philosophy, political philosophy, and postcolonial studies in philosophy. Recent work has been volunteer research on global poverty with Alberto Cimadamore of the University of Bergen, The Global Poverty Consensus Report (2015).

Mechthild Nagel is professor of philosophy, director of the Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies (CGIS) at the State University of New York, College at Cortland. Dr. Nagel is also a visiting professor at Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany. She is author of seven books: Masking the Abject: A Genealogy of Play (Lexington, 2002), co-editor of Race, Class, and Community Identity (Humanities, 2000), The Hydropolitics of Africa: A Contemporary Challenge (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), Prisons and Punishment: Reconsidering Global Penality(Africa World Press, 2007), Dancing with Iris: The Philosophy of Iris Marion Young (Oxford University Press, 2010), and The End of Prisons: Voices from the Decarceration Movement (Rodopi, 2013). Her recent coedited book is titled Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusive Excellence: Transdisciplinary and Global Perspectives (SUNY Press, 2014). Dr. Nagel is founder and editor-in-chief of the online feminist journal Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women’s and Gender Studies (wagadu.org).
APA NEWSLETTER ON Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNZHEZ, EDITOR

VOLUME 17 | NUMBER 1 | FALL 2017

FROM THE EDITOR

Carlos Alberto Sánchez
SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

An enduring question for us philosophical Hispanic/Latino/as in the US asks about our Latinidad, about what it means to be Latino/a. Much has been published on this question, but not nearly as much as the topic demands or has demanded over the past forty years. During this time, publishing or presenting on such themes fell to the brave few who dared pursue such questions, even if "on the side," as something in addition to their primary preoccupation (meta-ethics, Kantian epistemology, logical theory, etc.). Thus, the inquiry was itself marginalized, kept from the spotlight of mainstream academic philosophy, oftentimes discussed in the context of another marginalized philosophical interest, i.e., Latin American philosophy. In this way, panels at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy would bunch together papers on Vasconcelos and Dewey, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, and the debate surrounding our use of Latino or Hispanic. I venture to say that our days of hiding in the shadows are (slowly) coming to an end!

As a case in point, this issue of the newsletter includes reports on two conferences dedicated to Latino/a (or Latinx) philosophy, culture, and identity. These conferences represent an affirmative moment in the life of Latino/as in US philosophy that points toward the normalization of inquiries into issues relevant to our modern-day cultural and existential predicaments. In the first communiqué, the organizers of the Second Annual Latinx Philosophy Conference inform our readers about their successful reunion at Rutgers University this past March. In the second, Rocio Alvarez reports on the inaugural conference of the Society for Mexican American Philosophy (SMAP) held at Texas A&M in May. As is clear from the reports, these reunions showcased a turn inward for Latinx philosophers in the US, a turn toward the more immediate concerns of Latinx philosophers in the US and away from more abstract and distant issues of either continental or Latin American philosophy.

This issue also includes three articles that exemplify the breadth and scope of Latinx philosophy in the US. In the first paper, “What the ‘Nina’ Film Shows about African Heritage in the Americas,” Susana Nuccetelli explores the moral and political controversies surrounding contemporary depictions in media of prominent African American artists such as Nina Simone. Nuccetelli reflects on the moral dimensions inherent in casting a light-skinned woman of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent, Zoe Saldana, to play Nina Simone, an African American black woman who, in her music, rejected Eurocentric depictions of beauty and womanhood, which Saldana somewhat represents. The film is a foil, however, for more deeply philosophical questions that Nuccetelli explores. She considers the drastically differing reactions to the casting choices among the Hispanic and African American community. The reaction, or lack of reaction, by Hispanics, Nuccetelli suggests, could be due to a certain blindness toward anti-Black racism and an adherence to a mestizaje model of Latin American identity a causal role in Afro-Hispanics’ perception of their own African roots. The paper further explores this causal model of mestizaje.

In the second paper, Ivan Marquez questions the presumptions of postcolonial theory, especially its apparent monopoly on questions of the Other. Marquez suggests that postcolonial theory, in order to properly answer its own questions, must first overcome its own prejudices, including its apparent blindness toward philosophical difference. As he puts it by way of conclusion, “If postcolonial theory overcomes its anglophilia, discoursephilia, and historiographical amnesia, embracing instead richer and more encompassing theoretical alternatives to achieve their goals, like the ones exemplified by these Latin American thinkers, then their critical efforts might lead to greater actualization of developmental possibilities and yield greater emancipatory fruit.”

In the last of our scholarly papers, “Latinidad, Multiplicity, and the Time of Identification,” Jesús Luzardo examines the work of Cristina Beltrán, pointing out the shortcomings in her work and aiming to address them by appealing to the work of other Latina feminists such as Mariana Ortega and Gloria Anzaldúa. As he puts it, “I hope to show that the openness [Beltrán] attributes to collective political identity must be extended and deepened to our conception of selfhood, as demonstrated by Ortega.” Thus, the ultimate aim of Luzardo’s efforts is to augment Beltrán’s thesis so as to make it more inclusive of particular, not necessarily political, identities, “a conception of selfhood as multiplicuous, creative, and always open, and thus a conception of the individual that can deepen and support and be further developed by Cristina Beltrán’s view of Latinidad as similarly heterogeneous, and permanently open to future possibilities of solidarity and contestation.”

What these texts ultimately showcase is a definite turn in Latinx philosophy in the US, one which is more affirmative and self-conscious and less willing to remain in the margins of the US philosophical academy.
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the spring 2018 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latino thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as reflections, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and The Chicago Manual of Style formatting. All articles submitted to the newsletter undergo anonymous review by members of the Committee on Hispanics.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

DEADLINES

Deadline for spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. Deadline for the fall issue is April 15. Authors should expect a decision by June 15.

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor,

Carlos Alberto Sánchez, at carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu, or by post: Department of Philosophy
San Jose State University
One Washington Sq.
San Jose, CA 95192-0096

FORMATTING GUIDELINES


CONFERENCE REPORTS

The Second Annual Latinx Philosophy Conference

Alexander Guerrero
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Stephanie Rivera Berruz
WILLIAM PATerson UNIVERSITY

Edgar Valdez
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

The Latinx Philosophy Conference is a generalist philosophy conference that aims to celebrate and to engage with philosophical work by Latinx philosophers and philosophical work on issues of particular relevance to the broader Latinx community. The conference aims to bring together Latinx philosophers and those with interests in Latinx philosophy (two imperfectly overlapping groups of people) to help build and support the broader Latinx philosophy community.

As part of that aim, the organizers of the Latinx Philosophy Conference have sought to bring together philosophers who often have not interacted with each other, due to their coming from different traditions and philosophical styles. The result over the first two years of the conference’s existence has been a wonderful philosophical mash-up of topics, methods, and ideas.

The most recent conference, held April 27-28, 2017, at Rutgers University–New Brunswick, is a perfect example. Francisco Gallegos (Georgetown University) opened the conference with a talk on the phenomenology of collective moods and the work of Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla, and Carlos Alberto Sánchez (San Jose State University) ended the conference with a talk on methodology in philosophy, focused on the method and proper understanding of Mexican philosophical historicism. In between those talks, Ernie Sosa (Rutgers University) spoke about suspension of belief and virtue epistemology; Andrea Pitts (UNC–Charlotte) provided a moving and insightful conceptual genealogy of the idea of “sanctuary” and the history of sanctuary movements; William Jaworski (Fordham University) defended a hylomorphic response to the mind-body problem; Carla Merino-Rajme (UNC–Chapel Hill) and Nilianjan Das (NYU–Shanghai) raised questions about whether self-locating knowledge is rationally defeasible; Jesús Luzardo (Fordham University) reflected on Cristina Beltrán’s concept of “Latinidad” in light of Mariana Ortega’s view of multiplicitous selfhood and the idea of Becoming-With; José Jorge Mendoza (University of Massachusetts Lowell) raised trouble and troubling questions about Whiteness, Latinx identity, and the possibility of majority-minority politics; César Cabezas (Columbia University) put pressure on Tommie Shelby’s views on the connection between racist ideology and institutional racism; and Javiera Perez-Gomez (University of Maryland) offered a sustained reflection on civic alienation and asked us to consider its
status as an emotion, a mood, and a moral response. A similar range of topics and approaches was present at the first Latinx Philosophy Conference, which included talks on Kant and mathematics, Aztec and Aristotelian views of the good life, Enrique Dussel's concept of “transmodern” rationality, a defense of ideal theory in political philosophy, and many other topics.

The first Latinx Philosophy Conference was hosted at Columbia University in 2016. It was the brainchild and product of three Columbia Ph.D. students: César Cabezas, Mariana Beariz Nöe, and Ignacio Ojea Quintana. The 2017 conference was hosted by Rutgers University and organized by Stephanie Rivera Berruz (William Paterson University), Alexander Guerrero (Rutgers University) and Edgar Valdez (Seton Hall University), all of whom attended the first Latinx Philosophy Conference.

The 2018 conference will also be at Rutgers University and will be organized by the same trio as the 2017 conference. Keep an eye out for the Call for Papers and Panel Proposals, which should go out sometime in November 2017, with the conference taking place in April 2018. We hope that the conference will continue to bring together a diverse and expanding group of philosophers and philosophical styles, in part to encourage and inspire Latinx undergraduates and graduate students in philosophy to see a wide range of topics that can be the subject of philosophical reflection and research. And if you have ideas or suggestions for the Latinx Philosophy Conference, either for this upcoming year or in future years, please email them to latinxphilosophyconference@gmail.com.

The 2017 Society for Mexican American Philosophy Conference

Rocio Alvarez
TExAS A&M UNIVERSITY

On May 19 and 20 the Society for Mexican American Philosophy (SMAP) gathered for its very first conference at Texas A&M, "Cultivating Philosophical Space for the Future of Philosophy." Officially, the society is almost two years old, although several of its founding members have been collaborating for much longer. For the past two years, SMAP has organized panels at the Eastern, Central, and Pacific APA conferences. Last year it had a strong presence at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, and many members joined for the Second Biannual Conference on Mexican Philosophy. Although these panels have been great for SMAP, only a handful of its members are ever together at once. The conference held at Texas A&M was the first to provide a space specifically for the theme of Mexican American philosophy and, to our surprise, over forty philosophers (and non-philosophers) gathered to listen, speak, sing, and visually present their take on Mexican American philosophy. Speaking as an organizer, the success of this meeting went above and beyond my expectations.

In addition to myself, founding members and colleagues at the Texas A&M’s philosophy department Andrew Soto and Dr. Gregory F. Pappas served as co-organizers. We were able to secure a wide range of sponsors for the conference, including the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, from whom we were awarded a generous grant; TAMU departments of Philosophy, History, English, International Studies, and Hispanic Studies; and several working groups such as the Social, Cultural, and Political Theory Working Group and the Glasscock Center Three-Year Seminar on Latino/a Identities and Civil Rights. We also received logistical support from members of the Graduate Students in Philosophy and the Hispanic/Latino Graduate Student Association who stepped up to help with registration and moderating panels. Needless to say, the conference was well supported by a variety of entities at Texas A&M that truly did cultivate philosophical space for the future of Mexican American philosophy.

Like SMAP itself, the conference was quite different from more traditional conferences. It began with a Conocimiento, led by Felix J. Alvarez, founder and director of El Teatro de los Pobres and the Center for Community Cultural Activism based in California. The Conocimiento provided everyone with an opportunity to introduce themselves and where they are from, and it also included a physical activity that demonstrated who had rhythm and who did not! This was followed by a welcome address delivered by Pappas, who stressed the importance of familia. As a self-described "tío" of the society, Pappas reminded us all that though we may disagree philosophically on important matters pertaining to the development of a Mexican American philosophy, we are a familia, committed to each other and this new field. As an example, Pappas talked about the "generations" of Latin American philosophers in the United States, who are sometimes at philosophical odds with one another, but are always there to provide personal and professional support that is critical for marginalized fields of philosophy done by marginalized people within the discipline.

Pappas’s emphasis on familia was not just theoretical, but actualized at the conference through its participants that ranged from established scholars and rising stars in the field of Latin American philosophy, like Pappas, Amy Oliver, Jim Maffie, José-Antonio Orosco, Alejandro Santana, and Manuel Vargas, to a younger generation of scholars, like Kim Díaz, Lori Gallegos, Manuela Gomez, José Jorge Mendoza, Robert E. Sanchez, Jr., and Grant Silva. There were graduate students, like Julio Covarrubias, Francisco Gallegos, Adebayo Ogungbure, and Dalisto Ruwe, and a passionate panel of undergraduate students who reminded us all about the struggles of studying philosophy while being Mexican American or, more generally, as an “outsider.” Participants came from major research institutions and four-year universities, community colleges and the community in general, in addition to international participants from Mexico and Costa Rica. Like a familia, the conference was well represented with a variety of personalities, at different stages in their academic lives.

Although there was no official theme to the conference beyond Mexican American philosophy, many of the presentations dealt with the very foundational questions of
what a Mexican American philosophy is, who it is intended for, and what its responsibilities are. “Los Gallegos,” Lori and Francisco, in addition to Manuel Vargas tackled the first question in a panel, aptly titled “What is Mexican American Philosophy?” Several panels addressed the second question, such as Santana and Ogunbure in a panel titled “Disrupting Western Paradigms and Its Effects on Mexican Americans,” and Díaz and Gomez’s panel “Educating Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Chicanos on the US-Mexico Border.” Silva opened the second day of the conference with a presentation titled “On the Politics (and Duties) of Doing Mexican American Philosophy in the 21st Century.”

In addition to what may have been the organic themes of the conference, several panels addressed the intersections that Mexican American philosophy has with continental philosophies (Francisco Salinas Paz), Mexican philosophy (Oliver and Sánchez), and indigenous philosophies (Maffie and Covarrubias). Unlike anything I have seen at a conference, one of the final panels was entitled “Chicano Art and Philosophy,” which included a visual presentation of Yesenia Gonzalez’s artwork inspired by her undergraduate studies in Latin American philosophy (specifically, by Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s recent book, Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy) and a collection of canciones titled “Oralé Raza: One Voice for Justice,” written and sung by Alvarez. Orosco and Mendoza delivered the keynote addresses respectively titled “César Chávez and the Civic Integration of the Undocumented” and “Two American Myths: The Melting Pot and the Minority-Majority Nation.” The scholarship of all the participants generated healthy critiques, comments, and useful feedback.

On an academic level and as a step towards the development of this field of inquiry, the conference was clearly a success; but on the level of familia, it was a triumph. This conference enabled those of us working in the fields of Latin American, Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American philosophy to gather in one place and at the same time. As scholars from every corner of this country, mostly working in these fields in isolation, this inaugural SMAP conference provided critical space for us to come together. We thought together, ate together, argued together, and celebrated together . . . just like a familia.

For those interested in viewing a recording of the conference, a video will be available in the fall 2017 issue of the Inter-American Journal of Philosophy. For information on SMAP activities, please visit https://smapphilosophy.wordpress.com/.

ARTICLES
What the “Nina” Film Controversy Shows about African Heritage in the Americas

Susana Nuccetelli
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY, MINNESOTA

I. THE NINA FILM CONTROVERSY

In 2012, a controversy about some moral implications of the biopic Nina arose when its director announced the casting of a light-skinned Black Latina actress, Zoe Saldana, for the role of African American jazz artist Nina Simone. That decision was met in the US with objectors demanding respect for Ms. Nina Simone’s choice of self-identify as a Black African. Their objections began as soon as film producers announced that Ms. Saldana, an American of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent who identifies herself as Black Latina, would play the Simone character. US critics thought her unsuited for the role since Ms. Simone, until her death in 2003, had openly embraced her African roots.

Soon afterwards, a photo showing Ms. Saldana walking to the studio with an Afro-wig, skin-darkening, and broader lips and nose scandalized many of Ms. Simone’s fans who, by then, were already running a website against the casting decision. When the film’s poster and trailer came out, the controversy intensified. Objectors had two moral criticisms in mind: the casting was disrespectful of Ms. Nina Simone and her legacy and, more broadly, was indicative of anti-Black discrimination.

In the meantime, no such reaction was evident in the Hispanic world. Latin American news outlets took no stand on the moral issues at stake. They reported the controversy with a certain detachment, simply rehearsing the reasons given by the US parties to the dispute. Ms. Saldana herself adopted a similarly detached attitude in an interview. Drawing on her childhood experience in the Dominican Republic, she downplayed the normative significance of being Black in that country. But surely, African Americans are by no means the only people of African ancestry in the Americas who face disrespect or injustice, so it is no surprise that some US critics assigned to Ms. Saldana and other Afro-Dominicans the bias of colorism.

I believe there are two related topics in this controversy that should not be conflated. One concerns how the casting of Ms. Saldana might have had moral implications for Ms. Simone, her legacy, or for African Americans more generally. The other concerns what best explains the contrasting reactions of African Americans and Afro-Dominicans to the controversy. Regarding the film’s moral implications, Ms. Saldana’s cosmetic alterations have, according to one objection, a connection with “blackface,” where white performers in “minstrel” shows sing and dance with their faces painted black, as they attempt to parody the speech and demeanor of Black people, as seen through white racist stereotypes. Though the use of this practice in vaudeville acts persisted in the United States as late as the 1950s, no one today wants to defend
such blatantly racist displays. Black-face was nothing more than a crude attempt to entertain white audiences by morally objectionable means. If the same purpose fueled Ms. Saldana’s cosmetic alterations, then they were straightforwardly morally wrong.

Another quite interesting objection focuses on respect for persons. Although it is difficult to support the claim that the film shows disrespect for Ms. Simone (after all, whether the dead can be disrespected, harmed, or treated unjustly are still unsettled questions in ethics), it can be argued that it shows disrespect for her memory. All available evidence points to the importance for Ms. Simone of her African American identity. Furthermore, during her artistic career she was fastidious about her appearance, rejecting Eurocentric ideals of female beauty which Ms. Saldana appears to realize to some extent. Among her songs, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” and “Four Women” speak of an author who is militantly proud of her African ancestry and even holds an Afrocentric outlook. In sum, according to this objection to the film, it conflicts with Ms. Simone’s autonomous choices about her own racial and ethnic identity. She provided abundant evidence that the African roots of her identity amounted to a fundamental conviction concerning the meaning of life for her. Since the casting of Ms. Saldana failed to respect that choice, the film, then, shows a certain disrespect for Ms. Simone’s memory. If you’ll allow me to use a personal reference, compare this case: When I went back to Argentina recently after the death of a militantly atheist friend, I learned that her family had given her a Catholic funeral, and that her body now lies in a grave marked with Christian inscriptions. The wrongness of this arrangement seems similar to that in the Nina film: Why on earth would a light-skinned Black person be chosen to play Ms. Simone? Here too it seems that it’s not the dead person but her memory that has been wronged.

Now let’s consider the contrasting reactions of Afro-Dominicans and African Americans in the controversy. One account has it that the Afro-Dominicans’ response is due to colorism, which they suffer to a degree greater than African Americans because of their country’s uneasy relationship with Haiti. This account leaves unexplained the absence of a strong reaction to the film by other Afro-Hispanics. But the alternative hypothesis I suggest below does explain that absence, for it assigns the mestizaje model of Latin American identity a causal role in Afro-Hispanics’ perception of their own African roots. No comparably influential model has been in place in the US that is analogously inclusive of African Americans. As a result, descendants of Africans in each of the Americas sometimes have radically different attitudes about moral issues concerning their own collective identity. Since my hypothesis seems highly plausible in light of the historical evidence reviewed below, as I’ll argue next, it is what best explains the contrasting attitudes displayed in controversies of the sort revealed by my discussion of what’s morally wrong with the film Nina.

II. TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS OF AFRO-IDENTITY IN THE AMERICAS

Cornell philosopher Nicholas Sturgeon famously attempted to support his preferred type of moral realism by taking what seem to be the blatant moral features of some actions or institutions to be what best explains certain historical events. These included the fact that the West’s most vigorous abolitionist movements against slavery occurred in France and Britain, roughly between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On Sturgeon’s view, (1) France and Britain brought to North America a form of chattel slavery far worse than slavery in other regions of the world, “and much worse than slavery in Latin America”; and (2) this moral difference best explains the noted facts about the emergence of vigorous abolitionist movements. After invoking other moral features that seem to best explain some historical events, Sturgeon concludes that moral features can, and do, play an indispensable causal role. Therefore, like the scientific properties of natural science, they have a reality independent of mind or language.

Although (1) is consistent with historical records, since there may be alternative best explanations of the events invoked by Sturgeon, (2) does nothing to advance the debate with Sturgeon’s anti-realist opponent. But his argument for realism is not my topic here. Rather, I wish to explore another historical difference between the Spanish/Portuguese- and English-speaking Americas with potential moral underpinning. It concerns the place of Africans and their descendants in these regions’ respective models of racial and ethnic self-identity. My main goal here is to offer evidence for the crafting of an inclusive model in Latin America that appears to have no analog in North America. With roots traceable to the Iberian expansion of the sixteenth century, this model was fully articulated by 1815 and has been widely influential in the region since at least the 1920s. It is a mestizaje model holding that Latin Americans are a mix of some races and cultures—namely, the races and cultures of Africans, Amerindians, and criollos (i.e., Latin Americans of Iberian descent) who first met in the subcontinent during the Iberian modern expansion. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that North American nation builders produced no inclusive model of this sort. This, I submit, is a good candidate for what best explains some durable, contrasting attitudes of African Americans and Afro-Latinas and Latinos (hereafter, “Afro-Hispanics”) on issues concerning their own identity as a people. The contrast was evident in a recent controversy about the casting of a light-skinned Afro-Hispanic actress in the film Nina, which I examine last.

III. TRACING THE MAKING OF LATIN AMERICA’S MESTIZO SELF-IMAGE IN THE WORK OF LAS CASAS, BOLÍVAR, AND VASCONCELOS

According to the mestizaje model, Latin Americans are a new racial and ethnic group, the product of a “synthesis” of peoples of European, African, and Amerindian ancestries. On this model, three philosophical thinkers stand out for their impact on the regional philosophical thought and public policy: Bartolomé de las Casas (Spanish, 1474–1566) brought to it his pioneering recognition of the moral personhood of Amerindians and Africans. His arguments prepared the way for the early-nineteenth-century crafting of the mestizaje model by Simón Bolívar (Venezuelan, 1783–1830). About a century later, José Vasconcelos (Mexican, 1882–1959) gave the mestizaje model a novel normative force by arguing that Latin Americans’ mixed identity is a strength to be celebrated, chiefly because it has already
given them a sense of moral value much preferable to that prevalent in North America.

Each of these artifacts of the mestizaje model was effective in challenging the received, Eurocentric model of Latin American identity. Las Casas did it within the framework of the Thomistic natural law theory of the mid-sixteenth century, learned during training as a Catholic priest. Given that theory, “humanity,” or moral personhood, hinges on rationality. All humans, as rational beings, have non-negotiable, natural rights. Like the basic values of life, knowledge, sociability, and reproduction that ground them, natural rights are absolute (have no exceptions), objective (apply to all persons alike), inalienable (cannot be given up), and self-evident (go without saying). The normative force of this theory of value is straightforward: actions, views, and institutions that hinder or destroy basic values are morally forbidden; those that promote them are morally mandatory; and those that do neither are morally neutral or permissible.

Unlike his peers, Las Casas drew the correct conclusion from this theory once he recognized the humanity of Amerindians and Africans. As we would say today, he saw that they have moral personhood—or full moral standing, which includes the rights to life and liberty. They could not give up these rights, even if they wanted to. Furthermore, since human slavery hinders, and even destroys, some of Aquinas’s basic values, the institution is morally forbidden. Accordingly, Las Casas first shocked fellow settlers in Cuba by returning to the local authorities his “encomienda” or “lease” of Amerindian slaves he had inherited from his father. (The Spanish Crown technically owned them in the encomienda form of slavery for Amerindians). Then he devoted the rest of his life to advocacy for the rights of Amerindians, arguing for radical changes such as their immediate manumission, restoration of their property, and Spanish withdrawal from tribal lands.

In spite of Las Casas’s efforts, improvements in the natives’ conditions seemed unlikely, so Las Casas signed a petition to transport Christianized African slaves from Spain to Latin America (c. 1516). But reflection on the humanity of Africans committed him to the moral rejection of African slavery. After all, his natural law framework explicitly forbids intentional action aimed at a good effect (i.e., ameliorating the conditions of Amerindians) by means of a bad effect (i.e., enslaving the Africans). Thus he renounced his earlier, permissive position on African slavery in a series of publications that historian Helen Rand Parish considers the only public condemnation of African slavery of the century.

Crediting Las Casas for his insight on the personhood of Africans and Amerindians, Bolívar’s “Jamaica Letter” (1815) and “Angostura Address” (1819) explicitly take it into account in their mestizaje views about Latin America’s collective identity during the Wars of Independence (roughly, from 1810 to 1824). The following passage makes clear what Bolivar has in mind:

We must keep in mind that our people are neither European nor North American; rather, they are a mixture of African and the Americans who originated in Europe. Even Spain herself has ceased to be European because of her African blood, her institutions, and her character. It is impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy where we belong in the human family. The greater portion of the native Indians have been annihilated; Spaniards have mixed with Americans and Africans, and Africans with Indians and Spaniards. While we have all been born of the same mother, our fathers, different in origins and in blood, are foreigners, and all differ visibly as to the color of their skin: a dissimilarity which places upon us an obligation of the greatest importance.

The alluded duty is one that follows from Bolivar’s own identity determinism and polity relativism, which hold, respectively, (1) a people’s race, history, culture, and environmental conditions determine their national and regional identity; and (2) the nations builders must find the form of polity that works best given their people’s identity, with no single polity being universally valid for all nations. These were not innovative doctrines at his time. But Bolivar’s attribution of a mestizo identity to Latin Americans was so radical that, for some (e.g., Carlos Fuentes†), it was what motivated the criollos to oust him as leader.

Nation builders of the nineteenth century shelved the idea of a mestizo collective identity inclusive of Afro-Hispanics and Amerindians. But a revolt against their Eurocentricism was on its way. It erupted in 1925 from an unexpected source, Vasconcelos’s La raza cósmica (The Cosmic Race), a hybrid book combining amateur sociology, philosophy, and a utopian vision of Latin America’s role in world history. Sympathetic to continental philosophy, especially the doctrines of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, Vasconcelos was also a public figure known for his work in Mexico’s Ministry of Public Education (1921–1924), his dislike for North America’s hegemony in the continent, and his admiration for National Socialism in Germany. Yet on the issue of Latin American identity, his Cosmic Race gives no evidence of admiration for the Nazi cult of Teutonic racial purity. In fact, it regards Latin America’s mixed races, rather than purity, as a strength. It does so by means of observations about the actual racial and ethnic mix in Latin America together with the prediction that Africans, Amerindians, East Asians, and Europeans will eventually produce a “fifth” race in the Amazon region. This “cosmic” race will embody a universalist spirit representing higher aesthetic and moral values compared to the egoism and individualism of the Anglo-Saxons (especially North Americans). Since the cosmic race’s historic mission is to defeat the Anglo-Saxons’ hegemonic menace to the world, it will be a driving force in world history.

Putting aside the highly unrealistic elements of this narrative, it has, charitably construed, the force of a utopian celebration of Latin America’s racial and ethnic diversity. It vindicates, in its own way, the mestizaje that has already taken place in the region while encouraging further mixing of peoples and cultures. I know of no such celebrations of mixed races and ethnicities at comparable times coming from public figures in the US with a standing analogous to that of Las Casas, Bolivar, and Vasconcelos. In fact,
people of African descent seem to have been excluded systematically from North America's conception of its own collective identity. Although more needs to be said about this largely unexplored issue, I submit that it is this difference in the Americas' crafting of their own collective identity what best accounts, at least in part, for African Americans' and Afro-Hispanics' contrasting attitudes about identity.

What best accounts, at least in part, for African difference in the Americas' crafting of their own collective identity. Although more needs to be said systematically from North America's conception of its people of African descent seem to have been excluded about this largely unexplored issue, I submit that it is this difference in the Americas' crafting of their own collective identity what best accounts, at least in part, for African Americans' and Afro-Hispanics' contrasting attitudes about identity.

Notes


4. La Sha, “On Zoe Saldana, Nina Simone, Convenient Blackness and Colorism in the Dominican Republic.”


7. Later natural law theorists changed their minds about this, preferring a subjective view of natural rights according to which right-holders could abandon their rights. Thus amended, the theory was compatible with the institution of slavery.


As Parmenides puts it,

[T]he One, that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be,

is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth),

the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be,

this I point out to you to be a path completely unlearnable,

for neither may you know that which is not (for it is not to be accomplished)

nor may you declare it.

... For the same thing is for thinking and for being.

... [The One] being ungenerated it is also imperishable,

whole and of a single kind and unshaken and complete. (Fr. 2, 3, and 8)

And conversely, as Heraclitus puts it,

Things taken together are whole and not whole, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things comes a unity, and out of a unity all things.6 (B10)

As the same thing in us is living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old. For these things having changed around are those, and conversely those having changed around are these.7 (B88)

Cold things warm up, the hot cools off, wet becomes dry, dry becomes wet.8 (B126)

But what about the possibility that postcolonial theory did not discover the Other but discovered that (1) the Other and the One are mutually implicated, (2) the Other cannot be fully reduced to the One, and (3) the oppressive potential of being in the position of being the Other of One? None of these important philosophico-existential insights have their genesis in postcolonial theory. The claim that the Other and the One are mutually implicated is Heraclitean in origin and can also be seen in the work of Hegel.9 The claim that the Other cannot be fully reduced to the One can be seen in the later F. W. J. Schelling’s critique of G. W. F. Hegel’s notion of the Absolute10 and arguably also in Edmund Husserl11 and Martin Heidegger.12 The claim about the oppressive potential of being in the position of being the Other of One comes from Hegel and from the subsequent phenomenological-existentialist tradition, especially Jean-Paul Sartre,13 Simone de Beauvoir,14 and Emmanuel Levinas.15 I would argue that, concretely, this last claim has roots in Left Hegelianism, in general, and Karl Marx’s essay “On the Jewish Question” (1844),16 in particular—the “Jew” as the first self-conscious Other and as ontic placeholder for any other Other.

Let us continue to narrow the scope, then. Perhaps the insight of postcolonial theory is that it offers a critique of the totalizing threat of Western modernity as a cultural movement and concept. But that would not be a first of postcolonial theory either because this already is present in Max Horkeimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944),17 and arguably in Husserl’s The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936).18 In fact, the study of the problem of a “totalizing totality” that consumes everything or subsumes it to itself—the phagocytic nature of Western metaphysics—had been taken up by post-structuralism and deconstruction, before the advent of postcolonial theory, and can be seen in the works of Michel Foucault,19 Jacques Derrida,20 and Jean-François Lyotard.21

Finally, maybe the novelty or uniqueness of postcolonial theory lies in actually explaining or at least showing how the Other gets subsumed into the One, particularly, how this operates at the levels of ideology, culture, art, and criticism. But even here there are founding-generative sources, for example, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in The German Ideology (1846);22 Antonio Gramsci;23 Georg (György) Lukács,24 and even Walter Benjamin.25

I think that what remains as the core of postcolonial theory as practiced in US academia is the application of kinds of post-structuralism and deconstruction to the study of the construction of selves and others in the different cultural media of literature, film, television, painting, and music, specifically within social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that exhibit significant power differentials between different individual and collective subjects and agents—a power differential that has historical roots and that is partly maintained by the very same signifying structures that constantly are being produced and reproduced—and circumscribed to the global, geopolitical landscape in modern and contemporary history, characterized by imperialism, dependency, and globalization.

Therefore, after this preliminary analysis, it appears that postcolonial theory acquires its identity and uniqueness not from any originality with regard to theoretical content or mode of critique but from the phenomenon, issue, or theme that it investigates.

3. THE POVERTY OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

In what follows, I will briefly try to do three things: (1) I will say why I believe that postcolonial studies, as practiced in the US, is too narrow in scope and too poor in methods to adequately promote its own critical goals; (2) I will mention the kind of critiques that I think are needed; and (3) I will point to a few significant contemporary Latin American thinkers who are doing these kinds of critiques.

As I have already made clear, I believe that the general and central problem of postcolonial theory is the problem of the Other, which, by definition, is really a problem with the One, with the Absolute, with totalizing totalities. Right now, the solution could be defined, negatively and modestly, as a continuous effort to disrupt all totalizing totalities and, positively and more ambitiously, as the promotion of the conditions that would sustain non-
totalizing totalities, specifically, non-totalitarian systems of life-thought.

Postcolonial theory scholars are committed to critique that, at least, breaks the crust of convention and that, at most, makes things happen, and their critical attitude spans the whole spectrum between nihilism, cynicism, knowingness, irony, suspicion, enlightenment, condemnation, interpolation, reform, liberation, revolution, and even salvation.

But the postcolonial problem is not only a mental problem. It is also a life problem. So breaking the crust of convention, by itself, will not do. Critique will have to enable people to think differently and also to act differently. What critically minded people seek are changes in both subjectivity and agency, individual and collective. But if this is the case, then our critique has to go beyond the “text” and encompass the whole dynamics of daily life. Hence, in addition to “cultural critique,” what is needed are analyses that try to elucidate both the discursive and structural aspects of portions of social reality and, keeping the wants and needs of particular groups in mind, to try to show which are the possibilities for individual and collective cultural, social, economic, and political agency that will lead to a social transformation that will best promote the interests of that particular group.

The problem with postcolonial theory’s approach to the problem of postcolonialism is that it overemphasizes language/discourse and deemphasizes other material conditions as constitutive elements of social reality, in general, and of culture, in particular.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries exhibited two philosophical developments that are still with us, the linguistic turn and the naturalistic-materialist turn. The problem with postcolonial theory is the same as the problem with linguistic-centered analytic philosophy, post-structuralism, and deconstruction: the three embraced the linguistic turn but not the naturalistic-materialist turn. Consumed by language, they miss the rest of life. In the three of them, language might constitute and be connected to institutions, but it is not fully integrated into other aspects of life. Culture ends up being connected to consciousness, subjectivity, and even agency, but estranged from both the materiality of life and nature of which it is a part.

Postcolonial theory does well to appropriate post-structuralism and deconstruction for its analyses. However, the functions of post-structuralism and deconstruction are badly in need of expansion. Post-structuralism must be not only about understanding how discourse, truth, and power relate, and how subjectivities and agencies are shaped by it. It must also be about how to get to be otherwise within contingent discursive and material structures. Deconstruction must be not only about indeterminacy, incommensurability, undecidability, and possible silencing and erasure. It must also be about exploring discursive and material possibilities of being-in-the-world, and how certain possibilities preclude others, and how certain actualizations of possibilities preclude other possibilities while enabling still other ones.

At the highest level of generality, the problem we now face is the problem of figuring out what are the formal and material conditions and possibilities for the dynamics of an ever-developing non-totalizing totality, which, in turn, is linked to humanity’s three most important concerns in the twenty-first century: globalization (being-one-in-many), democracy (being-many-in-one), and sustainability (being-for-ever).

Let us move to a lower level of abstraction. Former colonies are contending with modernity. But the term “modernity” needs to be unpacked to be of any use. I suggest that we separate three meanings of modernity: (1) modernity as historical period, (2) social modernization, and (3) cultural modernism. Furthermore, we should naturalize culture and thus break down the culture-nature divide. Postcolonial theory should then supplement its emphasis on the narrow fields of literature, linguistics, literary theory, and criticism and embrace anthropology, geopolitical economy, sociology, and biology.

4. LATIN AMERICAN THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVES

Five contemporary Latin American thinkers, I believe, have done this kind of theoretical work with good results. First, the Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino brings Gramsci to bear on her development of a framework that moves away from the seemingly monolithic and static “ideology discourse” to the dynamics of hegemony and marginalization in what she calls “the cultures of politics and the politics of cultures.” Second, the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar has elaborated what he calls a “political ecology” that tackles issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation in a globalized modernity from the point of view of (human and non-human) biodiversity, local knowledges, local self-determination, bio-cultural geography, sustainability, and questioning the evolutionary model of Western developmentalism as applied to the “Third World.” Third, the Argentine philosopher and anthropologist Néstor García Canclini has developed the notion of “material cultures,” integrating the core insights of Bourdieu on social reproduction with Gramsci’s hegemonic struggles. What emerges are cultures that are permanently hybridized in the normal transactions of everyday life that produce them and reproduce them, and a definition of culture that is dynamic, fully embodied, and enmeshed in practices and traditions that are made within/by human transactions with themselves, with others, with artifacts, and with nature. Fourth, the Spanish-Colombian philosopher, anthropologist, and semiotician Jesús Martín-Barbero has contributed to the notions of “material cultures” and “hybridization” with his move away from a study of media and toward a notion of mediations, thus developing a version of reception theory of communication that explores how different people appropriate cultural products, making them their own, and, thus, how the battles of, with, and for hegemony are fought in daily life by the so-called masses. Fifth, and finally, there is the work of the Argentine philosopher and theologian Enrique Dussel who combines Kantianism, phenomenology, existentialism, and Marxism to elaborate a Levinasian ethical foundation for metaphysics and philosophy, in general, and a material ethics of human
flourishing, in particular, within the contemporary context of exclusionary-totalizing globalization and Empire.\textsuperscript{33}

If postcolonial theory overcomes its anglophilia, discoursephilia, and historiographical amnesia, embracing instead richer and more encompassing theoretical alternatives to achieve their goals, like the ones exemplified by these Latin American thinkers, then their critical efforts might lead to greater actualization of developmental possibilities and yield greater emancipatory fruit.

NOTES

4. See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 2010).
8. Ibid.
27. See Nancy Fraser’s Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Latinidad, Multiplicity, and the Time of Identification

Jesús Luzardo
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

In her 2010 monograph The Trouble with Unity, Cristina Beltrán provides a rigorous, wide-ranging analysis of Latinx politics and political theory that revolves specifically around the question of “Latinidad,” the term she uses to refer to the pan-ethnic identity of Latin Americans, as well as their descendants, in the United States. In an early chapter that provides the argumentative thrust for Beltrán’s text as a whole, she compellingly argues, via a reading of various Third World and Latina feminists as well as democratic theorists, that Latinx people must refrain from seeking a pan-ethnic identity that would claim to provide or serve as a foundational model or set of interests for political action. Instead, following Sheldon Wolin, we must
conceive of Latinidad as "fugitive," that is, as an ephemeral, transgressive moment in which multiple, heterogeneous forces and interests come together as one.

Given the scope of her project, Beltrán’s analysis remains focused on collective political identities, and thus little attention is paid to the conception of selfhood, or the individual’s own self-identification, operating implicitly within her analysis. Though she briefly mentions the fact that her conception of Latinidad is “linked to a rethinking of subjectivity,” this possibility remains underdeveloped in her argument. Thus I would like to suggest here a possible connection between Beltrán’s reading of collective Latino identity and Mariana Ortega’s conception of multiplicitous selfhood as presented in her recent monograph, In-Between. Working from views of identity and selfhood by Latina feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones as well as the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, Ortega conceives of individuals—especially women of color—as existing between different, sometimes contradictory, “worlds,” that is, different sets of norms, practices, and communities defined by them. Thus, for Ortega, the multiplicitous self is “characterized by being-between-worlds, being-in-worlds, and becoming-with.” Though such a position of “in-betweenness” is a result of exile, oppression, and marginalization, Ortega does not posit multiplicitous selfhood as a problem to be solved via a synthesis of these various worlds and identities but instead sees her multiplicity as providing the grounds for creative possibilities of individual and collective resistance against oppression.

Thus, rather than a critique of Beltrán’s analysis, I hope to show that the openness she attributes to collective political identity must be extended and deepened to our conception of selfhood, as demonstrated by Ortega. In doing so, I also hope to show the relevance of Ortega’s analysis of a coalitional politics, based on the process of Becoming-Within, for our understanding of democracy and political identification. I will begin by providing a brief overview of Beltrán’s critique of Latinidad as it is often conceived, followed by her ambivalent but ultimately positive engagement with Third World feminists and her subsequent appropriation of Wolin’s concept of “fugitive democracy.” I will then explicate Ortega’s conception of the multiplicitous self, its creative potential, and its participation in collective coalitional politics via the process of Becoming-Within. I will conclude by showing that the concept of Becoming-Within points to the ontological dimensions of the democratic moment as explained by Beltrán and Wolin.

Beltrán begins with a brief history of the Chicano and Puerto Rican political movements of the 1960s and ’70s, which “continue to serve as emotional and strategic touchstones” for all further Latina/o political movements. Thus, while she laments their later transition to a more elite electoral model predicated on the idea of a homogenous “Latino vote,” Beltrán claims that such a homogenous view of political identity was already present within these early movements. Citing El Plan de Aztlán, Beltrán explains the movement’s belief that “unity would emerge through culture and national origin rather than shared class interests.”

It was this focus on ethnic unity as the foundational principle for these movements, argues Beltrán, that led to a rejection of internal dissent and deliberation, as shown in their negative reaction to feminist critiques from their own party members. Beltrán appropriately uses her problematization of these early movements to transition to her reading of Latina feminism and democratic theory, as it allows her to wage a double-sided critique. If these early movements inefficiently attempted to enforce unity from within their ranks, Beltrán accuses others of attempting to impose it from without. In an attempt to call attention to and to empower Latinx and other minorities against more dominant, hegemonic identities, she explains, many white democratic theorists, such as Iris Marion Young, ultimately end up obscuring their heterogeneity. Thus, in recognizing such communities as different from and excluded by the norm, such theorists fail to recognize the many differences between members of these communities.

In contrast to these homogenizing views of Latinx and other minorities, Beltrán presents a critical reading of various Third World feminists, whom she nevertheless praises for “building bridges while simultaneously challenging the exclusion and silences that exist within all forms of community.” Given that Latina feminism serves as the main influence and site for Ortega’s text, it is in this discussion that the two thinkers come closest, though, as will be shown below, Beltrán’s analysis is largely focused on collective identity and on Third World feminists’ approach to it. Beltrán spends a substantive portion of her short reading of Third World feminists on what she takes to be their principal pitfall, namely, their presumption of and desire for homogeneity. After quoting Chela Sandoval’s own citing of various Third World feminists, such as Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, as thinkers who exist in liminal spaces and have thus helped develop a common theoretical standpoint, Beltrán explains that the problem with such a claim is not “the attempt to find common practices and perspectives—it is the presumption that a deeper, more organic form of consensus and identification exists at the site of this community.” Beltrán also cites the examples of Moraga’s foreword to the second edition of the anthology This Bridge Called My Back and Bernice Johnson Reagon’s “Coalition Politics” as further examples of what she refers to as the “democratic despair” that arises from the inability to achieve a complete community. Beltrán engages with these two texts differently, but her critique remains largely the same. That is, Moraga’s lamentation over the internal strife found in Third World feminism as well as Reagon’s defiant dichotomy between the contestable space of coalitional work and the nurturing space of the “home” continue to use harmony and unity as both a standard by which to judge spaces and a goal to be achieved. Thus, as Beltrán states of Reagon’s dichotomy, both thinkers leave “little room for the pleasures of difference.”

Beltrán, however, finishes her engagement with Third World feminism by showing its ability and its potential to contest the very idea of home, and thus the very idea of harmony. Beltrán provides a lengthy quotation by Anzaldúa, in which she describes the feeling of moving from space to space, feeling both welcomed and estranged—and for
different reasons—in each of them. “Moving at the blink of an eye, from one space to another, each world with its own peculiar and distinct habitats, not comfortable in any one of them, none of them ‘home,’ yet none of them ‘not home’ either.” It is this reconfiguration of the home as something that can be and yet not be, as something that can never be completely reached or achieved, that Beltrán takes to be the most productive contribution of Third World feminists towards our conceptions of both Latinidad and democracy.

Beltrán then moves to her conception of democracy, which is most heavily influenced by the political theorist Sheldon Wolin. In his 1994 essay “Fugitive Democracy,” Wolin seeks to distinguish between a pure conception of democracy and the modern system of constitutionalized democracy. Real democracy, he argues, is necessarily devitalized by any notion of system or form. Thus democracy “needs to be reconstituted as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being . . . doomed to succeed only temporarily.” Democracy emerges in a transgressive act, a moment in which “by which the demos makes itself political,” and, Beltrán explains, “in which ordinary individuals contest forms of unequal power and, in doing so, create new patterns of commonality.” Thus, in its transgressive suspension of norms, interests, and political identities, democracy provides a moment to configure and transfigure them into new formations, which can (but don’t necessarily) become systematized in an attempt at institutionalization and sustainability. Similarly, and quite importantly, such moments have no guarantee of taking place or successfully transfiguring political formations: “[It] is a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions, or may not,” Wolin explains.

Thus Beltrán concludes that Latinidad, too, must be conceived as fugitive. That is, rather than emerging from a common foundation or moving towards a common fate, Latinidad must be thought of as always open to future and always contingent possibilities for new political formations. Such a conception of political identity, furthermore, brings into question the temporality of the democratic moment and of the movement or action produced therein. Given that it transgresses current norms, patterns, and formations, the commonality that emerges in such a moment cannot be explained or justified by an appeal to these norms. Beltrán, following Alan Keenan, thus concludes that such formations must be self-constituting. After all, “the effort to call a people into being involves speaking and acting prior to the consent of those for whom they claim to speak,” for it is only this moment of identification that makes the possibility for consent available in the first place. The legitimacy of such actions, much like the consent of those it seeks to unite and represent, “can only be determined retroactively.” In Beltrán’s view, this is precisely what successfully took place in the form of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, and, thus, their “fundamental flaw,” she explains, “was not their specific instances of sectarianism and exclusion—it was the assumption that closure was itself a goal to be achieved.”

Beltrán’s analysis is compelling and rigorously resists the temptations of closure and unity. However, her views on the identity and the subjectivity of the individual remain underdeveloped. Despite her citation of Anzaldúa—and her experiences of the many spaces that are not “home” and yet none of which are “not home”—as a principal example of the agonistic and open views of Latinx identity to be found within Third World feminism, her analysis only gestures towards the internal strife, the unhomeliness that Anzaldúa feels, not just externally in relation to the various spaces she navigates, but internally, within herself, between the many cultures and identities she encompasses. For Ortega, however, this is precisely the point(s) of departure for a conception of a multiplicitous self, whom she describes as being-in-worlds, being-between-worlds, and becoming-with.

As mentioned before, Ortega largely derives her conception of selfhood from critical readings of Anzaldúa, Lugones, and Heidegger. All three thinkers, she notes, share an opposition to a Cartesian view of the self as a thinking substance, and instead seek to represent the self as she exists in the world amongst others. Such a self, furthermore, is always “in the making.” Ortega’s concept of beings-in-the-world specifically combines Heidegger’s ontological analysis of Being-in with Lugones’s understanding of the various “worlds” the self traverses. Put succinctly, “Being-in-worlds is meant to convey the condition of the multiplicitous self as being able to inhabit as well as access various worlds.” By “Worlds,” Lugones means a framework of meaning and practices, that is, a “construction of life,” and these various worlds are also variously conditioned and formed by different power relations. Thus, while Ortega clearly states that her conception of multiplicitous selfhood is not exclusive to oppressed minorities, her main break with Heidegger’s analysis is in her claim that the world-traveling of oppressed individuals is more precarious, reflective, and is characterized by “a thick sense of not-being-at-ease.” That is, unlike the subject of Heidegger’s analysis, who tends to exist in the world practically and non-reflectively, the oppressed minority can easily find her existence disrupted by the oppressive conditions of the worlds in and through which she travels.

This is precisely the eponymous condition of in-betweenness, the position of liminality across the various worlds accessed by the oppressed individual. But, to bring Ortega closer to Beltrán’s critique of the presumption of unity amongst Third World feminists, this position of liminality is not experienced equally by all oppressed people, nor is it even experienced equally across all possible worlds. “For many multiplicitous selves,” Ortega explains, “their condition of in-betweenness is highlighted and felt acutely given different conditions of marginality.” These conditions of marginality themselves emerge based on the many intersecting social identities the multiplicitous self has. As Ortega explains, “the multiplicitous self has multiple social identities in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and other social markers, and this self must negotiate such identities while being between-worlds and being-in-worlds.” Given this multiplicity of social identities and their countless negotiations within the worlds and liminal spaces through which the self traverses, Ortega explains that the multiplicitous self “must be understood as decentered,” which is to say that none of its many
worlds or social identities can be taken to be a priori or foundational.

Ortega here presents us with a complex, heterogeneous view of the individual. But here we must ask how the multiplicitous self appears in the realm of political action and identification. Is such a conception of selfhood not rendered futile, or at least far too scattered? While Ortega mentions and engages with other thinkers for whom this lack of internal coherence would foreclose the possibility of concrete political action and coalition building, she instead takes the multiplicity of selfhood to unlock diverse and heterogeneous possibilities for action. Thus, she explains that the multiplicitous self “does not necessarily need to be fully integrated.” Rather, she continues, “the multiplicitous self can shift or . . . highlight different identities in different contexts.” These highlights or deployments of various permutations of social identities, Ortega warns, can be and are limited by material conditions and power relations. Certain deployments may simply not appear as possible or available in certain, or perhaps in any, worlds.

But beyond material conditions and power relations, our ability to recognize and to deploy our identities is also determined by our relations to others. Ortega here wishes to dispense with the view that a politics based on identity must exclude collective, coalitional work between various groups. Like Beltrán, Ortega explains that coalitions cannot be built based simply on shared and already possessed identity markers, on Being, but must also allow for heterogeneity and for Becoming. Furthermore, coalitions must find similarities in both the forces that oppress them and in the tools of resistance that they have in common. Nevertheless, Ortega says, “coalitional politics depend on an acknowledgement of the need for us to work with the heterogeneity of members within our group as well as with other resistant groups.”

It is only in accepting internal and external differences between our groups, identities, and coalitions that we can become-with one another. The process of becoming-with does not entail simply working together towards a common goal; rather, it entails a collective transformation in which our separate interests come to be shared. Here we find a crucial connection with Beltrán, who criticizes not just the idea that Latinidad can represent and encompass Latinx people’s diverse and often contradictory interests, but also a conception of interests that she takes to be too static in the first place. Rather than an observable “thing that social groups possess,” Beltrán defines interests as “an activity in which subjects engage.” Thus Beltrán explains that, much like their identities, “Latino interests are multiple, crosscutting, and periodically opposed to one another,” and similarly become collective interests via an ongoing process of contestation and participation. This process, for both thinkers, is never guaranteed to yield this transformation, and its results nevertheless need not become institutionalized or become retroactively foundational.

Further, the process of becoming-with is not meant to erase differences, but rather to lead us to understand them, and ourselves, differently. Such a process involves an embodied knowing which “can be connected to social movements, and our participation with others in such movements allow for the possibility of feeling otherwise, of experiencing joy and freedom from oppression.” Thus, rather than a mere exercise in empathy, becoming-with is an active, embodied process, and can be seen to take place in collective participation and identification, in which resistant identities may become highlighted, worlds may become aligned, and new possibilities may emerge in a moment of self-constituting solidarity amongst multiplicities. If indeed the material conditions and power relations of our various worlds can render certain deployments of our many identities and certain coalescences of our various interests unavailable, the democratic transformation of becoming-with one another does not reveal such possibilities but, rather, creates them. In this process, “I become-with you, and we remake each other.”

Thus we find in Mariana Ortega’s text a conception of selfhood as multiplicitous, creative, and always open, and thus a conception of the individual that can deepen and support and be further developed by Cristina Beltrán’s view of Latinidad as similarly heterogeneous, and permanently open to future possibilities of solidarity and contestation. It is notable that the last sentence in Wolin’s “Fugitive democracy” is a warning about the limits of heterogeneity and the eventual need for homogeneity. Wolin clarifies that homogeneity “[requires] understanding what is truly at stake politically: heterogeneity, diversity, multiple selves are no match for modern forms of power.” Yet in Ortega and Beltrán’s work, we find the tools, the need, to reject this view. In a time in which social and political identities themselves have been transformed into mere consumer data and branding, in which our main channels of communication and participation are themselves made possible by the very forces that oppress us, in which the only models for homogeneity available to us have been shown to be of no avail—we must accept, explore, link, and de-link our differences in the hopes that a moment of unity may come about to show us whom we must be. The time for identification, more than ever but always, is now.

NOTES

4. Ibid., 42. Though similar charges of nationalism and a resistance to dissent applied to Puerto Rican groups such as the Young Lords, Beltrán makes it clear that Puerto Rican movements had a more explicit class-based philosophy, and were more open to feminist and gay critiques from its members.
5. Ibid., 57.
6. Ibid., 62.
7. Ibid., 64.
8. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 18
15. Ibid., 70.
16. Ibid., 73.
18. Ibid., 67.
19. Ibid., 65.
20. Ibid., 71.
21. Ibid., 63.
23. Ibid., 74.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 164.
27. Ibid., 165, emphasis mine.
29. Ibid., emphasis mine.
31. Ibid., 168

Stephanie Rivera Berruz received her Ph.D. in philosophy at SUNY Buffalo in 2014. Her main interests lie in social and political philosophy with an emphasis on philosophy of race and feminist philosophy, as well as Latin American philosophy.

Alex Guerrero, Ph.D., New York University; J.D., NYU School of Law; A.B., Harvard. I work on a variety of topics in moral, legal, and political philosophy, and epistemology (particularly social epistemology). I also have interests in African philosophy, Latin American philosophy, and Native American philosophy.

Jesús Luzardo is a Ph.D. student at Fordham University. He specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy, Kierkegaard, and Latin American philosophy.

Ivan Marquez is assistant professor of philosophy at Texas State University. He has published in many areas of philosophy, including ethics, metaphysics and epistemology, social and political philosophy, Latin American philosophy, and philosophy of education.

Susana Nuccetelli is professor of philosophy at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. Her articles in ethics, philosophy of language, and Latin American philosophy have appeared in many edited volumes and journals. She is the author of Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments (Westview Press, 2002) and, with Gary Seay, of Engaging Bioethics: An Introduction with Case Studies (Routledge 2017) and How to Think Logically (2e, Pearson, 2012).

Edgar Valdez is a teaching fellow at Seton Hall University. His research focuses on the work of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and is particularly concerned with revisiting Kant’s critical philosophy and understanding what implications Kant’s claims have for other human investigations like ethics and the natural sciences.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Rocio Alvarez is a fourth-year Ph.D. student in philosophy at Texas A&M University. She works primarily on social and political philosophy, critical race theory, and anticolonial methodologies, especially as they pertain to Chicano/a philosophy and history.
FROM THE EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry  
UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH

Along with a report to the community from our committee chairs, this issue of the newsletter features work that considers some of the challenges of educating about Native American and Indigenous history, life, and thought in a context of ongoing struggles for decolonization. These topics are particularly timely as the topic of justice for Native and Indigenous communities has re-emerged in general public discourse.

The summer of 2017 saw some good news for those opposed to the North Dakota Access Pipeline when, on June 14, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruled that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers did “not adequately consider the impacts of an oil spill on fishing rights, hunting rights, or environmental justice, or the degree to which the pipeline’s effects are likely to be highly controversial.” The fact that controversy was noted in Boasberg’s ruling highlights the fact that the pipeline protests drew broader attention to injustices to Native communities in the U.S. in a way not seen since the 1970s.

Meanwhile, the celebrations and controversies surrounding the Sesquicentennial of Canadian Federation serve to illustrate the urgency of points raised by Anna Cook in our first article, “When Listening Isn’t Enough: Settler Denial and Epistemic Injustice.” Cook utilizes work on the epistemologies of ignorance to critique the assumptions operative in Canadian governmental efforts toward Truth and Reconciliation regarding its settler-colonial history. Suffice it to say here in this introduction that these assumptions are philosophically naïve.

Moving from the question of mis/education and the tentacles of ideological colonialism on the world stage to the always-fraught activities in our classrooms, two authors gift us with experienced-based suggestions for undergraduate teaching of topics in what we can (problematically) call Native American philosophy.

First, Andrea Sullivan-Clarke offers a plethora of resources and advice for dealing with the likelihood that both nonnative and native students know little of their history and operate from colonialist assumptions about identity, epistemic authority, and academic disciplinary boundaries. At the same time, she reassures nonnative instructors that even quite limited efforts can have some salutary effects for themselves, their students, and their institutions.

Then Alejandro Santana offers a concrete example in his presentation and discussion of a syllabus for a course he developed in Native American philosophy structured to address the institutional constraints of his university. The course description, along with the narrative describing its development and institutional approval, may provide both inspiration and succor for those wondering how to develop courses that could “grow” along with their expertise.

Santana’s personal narrative also speaks directly to some of the motivations for navigating the often rocky waters of course development and curricular approval. As a first-generation Mexican-American, Santana notes one of his motivations for teaching a course that introduces Aztec and Maya thought along with work by contemporary American Indian philosophers working in the United States: “I teach it in an attempt to genuinely understand myself and engage in my own self-decolonization.”

Some of us personally have a felt urgency to embark on the endless work of decolonization as we recognize colonization as the literal condition of our being. (At the same time, this may mean that to the extent to which we find meaning and value in our existence, we may be less likely to be binary in our judgments about the history and myriad effects of colonial enterprises.) Yet one need not be of Native identity to see oneself as colonized, or of “mixed” heritage to see oneself as always-already both colonized and colonizing. I submit that doing philosophy, in the Americas and elsewhere, has always been a profoundly mixed enterprise: colonizing and decolonizing effects can blend as well as turn on a dime in the shifts of history. And to that extent, working toward decolonization—of our perspectives, our classrooms, and our profession—is everyone’s task. Given this, it is appropriate that prefacing all these discussions is a poem/prayer by John Powell that reminds us that words can have immeasurable weight. May our words be good.

NOTES

FROM THE CHAIR

A Committee of Change

Anne Waters
INTERIM CHAIR, APA COMMITTEE ON NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS

Some twenty years ago (about 1996) the American Philosophical Association (APA) asked me if I might create an APA committee for Native Americans. At that time only two self-identified American Indians held a Ph.D. in Philosophy: Viola Cordova and myself. We named this committee “Committee on the Status of American Indian Philosophers.” Our newsletter was similarly named, and it announced this naming included those of the Americas and Indigenous to the Americas, as our traditional Native nations and families stretched across colonial settler boundaries.

About ten years later (about 2006) some Canadian APA members informed the APA board they felt excluded and insulted by the name of this committee, as Canadians were not “Americans.” Thus this committee name changed to “Committee on Indigenous Philosophers.” The newsletter was similarly renamed. Although one might think this naming held global inclusion, Indigenous philosophers beyond North America have not been in participation until very recently.

The renaming of the committee, to be effective in this association, was too broad, unyielding, and confusing. Canadian First Nations members had participated in the committee since its inception, both as members, and as the second-in-line chair. And, problematically, the renaming was not effective to bring in Indigenous philosophers from other regions (or diversity committees), e.g., “American” or other nationality Latin American philosophers from Mexico, further South, or elsewhere—much less from Africa, Australia, Asia, or other global regions.

Thus, over several years, the committee fell into decline, with no articulated guiding light of mutual interest among its members. Worse, most United States American Indians were still not getting hired or published and were thus unable to have the wherewithal, including mentors, to build the field of American Indian philosophy, much less any global Indigenous philosophy.

Then, about ten years later (about 2016), some Native Americans complained that they felt excluded and insulted by the name of this committee, as they did not identify as “Indigenous.” Subsequently, the committee name changed again to “Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers.” And just as before, our newsletter may likely be named “Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers and Philosophies.”

What is the import of this renaming? First, because we are the American Philosophical Association (APA), this naming brings Native Americans into consonance with those who are at this American APA table. It brings Native Americans into a role as creators, caretakers, and protectors of “American Indigenous Philosophers and Philosophies,” alongside global Indigenous philosophers and philosophies. Native Americans are no longer made invisible by the amorphous naming of “indigenous.” It says we are here, in the Americas, and we deserve a place setting at the table of the APA. It makes us visible.

This committee, alongside the many Indigenous philosophers who will eventually come to this “American” association, will include those global members who identify as “Indigenous” and those who may not so identify, but believe they work in the fields of Indigenous Philosophy. (And malleable belief, not static knowledge, might be our guiding light of inclusion here.) As Indigenous to the Americas, Native Americans in this “American” association thus have a crucial and important role to make extra efforts to continue to diversify and include all Indigenous philosophers and philosophies as our colleagues in this American association.

May we never forget that we Native Americans, we, Native to the Americas, whether tribal or nation enrolled, or not, are, as Native Americans, “Of the Americas.” More, as well as “Native” or indigenous to our American or America’s roots, “you are,” as Geronimo told us so many years ago in a famous speech, “the Red, the White, and the Blue.” And as such we need to keep the Indigenous fires burning for all.

Many say where there are “Indians” there are “politics,” and I agree. Anticipations of some are that the inclusion of all Indigenous persons of the globe in this committee (remembering that we are all indigenous to somewhere!) will bring forth a new global “philosophy of indigeneity.” Such philosophy might be inclusive of different knowledge bases, experience oriented with elder participation, and continue the passing along of Indigenous community thought through generations, ever expanding our understanding of humanity and our human place in the galaxy.

The American Philosophical Association plays the role of facilitator to develop intergenerational and global philosophical thought. Many years ago, in a Michelangelo moment, President Kennedy announced a new NASA program, proclaiming that humanity would go to space and touch the face of God. Today some philosophers will reach, as Mike Pence says, to “touch the heavens.” Yet others, including Indigenous philosophers, will step into both an old and new world of learning more about how to understand our human place on earth in the context of our outer spacial regions of the galaxy.

In the near future this committee will connect traditional philosophies of Indigenous technological knowledge bases with those of Western scientific enterprises. This work has already begun by some members now associating with this committee. If the APA ever intended to be an “American” Philosophical Association in philosophical reach, beholden only to the USA and Canada, and excluding Central and South America, and other earthly regions, our current committee work challenges this thought! After almost forty years in this association and knowing the originating
history, I am still not clear whether "American" in the context of "the APA" might mean nation, region, a school of thought, or a political cadre of in-house philosophers with institutional money and power, or all of the above! Yet I am still here, a member, and perhaps there is reason to be creatively encouraged about this! But I do know that we come to this room because we are philosophers! And to have this space is important to me.

Our committee might perhaps now be more closely aligned with the Committee on Global Cooperation, and their interests (hopefully) in Indigenous philosophy, than any other committee or group at this time. For this reason it may be important to continue to include Native America as a guiding light and caretaker of this "American" association. For as we expand our human associations, a vast expanse of differing philosophical ontologies, epistemologies, metaphysics, and value theories presented by global indigenous thought may propel the APA forward intellectually in a way our association has not yet been challenged to think.

The notion that Western thought can anymore be taught as a representative of human philosophy in an introductory philosophy (or any other) course has been put to rest by many. In this context Indigenous philosophy seeks to search for human understanding rather than dogmatic truth, and relegate some unchanging static truth assertions to a misguided notion of global colonial settler history books. Some have contemplated that Native American philosophy ought to be taught as introductory philosophy to American students. I see no reason why this suggestion is not a good one. At any rate, as I face an oncoming new septuagenarian chapter of my own life, I hope to look back one day at how this APA committee has played a role in the development of ideas of both Indigenous and what was once known as "Western" colonial settler ideas.

In the same spirit that my father contributed to the invention of the "Black Box" that later became and remains the sin qua non of American wartime communication, and later developed the theory of inertial guidance for NASA to return our spaceships using gravitational forces, I have thought to articulate my and others' worldview, as an Indigenous philosopher, within the ambiance of this committee, this philosophical association, and current global and galactic consciousness. As such I have drawn heavily upon my mother's American Indian guidance.

I believe that in the United States there is currently no other association than the APA to work with to develop a cadre of intergenerational and diverse Indigenous philosophers devoted to inclusive cooperative understanding of multifarious global Indigenous philosophy. It is for this reason that I have continued to work within the APA for forty years. As originator of this committee so many years ago, and political activist on behalf of America's Indigenous philosophy within the APA, I view this committee as making great strides to envelop diverse thought that has and will continue to lead to substantial interaction with global and Indigenous philosophy and philosophers. I predict that inter-galactic philosophy will also find an important place within Indigenous philosophy.

It is in this spirit that I recently accepted the task and honor, once again, to assist this committee, this time to act as interim chair in the middle of the 2016 academic year. At the time I was a mere newsletter consultant at the request of the chair. However, during my recent tenure, our committee has changed from a committee with only one Native American to a committee of several Native American philosophers working alongside Indigenous philosophers of differing global traditions. As earlier mentioned, all philosophers native to the Americas have a special role to play within the APA.

The recent changes undergone by this committee lead the way not toward "touching the heavens," or "the face of God," in a traditional Western religious philosophical standpoint, but allow us to go forward in the pursuit of kneading the traditional historical flow of global Indigenous thought as it touches the lives of humanity. It is now the task of Indigenous philosophers of this association to lead where our hearts may take us. It may take time throughout the global Indigenous philosophical world to bring forth an offering of communicative interaction of ideas about ourselves and the world as we have known it, whereby humanity itself will have a more accurate assessment of our place.

Thus many Indigenous philosophers, by calling, do not see our place as folks who are leaders or followers of Western religious thought, but as developers of global Indigenous thought that will upturn current human paradigmatic scientific theories of our universe. Philosophers can now, through this Association, and this committee work, better touch the face of humanity. As we approach the contemplations of many of our traditional Western assumptions about the word, whether in areas of metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, science, or social and political thought, we are being and will continue to be challenged.

My comments here for the association this year are not about changing this committee to keep with the times. There will always be a chair and members to assist us in this way. Rather, my comments of my tenure in this association are about how the APA has changed us, through this committee, to more fully explicate who we are, as American Indians, and Indigenous philosophers, in the APA. When first I walked into the APA I was an Indian, and a red, white, and blue American of color. Today I am that same person, but my life and others' lives, have changed and been enriched by the APA committees, conferences, newsletters, and ongoing collegial mentoring and support through interactions of many global Indigenous philosophers. For this, I thank the APA. And my vision is that the APA and our members, through this committee, will experience more of this kneaded interaction.

I have spent much time this past year and a half thinking about this committee, our members of the committee, and members of the APA, as well as the institution of the APA itself! I have hashed and rehashed Indigenous issues, including the naming of ourselves and others. I do not expect all of the things I have set in motion since originally working with this committee in the 1990s, or even in the
past year and a half, to come to fruition, but only to have placed a few drops in the bucket of issues this committee will face over the next millennium. I hope my contributions have assisted in the development of human justice through philosophy, and most especially Indigenous philosophy, and that such development will move us closer to intergalactic philosophies.

A COMMITTEE OF MEMBERS: NATIVE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS

I could be equally but not more proud of any committee I have chaired in the past than I am now of the excellent ongoing work of our renaissance philosophy members of this committee. I continue to be honored to work with our committee members. I have learned much working with our astutely philosophical members. I take a moment to share this in the report to the board and APA members the ways these committee members contribute to this committee and global philosophy itself.

Agnes B. Curry, Indigenous to North and Central America, whom I have known and worked alongside for over 20 years, and with whom I edit a SUNY series devoted to Living Indigenous Philosophies, gifts this committee with her heart, her perspicuous philosophical and writing skills, her expansive committee experience, and her invaluable energy to committee success by filling the all-important role of managing editor of our newsletter. Since she has taken on this role, the committee has been able to diversify our perspectives and move toward our goal of inclusivity of global Indigenous philosophy. My hope is that Agnes will continue to provide the all-important interpersonal and philosophical skills, acumen, and passion she exercises all year long on behalf of this committee, its communicative newsletter, and the future of global Indigenous philosophies.

Shay Welch, Indigenous to North America, and well-published feminist philosopher, is a guiding light of how far our committee needs to reach to conjoin our sisters and brothers of Indigenous philosophy. She proves with enthusiasm that we can accomplish our goals and concretely bring Indigenous philosophers together at the APA. Shay has worked tenacity, in her own creative ways, to take our inclusive Indigenous committee message to the Feminist Social and Political conferences. More, she then returns to our committee to create conference and newsletter space for mutual dialogue interaction that inspires and propels this committee forward toward knowing how to touch our shared humanity on earth. I envision more leadership roles for Shay in the future and hope they will happen in the APA.

Brian Y. Burkhart, Indigenous to North America, whom I have known and worked with for over twenty years, since he began graduate school, offers this committee a constant in producing scholarship that propels us to step outside habitual philosophical frameworks to envision an Indigenous American Indian ontological worldview. Ever on the cusp of understanding and integrating the thought of Indigenous and all philosophers with that of settler colonialist thought, Brian sits upon this committee to provide that cutting-edge knowledge, research, and method. My hope is that we will soon see Brian’s manuscript ("Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: The Geographical Locality of American Indian Thought") alongside that of Thomas Norton Smith and Chike Jeffers in the State University of New York (SUNY) Indigenous Philosophies series edited by myself and Agnes Curry. Until then, I hope Brian will continue to share his fresh ideas about Indigenous philosophy with this committee and the APA.

Andrea Sullivan-Clark, Indigenous to North America, is an astute poet, outstanding scholar, and recent philosophy Ph.D. specializing in philosophy of science (value theory) and social epistemology. She brings to our committee well-honed grant writing success! This year she received a $10K diversity grant from the APA to engage in what I believe to be one of the most inclusive summer programs the APA has ever supported financially. This success and, more importantly, Andrea’s understanding of the role and nature of “diversity in philosophy” supports the overarching goals of the APA to increase inclusion and diversity within our profession. Andrea’s strong insight and leadership synthesizes with those same skills in our committee members. My hope is that Andrea will remain in philosophy and continue to encourage her students to pursue philosophy of a diverse bent with the support of the APA.

James Maffie, an Indigenous, Latin American, and comparative philosopher, is well published and is the gifter of “Aztec Philosophy: A World in Motion” (see IEP “Aztec Philosophy”). He has successfully challenged some of the internalized settler colonial Platonic metaphysics of our most important Latin American philosopher, Leon Portillo. He is also one of the recent originators and editors (with Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach) of “Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies.” James joins our committee this year to bring perspicuous detail to our sometimes muddled thoughts about science and global Indigenous philosophy. Jim has been a quiet supporter of several members of this committee (publishing several of us) and of the committee itself for almost 20 years. It is exciting to have him work with us alongside environmental philosophers this coming year. His philosophical understanding of the seams of North, Central, and South America in the context of settler colonial philosophy will serve this committee well.

Robert M. Figueroa, Indigenous to Central America, whom I have come to know only recently, promises to continue to contribute to this committee his expertise in environmental philosophy and justice studies (e.g., “Indigenous Populations and Cultural Justice,” Oxford Handbook of Climate Change). Hopefully Robert will take the lead within the APA, along with Brian, Lori, Andrea, James, Andrew, and others, to bring an Indigenous philosophical perspective of environmental justice as it affects Indigenous people and cultures, especially in the Americas, to the APA. I hope our members can look forward to hearing about new paradigmatic shifts toward understanding our environmental value issues in the next few years, articulating differences of Indigenous philosophy from Western thought, and seeing some cognitive changes in core areas of philosophy, most especially metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and science, will help guide these efforts.
Scott L. Pratt, an Indigenous philosopher since his graduate school, supports this committee as a senior scholar as he has since its inception. Scott has been pivotal in his commitment to caretaking some of the Indigenous conceptual glue that has brought “Canadian” and “American” Indigenous philosophy to the APA. His lengthy history with this committee, and his experience as a dean, has enabled him to mentor and assist in our committee development over the years. I know he will continue to support this committee.

Andrew F. Smith has only recently joined this committee, though his interests are in environmental ethics and political philosophy. Andrew brings new energy and commitment to our committee. Andrew assisted in developing programming this year, and I hope he will be active next year assisting in programming and bringing together the thought of our diverse Indigenous environmentalists on the committee. We thank Andrew for his interest and commitment to Native American and Indigenous philosophy!

Lori J. Underwood, Indigenous to North America, is the new chair of this committee. Her fields include Kant, philosophy of law, and political philosophy, and she has interest in Kant’s cosmopolitanism and global terrorism. She is editor of Peter Lang’s Terrorism Studies series. New to this committee as both dean and philosophy faculty, Lori brings honed administrative skills to our committee. Her interest in environmental Native justice complements committee members’ interests and will serve her well over the next three years working with such a diverse group of Indigenous philosophers who are, each in their own unique manner, outstanding scholars. Lori tells me she is honored and excited to work with our committee members and looks forward to celebrating and increasing our diversity while directing our attention to environmental philosophy and Indigenous populations. We are honored to have her guide and facilitate the work of this committee.

**IN CLOSING**
The best way I know of to close this report is to say thank you on behalf of the Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers, thank you to members of this committee, to members of the APA who continue to support this committee over the years, to the board for letting it happen, and to Amy, Erin, and Linda, who also help us make things happen!

---

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the spring 2018 newsletter.

We welcome work that foregrounds the philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding Native American philosophers and philosophers of all global Indigenous nations. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. Editors do not limit philosophical methods, modes, or literatures, as long as the work engages in substantive and sustained re-centering of the philosophical conversation to focus on Native American and Indigenous concerns. Nor do we limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats, including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats. In all cases, however, any references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and include endnotes rather than in-text citations except for extensive reference to a single source.

For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website. The submission deadline for the spring 2018 newsletter is January 15, 2018. Please submit copies electronically to Agnes Curry at acurry@usj.edu.

---

**POEM**

*Prayer for First Day Teaching American Indian Lit*

John Powell

**HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY**

May these things we say here not be words.
May they have a trajectory and a weight.
May we tilt our heads back,
May we let our feet come out our mouths,
Let our bellies and bowels come out our mouths,
Let our tear ducts and our scratches,
Our stab and exit wounds come out our mouths.
Let our living ancestors and our children
Fly around us, strike us with blows
And kiss us and caress us.
Let this work of ours not be stuck on pages,
Let this work not be caught in a room,
Let it not move from within these walls
To within other walls.
Let every thing we say be our viscera
And our blood,
And let our stories be our lives
And let our lives be prayers.
ARTICLES

When Listening Isn’t Enough: Settler Denial and Epistemic Injustice

Anna Cook
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

“I want to acknowledge these stories as gifts . . .”

– Therese Boullard, director of the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission

The Indian Residential Schools system has been referred to as “Canada’s greatest national shame.” Beginning in the 1880s, the Canadian government sought to assimilate Indigenous children by requiring, under the Indian Act of 1876, their attendance at church-run schools. The result was that 132 federally supported schools were set up in almost every province and territory, and functioned for well over a century. Most schools were operated as joint ventures with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, or United Churches. Over 150,000 children were separated from their families and communities to be sent far away to schools where they were forbidden to speak their languages, practice their spirituality, or express their cultures.

On June 11, 2008, the (now former) Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, made a Statement of Apology on behalf of the Canadian government for the Indian Residential Schools system: “The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage, and language.” The Canadian government’s 2008 Statement of Apology for the residential school policy came in the shadow of the dissolution of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in 2005 that unsuccessfully settled thousands of residential school survivor lawsuits. The Settlement Agreement came into effect September 19, 2007, and provided approximately five billion dollars in compensation, commemoration, and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC). The TRC has had the stated purpose of promoting public awareness about the residential school system, and educating Canadians about the 150-year history of residential schools, rather than bringing about legal reparations. As part of the truth-telling and reconciliation process, there have been seven national events across Canada (Winnipeg in 2010, Inuvik in 2011, Halifax in 2011, Saskatoon in 2012, Montreal and Vancouver in 2013, and Edmonton in 2014) that aim to engage and educate the Canadian public about the history of the residential school system through personal testimony from survivors. This truth-telling and reconciliation process was finalized in the final report, “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future,” which was published in December 2015.

Truth commissions have most often been established in countries making the transition to more democratic politics such as in South Africa, Chile, El Salvador, and Argentina, for example. For this reason, the establishment of a truth commission in a stable Western democracy such as Canada was an unusual occurrence. While truth commissions differ, they share the basic commitment to investigate and publicly disseminate information about past human rights abuses and to provide a public platform for victims to tell their stories. One of the goals of truth commissions is to give voice to the survivors of human rights violations. For this reason, Teresa Godwin Phelps emphasizes the potential of storytelling as a nonviolent means of achieving retribution that avoids cycles of revenge. She argues that victims of human rights abuses lose language, such that truth commissions can provide the opportunity for victims to reconstruct their “shattered voices” and regain their dignity and self-respect. While truth commissions provide a public platform to share survivors’ experiences, the reconciliatory potential of the TRC rests, however, on whether the personal testimonies of residential school survivors can be heard. This concern is further articulated by Paulette Regan, the Research Director of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who sees the Apology and the creation of the TRC as uncovering an uncomfortable “historical amnesia” of the residential school system by a non-Native audience. She contends that this amnesia reveals the “continuing complicity in denying, erasing, and forgetting this part of our own history as colonizers while pathologizing the colonized.” For this reason, she exposes the pressing need to decolonize the way non-Natives hear the voices of residential school survivors in such a way that can effectively disturb the fiction of Canada as a peacekeeping country that respects human rights.

The TRC demands survivors of the residential school system to share their personal narratives under the assumption that the sharing of narratives will inform the Canadian public of the residential school legacy and will motivate a transformation of settler identity. The TRC assumes that the testimonies will be heard in a politically meaningful way. I am critical of this assumption, and in response, I examine the relationship between truth-telling and reconciliation in light of structural settler denial. I contend that the characterization of settler denial as an epistemology of ignorance gives us the tools and language to better articulate how the denial of past and ongoing settler colonialism is sustained.

By settler denial, I mean both the explicit and implicit denial of past and ongoing settler colonialism. Settler denial can be explicit—in the denial of ongoing settler colonialism in the 2008 Statement of Apology, which positions the ills of colonialism strictly in the past and thus denies the realities of an ongoing settler colonial present, or in the denial of past settler colonialism in Stephen Harper’s 2009 G20 address in which he proudly claimed that “Canada has no history of colonialism.” Settler denial is often more pernicious and subtle, however, in forming the settler everyday—for example, in Canadian history education curricula that frames the founding peoples of Canada as French and English settlers, or in recent discourse about non-European immigration as people who are “not from here.”
DENIAL AND IGNORANCE

One outcome of the turn to testimony in social epistemology has been to seriously consider ignorance, that is, the failure of knowledge-production and knowledge-circulation, as an epistemic practice. An epistemology of ignorance aims to identify different forms of ignorance and examine how ignorance is produced and sustained, and to investigate the role it plays in knowledge practices. In short, an epistemology of ignorance asks which epistemic practices make it such that “S does not know p.” In this way, ignorance is not taken to be a neglectful epistemic practice or simply a result of failed inquiry, but is rather considered as a “substantive epistemic practice.”10 Moreover, investigations of racial ignorance examine how a lack of knowledge is actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation. The central claim of an epistemology of ignorance is that an account of knowledge is incomplete without an account of ignorance, and an account of ignorance is incomplete without an account of who benefits and who is disadvantaged by such ignorance.

Analyses of ignorance with an emphasis on race were first articulated in Marilyn Frye’s 1983 The Politics of Reality and in Charles Mills’s 1997 The Racial Contract. Frye defines ignorance not as a simple absence, but as an active force. In particular, she names the non-accidental ignorance of white feminists who think of themselves as anti-racist while remaining largely oblivious to the worlds of women of color. Additionally, she cites “the determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrich-like ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most white Americans have of Black language—ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences.”11 Ignorance is here described as more than an effect of the knower’s general situatedness, but rather defined in terms of structures of power.12

The formulation of an epistemology of ignorance within white supremacy is famously expressed in Mills’s articulation of the “racial contract,” which prescribes for “its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”13 An epistemology of ignorance (or an inverted epistemology) is a requirement for the racial division of the human race into “full persons and subpersons.”14 Ignorance is here defined as more than just the individual prejudicial blind spots according to one’s group identity, but it is structural such that dominant groups not only have less interest in criticizing the status quo, but they “have a positive interest in seeing the world wrongly.”15 There are concrete benefits to this sustained ignorance. Mills illustrates this by looking at the notion of “color blindness.”16 Color blindness fosters a worldview in which racial violence can be easily overlooked (for example, consider the “All Lives Matter” slogan in response to Black Lives Matter). Rather than promoting racial equality, color blindness, in the wake of historical inequality and white normativity, actively separates present perception from past wrongs, thus ignoring the ways in which a history of domination shapes the present.

Mills further elaborates on the “inverted epistemology” of the racial contract by describing white ignorance as it is connected to white supremacy. White ignorance supports the social cognition that distorts reality shaped by white supremacy. For example, the lens shaped by white supremacy causes people suffering from white ignorance to “mis-see whites as civilized superiors and nonwhites as inferior savages.”17 White ignorance has the result of cultivating a collective amnesia about the past that undermines the testimony and credibility of nonwhite people.

SETTLER IGNORANCE

Mills’s articulation of white ignorance can be expanded, I argue, to a consideration of settler ignorance. Over and above an account of white ignorance, such an account will have to consider the underlying logics of settler colonialism. For this, I turn to both Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini. Wolfe argues that settler colonies operate under a “logic of elimination” whereby settlers attempt to “‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity.”18 Ignorance aims to identify different forms of ignorance and examine how ignorance is produced and sustained, and to investigate the role it plays in knowledge practices. In settler colonialism involves, to borrow Miranda Fricker’s term, epistemic injustice.24

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that the settler desire for land (“land/water/air/subterranean earth”) has the effect of both making Indigenous land into the “new home and source of capital” for the settler, but also of disrupting Indigenous relationships to land, which represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence.22 Following Wolfe, they affirm that this violence is not a particular event but a structure that is reasserted each day of occupation. Land is remade and reconceptualized as property, and, as such, epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land other than as a property are “interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward.”23 In other words, settler colonialism requires the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledges to function. To be colonized is to be discredited as a knower. Settler colonialism involves, to borrow Miranda Fricker’s term, epistemic injustice.24

In considering how these logics map out in terms of the Canadian TRC, I turn to an analysis of how the logic of imperialism manifests in present-day Canada. In
light of the failure of classical imperialism to control Indigenous populations, Canadian imperialism becomes what Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Cornessel refer to as “shapeshifting colonialism,” which is more reactive and adaptive in its enforcement of “an ideology of control than creating specific structures.”

Adam Barker affirms that contemporary Canadian colonialism need not necessarily involve “the establishment of physical colonies, forced military suppression of peoples, [or] slave labor” but rather requires the creation of the narratives of the benevolent settler and the chaotic Indigenous people who “act as both a cover and a motivator for actions of control.” The narrative of the benevolent settler informs a denial of ongoing settler colonialism (we’re so benevolent!), and the narrative of chaotic Indigenous peoples justifies a denial of past settler colonialism (they needed to be tamed).

These settler narratives underlying settler ignorance complicate the TRC’s underlying epistemic claim that a collection of facts and testimonies can and will reconcile relationships between Native and non-Native Canadians. The epistemic presumption of the TRC is that there is simply the lack of information, that we just need more information about the evils of the residential school system, that the government and the general public are just unaware of the violence perpetrated against Native peoples in Canada. This epistemic story fails to consider the role of systemic settler denial in preventing personal testimonies from being heard by a settler audience in an unsettling way, that is, in a way that transforms self-conception of settler identity. There are mechanisms of ignorance that complicate the assumption that non-Native Canadians simply need to hear testimonies of residential school survivors in order to challenge their historical amnesia. Moreover, this preliminary consideration of settler ignorance reveals that the problem of settler denial is not accidental, but is integral to the settler colonial project. The denial of past and ongoing settler colonialism is not explainable in terms of a lack of access to resources for knowledge and information. It is, or appears to be, a willful ignorance. Over and above a lack of information, settler denial involves complicity in erasing and forgetting the inconvenient truths of past and ongoing settler colonialism.

Crucially, sustained settler denial in the face of the testimonies of residential school survivors relies upon an epistemology that delegitimizes Indigenous peoples as knowers outside of an account of Indigenous resurgence and recognition of Indigenous epistemologies. Residential school survivors cannot be properly heard as knowers outside of an account of Indigenous resurgence and self-determination. Unlike the limited TRC, meaningful reconciliation must support Indigenous self-determination. This criticism of the TRC’s limitations is further articulated by Taiaiake Alfred who contests that “without massive restitution, including land, financial transfers and other forms of assistance to compensate for past harms and continuing injustices committed against our peoples, reconciliation would permanently enshrine colonial injustices and is itself a further injustice.” Without restitution and support of self-determination, apologies and truth commissions engage in a “politics of distraction” whereby “they shift the discourse away from restitution of indigenous homelands and resources and ground it instead in a political/legal rights-based process that plays into the affirmative repair policies of states and ultimately rewards colonial injustices.”

Genuine reconciliation must promote an awareness of indigenous histories, ongoing relationship to their homelands, and recognition of indigenous epistemologies. Moreover, reconciliation requires an investigation and transformation of who counts as a knower under settler colonialism. Without this transformation, the testimonies of residential school survivors will fall on deaf ears—that is, on settler ears.

NOTES

2. The last federally run facility, the Gordon Residential School in Saskatchewan closed in 1997.
5. The monetary repayment ($10,000 for the first school year the survivor attended, and an additional $3,000 for each subsequent school year) has been met with mixed reaction. The repayment process has been criticized by some students whose compensation claims were denied, while others report that the payment was important to them as tangible recognition of the systemic harms they suffered at the schools.
9. The final report notes the amorphous definition of reconciliation throughout the truth-telling events, yet officially defines reconciliation as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.”
12. Mills’s structural account extends both Lorraine Code’s claim about the general situatedness of knowers, and Sandra Harding’s
claim about the blind spots that arise from the situatedness of a knower's group identity.


17. Sullivan and Tuana, Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 3.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


REFERENCES


Tips for Teaching Native American Philosophy

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

DEPAUW UNIVERSITY

Today, many institutions of higher education seek to increase diversity on their campuses. This can be accomplished in various ways. For example, some institutions may attempt to hire faculty from diverse social groups while others might seek out candidates who conduct diverse research. One difficulty, especially as regards Native American philosophy, is that there may not be enough scholars to meet the demand, and unless their presence in academia increases, students will not receive the benefit of these courses.

I have written this article with the intent of encouraging our academic allies to test the waters, to teach an article, topic, or concept connected with Native American philosophy. In this paper, I offer some tips for introducing Native American philosophy and, below, I include some materials and topics that are accessible for incoming freshmen. While I do think an entire course devoted to Native American thought offers distinct benefits—it raises awareness among nonnative and native students alike—I encourage those who are hesitant to create such a course to begin by including some Native American philosophy in a relevant section of their syllabus.

During the 2017–2018 academic year, I had the fortune of working at DePauw University as a Consortium for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow. My appointment was split 50/50 between research and teaching. My courses included an introduction to philosophy, a seminar on feminism and science, a lower-level introduction to Native American philosophy, and a course on ethical issues affecting Native Americans today. Each of these courses included at least one reading from Native American or indigenous thought, if not more, as part of the assigned material. My experience as a mixed-race Native American teaching at a predominantly white institution and the interactions with my students while teaching the above courses inspired the following suggestions for teaching Native American philosophy.
NATIVE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS (WHO?)

Generally speaking, “Native American philosophers” refers to individuals who are native and work in either Native American philosophy, traditional philosophy, or both. Even so, there are also nonnatives whose research includes Native American philosophy, and they sometimes go by the same term. I call attention to the variety of scholars working in Native American philosophy because I wish to dispel a worry that might prevent a nonnative educator from taking on the task of teaching Native American or indigenous materials: the question of authenticity. Others have addressed this topic elsewhere, and although some of the concerns are legitimate, I will not engage the issue here. Drawing from my experience as a mixed-race Native American instructor, I merely want to emphasize that being native is neither necessary nor sufficient for teaching Native American philosophy.

In the classroom, I have found that most students, both native and nonnative, are not fully acquainted with the historical relations between tribes and the U.S. government. For example, my students had a vague notion of the Trail of Tears and the actions of President Andrew Jackson, but they knew very little about events in contemporary history such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). For example, after viewing A Good Day To Die, one student remarked that he had never heard about the occupation of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs by members of AIM. This particular revelation prompted a class discussion on what subjects are included in a typical American history course and what topics are often omitted. The movie itself is a great way to talk about activism and the events in Native American history that impact contemporary attitudes toward Native Americans.

During my stint as a postdoc, I had the (mis?)fortune to teach while the protests against the construction of the North Dakota Access Pipeline (NoDAPL) were taking place, so none of my students doubted that Native Americans currently existed. However, what my students failed to understand about the pipeline “protests” was that it was not merely a local event. It has its roots in the historical, and often antagonistic, relations existing between the Lakota people, the dominant community, and the state/federal government. A particularly good movie based on the history of South Dakota is Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. Although it is a dramatic piece, it presents the native perspective in a respectful manner and provides a historic framework for understanding the motivations of the Lakota people today. Viewing it along with a Good Day to Die is very helpful for understanding the sacredness of land and its significance for the people living there. For example, it provides context for why Wounded Knee was selected as the locale of a contemporary standoff between the U.S. government and AIM in the early 1970s.

Many students are uninformed when it comes to what modern Native Americans look like or how they live. To introduce modern examples of Native Americans, I showed a couple of videos that featured young, native, college students, who were talking about what it is like being Native American living in a contemporary world. One is a short YouTube video titled “Who We Are,” and the other is a segment of a PBS series called In the Mix, titled “Native American Teens: Who We Are.” These videos were useful because each focuses on the lives of their peers from across the United States. A couple of documentaries, which may be useful, are Miss Navajo and Up Heartbreak Hill. Each of these chronicles the lives of teens from the Navajo Nation, revealing what it is like to live on a reservation, the challenges these young people face, and how to negotiate traditional-contemporary life.

In addition, I found it useful to create discussion questions about the stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood using the film Reel Injun. This documentary takes on the stereotypes/identities of Native Americans perpetuated by American filmmakers. It discusses some of the effects of images, like the noble savage and the plains warrior, even noting how some Native Americans have internalized these depictions.

Mixed-race native students, like their peers, may not know much beyond their own tribe’s history, and even that knowledge may come in degrees due to effects of governmental policies based on colonialism, such as the removal of tribes from their homelands and the forced assimilation into the dominant society. These particular shortcomings attest to the need to teach the diverse perspectives and histories of Native Americans. The information provided by the National Congress of American Indians is a good place to start, as is the history of the U.S. Federal Indian Policies provided by David E. Wilkins.

DRAW ON LOCAL HISTORY

Another strategy I recommend for those teaching Native American philosophy is to research the history of the area where your institution is located. This serves a couple of purposes: 1) it acknowledges the history between Native Americans and the federal government, and 2) it will give you an idea of what your students know about those relations.

In other disciplines, there is a practice that native scholars use before presenting their research: they preface their talks by acknowledging the people who originally occupied the land prior to European contact. This isn’t a common practice in philosophy, but it can be quite useful for motivating class discussion. In preparation for my classes, I decided to research the people who lived in what is now the state of Indiana. When I asked my students if they knew the names of the local tribes, very few of my students, even those who grew up in the state, knew that Indiana was home to several tribes and that these tribes were also affected by the federal policy of Indian Removal.

Having grown up in Oklahoma, the names of some of the Indiana tribes, such as the Potawatomie, Miami, and Kickapoo, were familiar to me. Until I researched the area, however, I did not know that they, like my own tribe, underwent forced removal to Indian Territory. I suggest asking your students if they know the names of the people who occupied the area prior to colonization; further, ask if they know the tribes’ current whereabouts. It could be that the tribes no longer have a physical presence in the area. In the case of the tribes of Indiana, some resisted removal and were able to remain in the state. It may prove...
useful to talk about how the separation of people affects group and personal identity. In addition, while researching I learned that the local tribes hold pow-wows and festivals that are open to the public. This may provide additional opportunities to learn outside of the classroom.

**IS IT NATIVE AMERICAN, AMERICAN INDIAN, OR INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY?**

While at DePauw University, I had several students and faculty ask me this question. As philosophers, we are very conscious about the terms we use, so it makes sense to consider how we should refer to the philosophical thought of the people living in North America prior to European contact. Although there are no hard and fast rules regarding how to refer to the discipline, I think discussing this difficulty with your students can also be a useful introduction to key concepts such as necessary-sufficient conditions, pan-Indianism, and decolonialism. In addition, it is useful to consider the reasons for and against the use of each term.

Many scholars prefer “American Indian” because it appears in the treaties and other government documents of the United States; the justification for its use is that it serves in an official capacity. Some scholars, however, object to its use because Columbus failed to reach the Indies. Thus, the people cannot be properly called “Indians.” The term “Native American” is often considered more politically correct and is often included as a racial category on the census. Although this term may appear more appropriate by some, it has its share of critics as well. For example, individuals born in the United States have claim to the same title. An additional worry regarding the use of “Native American” is its association with being primitive or uncivilized. Critics charge that the term reifies a static, colonial conception of American Indians. The use of “indigenous” differs from the previous terms. While it is true that Native Americans are indigenous people, not all individuals who are indigenous are Native Americans. Thus, the term “indigenous” has a broader scope than either “American Indian” or “Native American.”

Given the difficulties, what’s a philosopher to do? In my dealings with nonnatives, I often use “Native American.” It is generally identifiable by my target audience, nonnative students, and it avoids confusion with course offerings on Indian philosophy. That said, I am careful to point out the use of “American Indian” to my students, and I make sure to note its use in our course materials. Confusion about which term to use also invites discussion about Pan-Indianism, which is the act of applying a single term, like “Native American,” to refer to a large number of distinct groups of native people. I caution my students against the uncritical use of such a term, noting that it may lead to dangerous generalizations. For example, as a category in medical research, it may result in negative consequences against a whole group of people, such as when researchers claim that Native Americans are predisposed to alcoholism. However, it can be useful as well, such as when tribes unite for a social event, like a pow-wow, or when they come together to protest government policies, such as AIM or the NoDAPL protests.

To counter the tendency to think that all Native Americans are alike, I ask my students to look over materials from the National Congress of American Indians. I highlight the number of recognized tribes in the U.S. (over 650!) and the areas in which they live. I ask them how the people of these tribes might differ from each other and how they might be similar. Some possible answers to these questions are particularly telling: there are many ways in which they differ from one another (language, customs, traditions, stories), but there may be only a few in which they are similar (survivors of genocide, resisters to contemporary oppression). It is important to note too that when asked, a Native American may not claim to be Native American or American Indian. Instead, he or she may respond by claiming membership in a particular tribe. For example, I often respond as being a member of the Muskogee Nation of Oklahoma when asked.

In the literature, Native American philosophers are often careful to note the particular tribe from which they draw support for their claims. For example, Brian Burkhart notes that the story of the Three Sisters used in his paper on Native American epistemology comes from the Iroquois Confederacy, and Lee Hester discusses excellence as conceived by the Choctaw Nation. While there may be similarities among the thought of the people of different tribes, the differences should not go unnoticed. Towards achieving this goal, I selected three creation stories belonging to different tribes across the United States. I broke my class into groups, giving each group one story to read and present to the rest of the class. The creation stories of the Yuchi, Iroquois, and the Ute tribes not only demonstrate different beliefs, but these stories have elements of the three areas of Western philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology.

The creation stories I assigned provided a useful foundation for understanding Native American philosophy. For example, my students identified an emphasis on relationships (to people, animals, nature and its many objects), they also discovered that there exists some knowledge that should/should not be known, and through these discoveries, they recognized the moral obligations and notions of the right/wrong way to act. For example, by requiring my students to convey these stories orally, the traditional method of transferring knowledge, I was able to emphasize the moral obligations for members of the tribe to learn and participate in the traditions so that they may pass this knowledge on to future generations.

Some students made the connections between the metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, realizing that we might be unable to separate the questions into separate categories as easily as we do in Western philosophy. I challenged their discoveries by bringing up the fact that white anthropologists who conducted their research through the lens of colonialism recorded many of these creation stories as well as the tribal traditions, languages, and cultural practices. This point of critique invited other points of discourse about the need to collaborate with tribal elders and members as well as the need to establish respectful relations with people who were often treated as objects of study and not thought of as fully human.
A PITFALL TO AVOID

Native American identity, specifically who is and who is not native, is not clear. Like other racial groups, determining who is Native American is fraught with pitfalls, and recent stories in the media about questionable claims to heritage invite some to take on the role of identity police. It is wise to tread lightly concerning identity when encountering faculty and students who identify as having native ancestry. For example, many mixed-race Native American individuals may not display the physical features commonly associated with the racial stereotypes that have been reified within the dominant society. When dealing with faculty or students who identify as Native American, responses that challenge their claim are not welcome. These types of responses include, but are not limited to,

- replying that they do not look native,
- asking what degree of native blood they have, 13
- asking if they practice the culture or maintain ties to their community,
- and asking if they speak the language.

While such responses may be well-intentioned, they are often taken as a direct challenge to the individual’s assertion of having native ancestry. Federal policies—such as removal, assimilation, and the withdrawal of federal recognition—have created a variety of native identities, and it should be noted that even in native communities, the above criteria is often used to establish a hierarchy of indianness. In some extreme cases, the result has been disenrollment from a tribe. As an academic, I have personally experienced these responses, and my mixed-race native students have also confided having similar responses to their claims as well.

It is also best not to single students out as representatives for an entire racial group. Some students have expressed to me that they struggle with living in both dominant and traditional societies. I understand their struggle. For example, I had several people who made assumptions about my knowledge with the NoDAPL based on my identity. They assumed I would know who to contact and how to help. Neither my areas of research, feminist philosophy of science and social epistemology, nor my being a member of a tribe in Oklahoma made me an authority on the NoDAPL. In that particular case, my decision to protest the project was based on personal beliefs and not professional. Students should feel comfortable in the classroom, and challenging their identity or having them reveal personal experience may detract from learning. The point of incorporating diversity into the class is to introduce students to material beyond the traditional canon; even native students may not be familiar with native philosophy.

I hope that the faculty who would like to introduce Native American philosophy into their courses find these tips useful and that they do not discourage them from incorporating diversity into their syllabi. Below, I have included resources along with descriptions to engage students in the classroom. In future issues of this newsletter, the Committee for Native American and Indigenous Philosophers plans to introduce even more resources and materials. This article serves as a brief introduction to this endeavor, and I wish success for those who draw from them.

RESOURCES

On the Web:

National Congress of the American Indian, http://www.ncai.org

Movies:

A Good Day to Die
A documentary about the founding of the American Indian Movement and its connection to the historic place, Wounded Knee.

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee
Based on the book by Dee Brown, the subject matter includes treaties, Indian removal, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the massacre at Wounded Knee, and the government motivations for locating the Lakota people on reservations.

Skins
Based on the novel by Adrian C. Louis, the subject matter includes living on the Pine Ridge Reservation, alcoholism, and the relations between native and nonnative people.

The Cherokee Word for Water
The story of how Wilma Mankiller and Charlie Soap organized the Cherokee community in rural Oklahoma in order to complete the Bell Waterline Project, providing running water to native homes. Subject matter includes distinctions between full bloods and mixed-blood communities, the Cherokee concept of “gadugi” (the traditional notion of working together), and the bureaucracy constraining improvements in native communities.

Up Heartbreak Hill
Documentary by Erica Scharf that chronicles the lives of two high school students from the Navajo Nation. Topics covered in the film include reservation life, growing up, career/college options, and what it means to be both native and modern. Additional resources provided on the Public Broadcasting website, http://www.pbs.org/pov/upheartbreakhill/film-description/.

Apache 8
Documents the true story of the first all-women wildland firefighter crew from the White Mountain Apache Tribe. Topics of interest include feminism, tribal traditions, poverty, and pride.

Reel Injun
Miss Navajo
Documentary about women and the preservation of the Navajo culture presented through the life of twenty-one-year-old Crystal Frazier as she trains for the title. Topics include contrasting with Miss USA pageants, preservation (and loss) of tribal languages, living on a reservation, and Navajo values.

Videos:
"We Are Still Here," A Documentary on Today’s Young Native Americans by Director Emma Li. 2012, Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnPfKzZzScM.

"Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Dr. G. Cajete." An academic talk comparing/contrasting indigenous knowledge and Western science. His talk was given at the Banff Centre as part of the Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Contrasts and Similarities event, January 14, 2015. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFeNIOgIbwz.


Readings:
Government Relations

Cultural Appropriation


Epistemology

Feminism


Creation Stories
Iroquois Creation Story, http://coursesite.uhcl.edu/HSH/White/texts/Amerind/origins/Aminorsiroquios.htm
Ute Creation Story, https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/history/creation-story/
YuchiCreationStory,http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011679/00001

Native Excellence

Science

Racial Identity

Environment

Teaching Native Studies Courses

NOTES
1. This list is by no means complete, but it is offered as a starting point for future study. In future newsletters, the Committee for Native American and Indigenous Philosophers will provide more resources and topics; my remarks are only the first steps of the journey.
2. See http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/provost/cfd/index.dot for more information about this program.
3. Arguments can be made for who should be teaching Native American philosophy, but that is not the point of this article.
4. In fact the question of who should teach native studies and how it should be taught is a great topic to discuss in a philosophy course. I have added only some readings in the resources list.
5. I have heard that some students may believe that Native Americans were an historical group that is no longer present today. I did not encounter this.
6. One student confided to me that they were not taught the history or traditions of their tribe because their grandparents believed them to not be Indian enough to teach them. They took my class wanting to learn what they could about an important part of their self identity.
7. You may want to check out the following website to see if there are any events in your area: http://www.powwows.com.
In fact, a non-native makes this claim in a comedic piece on the use of redskin as a professional team name, created by the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iok2DRBnk24.

I have had students from Asia ask about my use of Indian Country and American Indian. For them, it can be a source of confusion.


Looking back, I realized that I should have selected even more.

Examples like Senator Warren, see https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/05/is-elizabeth-warren-native-american-or-what/257415/, or Professor Andrea Smith, see https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/05/is-elizabeth-warren-native-american-or-what/257415/, come to mind.

Referring to as the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood or CDIB, this card is issued by the U.S. Government and states the amount of Indian blood of the individual. There are too many problems associated with the CDIB and how the degree of Indian blood is determined to mention here. You may want to start by reading this: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED280661.

While many native scholars are happy to share their work, one should also note that, like other philosophers of color, some may be asked to do many tasks (native project, bring a speaker, etc.) simply because of their identity. I encourage those seeking to teach to go out and do some research, just as you would when developing a new course.

I also have (3) aspirations to teach at least two versions of this course. The first version is a course devoted strictly to the Mexica and the Maya. The second version will be devoted to contemporary North American Indian thought. The syllabus below (for a summer session) is an amalgamation of the two, as I am slowly working now to develop the second version. I should point out that the course description in the syllabus states that the course “explores Native American philosophy with particular emphasis on Mexico or the continental U.S.” The disjunctive nature of this statement and its emphasis is intentional so that the description makes clear that the course is not intended to represent nations across the entire western hemisphere. Instead, the description is intended to narrow the scope of the course but be flexible enough to encompass the future versions I have in mind as well as versions I undertake far into the future. So the strategy that I employed is to begin teaching the course emphasizing the indigenous traditions with which I am most familiar, and then as I expand my competence in other traditions, I would slowly add content modules to the course until I ultimately ended up with enough material for a new version.

As I was initially constructing this course (in the spring and summer of 2011), I wrestled with this for some time before I finally decided how to proceed. There is a good deal more to say about this, but overall, the decision was grounded in four considerations: (1) I am the only one in the department who teaches in this area, and (2) there is room in my teaching schedule for only one course like this.

Syllabus for Philosophy 336 Metaphysics: Native American Philosophy

Alejandro Santana
UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

It is truly an honor to have my course syllabus included in this edition of the newsletter. This syllabus is somewhat unusual, so for the sake of making its content and structure clear, some preliminary remarks are in order. To begin with, a brief remark about myself. I am a Mexican-American philosopher and a first-generation son of Mexican immigrants. I do not claim any kind of status as an indigenous person, but my Mexican ancestry inspires me to explore this area of my cultural heritage. The course I teach is not perfect, nor do I teach it perfectly. I teach it in an attempt to genuinely understand myself and engage in my own self-decolonization. I submit this syllabus with profound humility, respect, and gratitude for those who have struggled to study and teach in this area for longer than I have.

Next, a remark about my audience. I teach at a private liberal arts institution with a predominantly white, upper-middle class to wealthy student body. However, there is a sizable Latinx minority, consisting largely of Mexican and Central Americans. There is a very small minority of American Indian students; to my knowledge, I have had the privilege of teaching only one. This course is for everyone, but it has a particular interest in helping Latinx and native students either begin or continue their own process of self-discovery and self-decolonization. This is also a junior-level metaphysics course, which is one of a distribution of college core courses that every student with a major in the arts and sciences is required to take. The course is therefore pitched to a general audience, usually nonmajors, who have little to no background in metaphysics and perhaps even less in the history and traditions of indigenous peoples.

A few remarks about the course name and description. As I was initially constructing this course (in the spring and summer of 2011), I wrestled with this for some time before I finally decided how to proceed. There is a good deal more to say about this, but overall, the decision was grounded in four considerations: (1) I am the only one in the department who teaches in this area, and (2) there is room in my teaching schedule for only one course like this.

I also have (3) aspirations to teach at least two versions of this course. The first version is a course devoted strictly to the Mexica and the Maya. The second version will be devoted to contemporary North American Indian thought. The syllabus below (for a summer session) is an amalgamation of the two, as I am slowly working now to develop the second version. I should point out that the course description in the syllabus states that the course “explores Native American philosophy with particular emphasis on Mexico or the continental U.S.” The disjunctive nature of this statement and its emphasis is intentional so that the description makes clear that the course is not intended to represent nations across the entire western hemisphere. Instead, the description is intended to narrow the scope of the course but be flexible enough to encompass the future versions I have in mind as well as versions I undertake far into the future. So the strategy that I employed is to begin teaching the course emphasizing the indigenous traditions with which I am most familiar, and then as I expand my competence in other traditions, I would slowly add content modules to the course until I ultimately ended up with enough material for a new version.

There were also (4) institutional dynamics in play as I was framing the course. To be clear, my department has been totally supportive of me and this course. My university has also been very supportive. There was, however, one member of the upper administration who, at the time I was getting this course approved, had idiosyncratic views on what metaphysics is and should be. Consequently, care had to be taken to make this course recognizable as a “genuine” metaphysics course, which would thereby forestall any potential criticism about the course content. As a result, Western philosophical sources had to be included, but I added sources that would serve to either complement or serve as useful contrasts to the indigenous outlooks we were considering. This, however, put further constraints on what could be covered in the course, which already had to satisfy the learning objectives placed on all metaphysics courses offered at my university. Ultimately, the course name and description seemed to be the best fit for the future plans I have for the course and the institutional context within which it was constructed. This institutional dynamic has changed over the years, as the aforementioned administrator has left the university and the upper administration has more broadly come
I intended to be an exercise in objectification. Rather, it is intended to be a dynamic, multi-modal, and immersive learning experience for students who usually know little to nothing about the history and culture of the people whose philosophical perspectives they will be studying. My course notes are intended to help bootstrap students in this historical and cultural context before we begin the process of understanding the details of the overall philosophical outlook. This also helps prevent the students' tendency to either barbarize, primitivize, romanticize, or anachronize indigenous peoples.

Because this is a philosophy class, there is no time to read all of these books on which I have taken notes, so I blend them in course notes, along with the multiple visual aids mentioned above, to provide the necessary context for the philosophical exploration that happens later. I then supplement all of this by requiring students to watch documentaries (almost all of which are available on YouTube) that help fill in gaps and raise awareness about issues that confront Native Americans to this day. The documentaries currently emphasize either more historical context or U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. The latter is done primarily to help students understand the sheer scale and violence of U.S. imperialism, which usually comes as a surprise to a majority of them. It is a regrettable—but, unfortunately, not surprising—fact that many of my students are confronted with issues of Western imperialism, colonialism, and genocide for the first time in my course. No documentary is perfect, but again, I use the imperfection as a teaching tool, as we spend class time discussing inaccuracies, distortions, exaggerations, or filling in overlooked details. One might think that this historical and cultural context should be provided in a different class, but, unfortunately, there is no such class at my university. Several history courses offered at my university cover various facets of this context, but many of the students who take my course have not taken any of them, and they report that my course is not taken for which they signed up. On the very first day of lecture, I make three things clear to the students. First, I make it clear that indigenous traditions and philosophical outlooks are far too broad and diverse to be covered adequately in one course. I have therefore opted to focus the students on a few traditions, because they are the ones I know best and could cover well in their proper context. Second, I make it clear that there are many traditions about which I am as yet unfamiliar (those in South America, for example) and that is why they are not included. Third, I use the previous point to emphasize that we (the students and I) are all outsiders and that the guiding principle for the course would be to listen—listen to the voices of a people from a different time, place, and cultural context; listen with genuine sensitivity, openness, and a desire to understand, and listen without judgment; arrogance, condemnation, or romanticism. So, in effect, I use the course title and description as a learning tool to emphasize both my own limitations and the highly particularized nature of studying in this area, which has the derivative effect of disabusing students of their tendency to inappropriately universalize over indigenous peoples and their traditions.

Another important point of clarification has to do with the fact that the course schedule makes frequent reference to course notes that I have prepared for the students. The course notes are an amalgam of notes I have taken from several books. Fundamentally, they are notes from Michael Coe’s Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs, with notes included from Richard Townsend’s The Aztecs and David Carrasco’s Daily Life of the Aztecs. They also include some excerpts from Bernal Diaz del Castillo’s Conquest of New Spain and Bernardino de Sahagún’s General History of the Things of New Spain. When we discuss Miguel León-Portilla’s Aztec Thought and Culture, I also include several interpretive updates from Jim Maffie’s Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion. For the Maya, I use Robert Sharer’s work in Daily Life in Maya Civilization and some of his work in The Ancient Maya. I also use León-Portilla’s Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya as well as parts of Diego de Landa’s Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán. I use other texts; however, the abovementioned texts are used the most.

I put all of these notes together in Power Point lectures that include photos and videos I took while touring multiple museums and indigenous archeological sites in Mexico and Guatemala as well as photos gleaned from reliable online sources. I do this to help students become familiar with the places and peoples that are frequently referred to in class as well as to help students understand the amazing cultural legacy of the Mesoamerican indigenous peoples on which the course is focused. This is neither a tourist nor voyeuristic approach to teaching. Moreover, this is not intended to be an exercise in objectification. Rather, it is
PHILOSOPHY 336 METAPHYSICS: NATIVE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

INSTRUCTOR AND COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Alejandro Santana
Office, office phone, and email: BC 143, (503) 943-7248, santana@up.edu
Office hours: TR 1100–1230; and by appointment

Course section, reference #, time, days, and location:
A, 6219, 1240–1420, MTWR, Franz 217

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores Native American philosophy with particular emphasis on Mexico or the continental U.S. Topically, the course focuses on metaphysical aspects of Native American thought such as the nature of reality, time, space, truth, freedom, the self, and the relation between the self and the world. The course will also draw comparisons to the Western philosophical tradition on these issues.

This course satisfies the College metaphysics requirement. It is therefore intended to enable and encourage students to critically engage certain basic questions of human existence: Who am I? Who am I becoming? Why am I here? Who or what is God? How can one relate to God? Because the metaphysical problems explored in Native American philosophy bear directly on such questions as meaning or purpose of existence, and the existence or nature of a deity, Native American Philosophy is included among the courses meeting the College metaphysics requirement.

COURSE GOALS

The course aims to (1) familiarize students with important metaphysical perspectives and concepts in Native American philosophy; (2) develop students’ abilities to write and think clearly about some of the major metaphysical theories and debates in this area; (3) encourage students to integrate philosophical perspectives with other aspects of their lives; (4) broaden student understanding of the contributions of non-Western traditions to philosophical inquiry; (5) prepare students for more advanced study in this area.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course aims to enable the student to:

1. Comprehend the major perspectives, concepts, and discussions in Native American philosophy;
2. Understand how topics in Native American philosophy are related to problems in Western metaphysics;
3. Read Native American philosophy texts (in translation) in a competent manner;
4. Write technically competent essays that display a critical awareness of issues in metaphysics;
5. Express and discuss philosophical ideas;
6. Integrate readings and discussions with other aspects of the student’s intellectual and personal life;
7. To aid students in developing a multicultural perspective in philosophy.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (percentage of final grade):

1. Pop Quizzes (10 pts. ea.; at least 10 pts. possible; 20% of grade).
2. 2 Exams (30 pts. ea.; 60 pts. possible; 20% of grade).
3. 4 Homework Assignments (10 pts. ea.; 40 pts. possible; 20% of grade).
4. 1 Reflection Paper (50 pts. ea.; 50 pts. possible; 20% of grade).
5. Attendance (1 pt. for each ½ class attended; 22 pts. possible; 10% of grade).
6. Active class participation: consistent participation in class discussions and activities; asking questions; after-class visits; office hour visits; or email correspondence.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Miguel León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture.
2. Electronic Reading materials on the course Moodle page.
3. Course Notes on the course Moodle page.

OPTIONAL READING

(Library On-Shelf Course Reserves)


COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

M: Introduction, syllabus, quizzes, homework assignments, papers, and icebreaker.

• Discussion: What do you know about the Aztecs and Maya? What do you know about metaphysics? How relevant is metaphysics in your everyday life?

• Course Notes:

• Approach to Native American Thought.
T: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Course Notes:
  - Mesoamerican history and culture I (Archaic and Pre-classic).
  - Mesoamerican history and culture II (Classic and Post-classic).
  - Aztec history and culture I (The Rise and Fall of the Aztec Empire).

2. If your view of the world was like a screen of a video game (e.g., with background and indicators of ammunition, gas, maps, lives you have, etc.) what features of the world described in question 1 (above) would your video screen include?

T: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- AT&C:
  - Metaphysical and Theological Ideas of the Nahua.
  - The Approach to Man in Nahuatl Thought.

W: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Course Notes:
  - Aztec history and culture II (Empire, Social Organization, and Becoming an Aztec).
  - Aztec history and culture III (War and Human Sacrifice).
  - Discussion: What is your reaction to Aztec Human Sacrifice? Regarding war, violence, human sacrifice, or all three, what similarities (if any) do you notice with the world in which you live?

W: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Electronic Reading:
  - Maffie, “Aztec Philosophy.”
  - Discussion: Is there fundamentally one thing in this world or many? Is reality fundamentally fixed, changing, or both?

R: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Electronic Reading:
  - Benjamin, “Ideas of Time in the History of Philosophy.”
  - Discussion: How do you see yourself in time? If you were to draw your past, present, and future with three circles, what would it look like?

R: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Homework Assignment 2 Due

Week 3

M: Memorial Day Vacation: No class!

T: Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Electronic Reading:
  - Rescher, Process Metaphysics Ch. 2, “Basic Ideas”
  - Gingerich, “Heidegger and the Aztecs: The Poetics of Knowing in Pre-Hispanic Nahuatl Poetry.”
  - Discussion: What is it to be a thing? What explains the existence of a thing (Matter? Energy? Nothing)?
  - Discussion: What is truth? Is there a relationship between truth and aesthetic concepts like beauty, harmony, or artistic expression?
W: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading:
  - Aristotle, De Anima (Bk. II, Chs. 1 – 3) and Politics (Bk. I, Chs. 1 – 6).

- Discussion: Besides rationality, in what other ways does the metaphysical rubber hit the road in your experience of the world? More specifically, in what other ways do metaphysical concepts affect how people are seen and treated?

R: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading:
  - Lukes, “Some Problems about Rationality.”

- Discussion: What beliefs strike you to be irrational? Why? Is there a universal rationality?

Week 4

M: Exam 1 and Lecture and Discussion on the following:

- Course Notes:
  - Maya history and culture I (Timeline of Maya Civilization).

T: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Course Notes:
  - Maya history and culture II (Economy, Society, and Government).

  - Maya history and culture III (Daily Life of the Maya).

W: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Course Notes:
  - Maya history and culture IV (Cosmology and Religion).

  - Maya history and culture V (Cosmology and Religion).

- Discussion: Why is suffering and sacrifice spiritually enhancing or redemptive?

R: Lecture and Video:

- Course Notes:
  - Maya history and culture VI (Maya mathematics).

  - Maya history and culture VII (Maya Writing).

  - Video (Nova: Cracking the Maya Code). (Food Provided: Guacamole, Salsa de Nopales y Camarones, Pico de Gallo, sweetened popped amaranth, and Chia Fresca!)

- Homework Assignment 3 Due

Week 5

M: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Course Notes
  - The Maya Concern with Chronology.

- Video (Nova: The Fabric of the Cosmos – The Illusion of Time)

T: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.

  - Ohiyesa (Eastman), Selections from The Soul of the Indian.

W: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.

  - Deloria, Jr., “Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples.”

  - Deloria Jr., God is Red, Chs. 5 and 6.

R: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.

  - Burkhart, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us”

  - Burkhart, “The Physics of Spirit.”

- Reflection Paper Due

Week 6

M: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.


  - Waters, “Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being.”
T: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.
  - Cordova, “Approaches to Native American Philosophy.”
  - Cordova, “Ethics: The We and the I.”
  - Cordova, Excerpts from How It Is.

W: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Electronic Reading.
  - Norton-Smith, Dance of Person and Place, An Overview
  - Cajete, Native Science, Ch. 2

R: Lecture and Discussion of the following:

- Course catch-up.
- Discussion: What do you know about the Aztecs and Maya? What do you know about metaphysics? How relevant is metaphysics in your everyday life?

**Homework Assignment 4 Due**

**Exam 2**

**POP QUIZZES**

1. Format: True/false, multiple-choice, short-answer questions

2. Each quiz will be worth a total of 10 pts.

3. Questions will be drawn from the text and/or notes that are scheduled to be covered for that day.

   a. The text and/or notes should be read carefully, analyzed, and studied prior to the day they are scheduled to be covered!

4. In regards to the texts, focus on the following things:

   a. The main moves the author makes in the text.
   b. The main conclusions the author draws.
   c. The main lines of evidence, in detail, that the author uses to draw his/her main conclusions.

5. In regards to the notes, focus on the first three layers of indentation.

**Homework**

I. Due: See Course Schedule

II. Assignment

1. On any one of the videos below, write a minimum two-page summary and philosophical reflection as follows.
   a. Page 1: Summarize the main elements of the video.
   b. Page 2: Philosophical reflection, making at least two connections to the course material.

   1. This is NOT a movie review; it is a chance for you to demonstrate your deep philosophical reflection about the course material or a philosophical idea.

   2. Acceptable: “The video reminded me of León-Portilla’s Aztec Thought and Culture in the following ways…” or “The video reminded me of course reading x in the following ways…” “The video made me think more deeply about philosophical topic x in the following ways…”

   3. Unacceptable: “I thought the video was interesting entertaining…” or “I thought the video was boring…” or “I really liked the video, but the graphics were out of date …”

III. Videos (To be done in this order).

1. When Worlds Collide: The Untold Story of the Americas after Columbus

2. Engineering an Empire: The Aztecs

3. Engineering an Empire: The Maya

4. The Secret Genocide Funded by the USA and Bill Moyers, The Secret Government.

**Extra Credit**

I. Complete the minimum requirements for an extra Homework Assignment as outlined above for the following videos: (2 pts. ea.; extra credit awarded to pop quiz grade)

   1. The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico.

   2. Nova: Lost King of the Maya (on the Maya city of Copan, featuring Robert Sharer)


5. *Nova: Ghosts of Machu Picchu*

6. *A Place Called Chiapas* (on the Zapatista Movement in Chiapas, Mexico)

7. *National Geographic: America before Columbus* (on the interaction between biological, agricultural, and ecological factors that led to and influenced the European colonization of the Americas).

8. *The Empire Files: Native American Genocide with Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz.*

9. *We Shall Remain, any* of the five parts (available in the library).


**REFERENCES**


**Documentaries**


*American Experience: We Shall Remain*. Written by Dustinn Craig, Rick Burns, Sarah Colt, and Mark Zwonitzer. 2009.


*National Geographic: America before Columbus*. Written and Directed by Christina Trebbi and Fabian Wienke. 2009.


*Nova: Ghosts of Machu Picchu*. Produced by Own Palmquist and Ricardo Preve. 2014.

*Nova: Lost King of the Maya*. Produced by Gary Glassman. 2001.


*The Empire Files with Abby Martin: Native American Genocide with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz*. Created and Directed by Abby Martin.

*The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico*. Produced and Directed by Patricia Amlin. 1996.


The APA Committee on LGBTQ People in the Profession is pleased to publish the fall 2017 edition of this newsletter, featuring three related articles on the theme "Bathroom Bills, 'Religious Freedom' Legislation, and Anti-LGBTQ Violence." In the wake of the recent Supreme Court decisions in US v. Windsor (2013) and Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) affirming marriage equality, religious and social conservatives in collaboration with state legislators have renewed their ongoing efforts to deny LGBTQ citizens a variety of rights in the public sphere.

In particular, these efforts have focused on passing legislation in three areas: (1) prohibiting municipalities and counties from passing measures aimed at protecting LGBTQ persons from discrimination in housing, employment, and health care; (2) denying trans persons access to public services such as health care and the use of restrooms based on their chosen gender identity; and (3) protecting the "religious liberty" of individuals who wish to decline selling goods and services to LGBTQ individuals on the basis that it violates their closely held religious beliefs. Thus, the battle for equality under the law has shifted from marriage rights for members of the LGBTQ community to "bathroom wars," and the consequences of these shifting battle lines are especially harmful to marginalized members of the community such as trans individuals, persons of color, and the poor.

In the first essay, "Targeting Trans: The Marriage Equality Backlash," Loren Cannon of Humboldt State University argues that recent forms of proposed legislation to severely limit the social participation and well-being of transgender persons is primarily a backlash from the Obergefell ruling that legalized same-sex marriage across the nation. Cannon describes a number of ways that transphobia has intensified during the first two years of the Marriage Equality Era. First, the rate of trans violence has risen since the summer of 2015. Second, three different kinds of proposed legislation has either been considered or passed, which aims to erode the social participation and well-being of transgender individuals: (1) reducing or prohibiting healthcare access for transgender persons, (2) reducing one's ability to correct the gender designation on personal documentation, and (3) passing notorious "bathroom bills," which have demonized and disregarded the well-being of trans women, "invisibilized" and disregarded the existence and safety of trans men, gender-queer, and non-conforming individuals, and effectively ostracized trans participation in a number of different kinds of public spaces.

The second essay, "Resisting the Inadequate Resistance to House Bill 2 at a Private University in North Carolina," by Claire Lockard of Loyola University Chicago, recounts from a personal standpoint some of the theoretical and practical complexities confronting individuals and groups attempting to resist H.B. 2 in that state. While there are many critiques that queer and trans communities, activists, and scholars can make against such legislation and the broader violence against trans communities it perpetuates, Lockard offers an additional critique, not of H.B. 2’s blatant transphobia, but of the transphobia that institutional denouncements of H.B. 2 can quietly reproduce. Relying on her own experiences resisting these "failures" of nonperformative speech-acts at a private university in North Carolina, Lockard explores the problem of resisting H.B. 2 at an institution that has officially denounced it: What are campus activists to do when they feel called to resist an injustice, but also to resist an inadequate or problematic institutional response to that injustice? Using insights from the theoretical work of feminist philosophers such as Sarah Ahmed and Maria Lugones, she claims that inadequate institutional responses to H.B. 2 can be considered symptoms of broader problems with institutional speech-acts whereby diversity work is often reduced to the circulation of policies and other documents that do not do what they say. These nonperformative speech-acts can contribute to the creation of what Ahmed calls institutional walls: the blockages that emerge when institutions are resistant to change because they believe they have already done all the diversity work they can or should do.

The last essay, "Potty Humors: Melancholic and Choleric Presidents, Sclerotic Voters, and the Federal Courts on Title IX in School Bathrooms," is by Richard Nunan of the College of Charleston. Nunan provides a close and detailed analysis of the legal challenges, constitutional issues, and philosophical problems that converge in three related areas: (1) North Carolina’s “bathroom bills,” (2) the Obama Administration’s interpretation of Title IX’s mandate for non-sex-discriminatory policies in educational institutions and subsequent rulings by federal courts, and (3) Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s reversal of the Obama Administration’s Title IX interpretation. He argues that while these so-called “bathroom bills” and other transphobic legislative measures have become the latest battleground in the efforts of conservatives to regain ground they lost in the war for marriage equality, they ultimately hasten the evolution of acceptance of trans identity by drawing...
increased attention to their mean-spirited targeting of this historically marginalized group.

Finally, the Committee on LGBTQ People in the Profession is pleased to announce that a new editor will assume responsibilities for the APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy. Grayson Hunt of Western Kentucky University (Grayson.Hunt@wku.edu) will be taking over for the 2018–2020 term. In the past two years, this newsletter has published timely and relevant articles on diverse topics ranging from the historic civil rights ruling of Obergefell in 2015, to the ethics and politics of healthcare issues facing the LGBTQ community, to the tragedy of the Pulse Nightclub shooting and the violence that its members face on a daily basis. As the outgoing editor, I wish to thank the committee, contributors, readers, and especially Erin Shepherd in the APA National Office, for all of their dedication, research, and hard work drawing attention to these significant issues.

ARTICLES

Targeting Trans: The Marriage Equality Backlash

Loren Cannon
Humboldt State University, Loren.Cannon@Humboldt.edu

Like many people, I celebrated the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling that was announced just two years ago on June 26, 2015. The day brought a sense of optimism that now seems difficult to imagine. Many expected a political backlash, but as I and others awed at pictures of the White House lit up in the colors of the rainbow, it was unclear how that backlash was going to present itself. As I discuss herein, much of what I take to be backlash from the Obergefell ruling that legalized same-sex marriage across the nation has come in the form of proposed legislation to severely limit the social participation and well-being of transgender persons. The breadth and depth of the proposals give evidence that, while the ruling itself was mute regarding the humanity and civil rights of transgender persons, we are seen as part of the LGBTQ collective and thus an appropriate target for those who feel that their worldview and belief system is eroded by LGBTQ equality in general.1 I don’t deny that many trans persons have benefited from the marriage equality ruling. Of course, many trans persons are also gay, lesbian, bisexual, fluid, and may desire to engage in same-sex marriage and should be able to do so and incur all the benefits thereof.2 This is indisputable. However, in many other ways, the last two years have been extremely difficult for trans persons across the nation, and I fear that it would be naive to think that the storm of transphobia is completely over.

In this brief essay my focus will be to describe a number of ways transphobia has presented itself in the first two years of the Marriage Equality Era. First, by common measures used, the rate of trans violence seems to have risen since the summer of 2015. While it is difficult to specifically account for the increase, it can at least be concluded that the political goals of marriage equality and transgender acceptance and safety are distinct enough that the Obergefell ruling certainly did not reduce a steady drumbeat of murders of trans individuals, mostly trans women of color. Secondly, I present my thoughts on three different kinds of proposed legislation that has sought to erode the social participation and well-being of transgender individuals. This transphobic trio includes three different kinds of proposed statutes: (1) those reducing or prohibiting healthcare access for transgender persons, (2) those reducing one’s ability to correct the gender designation on personal documentation, and (3) the notorious bathroom bills whose debates have demonized and disregarded the well-being of trans women, “invisibilized” and disregarded the existence and safety of trans men as well as gender queer or non-conforming individual individuals, and have effectively ostracized trans participation in a number of different kinds of public spaces.

I. TRANS-DIRECTED VIOLENCE

At a marriage-equality celebration event in Manhattan, former Vice President Joe Biden spoke of the continued challenges facing LGBTQ equality: “There are 32 states where you can get married in the morning and get fired in the afternoon.” For many trans persons, the right to marriage equality has not affected the fact that one is more likely to be victim of employment discrimination, as well as tragic violence during one’s lifetime. In the two years since the historic ruling, there has been an increase in the number of reported murders of transgender and gender nonconforming persons. According to GLAAD, 2016 surpassed 2015 in the murders of transgender persons with a total of twenty-seven reported murders. Those at GLAAD reassert something that is now becoming well known: “The victims of this violence are overwhelmingly transgender women of color, who live at the dangerous intersections of transphobia, racism, sexism, and criminalization which often lead to high rates of poverty, unemployment, and homelessness.”3 There seems little reason to believe that this year (2017) will bring any relief regarding transdirected violence since at the time of this writing (mid-year) there have already been fifteen individuals who have lost their lives.4 (Heartbreakingly, I have had to revise this count numerous times since the inception of this essay.) There are two reasons that this kind of violence is somewhat predictable. First, it can be argued that those whose identities and worldviews have been threatened by the Obergefell ruling, and who are prone to violence, are likely to target the most economically and socially vulnerable of those affiliated with the loose collection of letters and identities that attempt to pick out those in our “community.” Numerous empirical studies verify that trans folks, particularly those with multiple marginalized identities, are both economically oppressed and socially devalued. Secondly, the events of the last two years have only made it obvious (if indeed there was any doubt) that the US continues to struggle with its legacy and contemporary practices of racism, sexism, and classism, along with transphobia, biphobia, and heterosexism. Given that the victims of such violence are overwhelmingly women of color, seriously addressing this problem requires addressing the racism, sexism, classism, and transphobia.
that combine to make so many so vulnerable. It requires recognizing that transphobia exists as a separate source of oppression and also that it combines with and magnifies the oppression of multiple other vectors. While single-issue proposals, like the right to marry, lend themselves to focused arguments, improving the well-being of those who are oppressed along multiple lines requires a different kind of approach. Barriers to flourishing include discrimination in housing, employment, health care, and in some areas police oversurveillance and profiling. While the Transgender Day of Remembrance serves an important role in bringing attention to this disgraceful level of violence, as does the practice of memorializing murdered individuals on social media sites, this mournful counting and naming is not sufficient to change the lives of those who are so often the focus of this violence and, unsurprisingly, neither is marriage equality.

II. ANTI-TRANS LEGISLATION AND THE TRANSPHOBIC TRIO

Since the Obergefell ruling there has been a tidal wave of anti-trans sentiment, discussion, and proposed legislation across the country. According to the National Transgender Advocacy Group at the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), over fifty such bills have been introduced in 2017 alone by state legislatures, and more are expected in the second half of the year. Looking at legislative proposals of 2016 makes it clear that this is the second year of anti-trans legislative frenzy. Taken together, the result of this proposed legislation is the severe reduction in opportunities for positive and respectful social participation. If the majority of these proposals were to find their way into state law, it would be nearly impossible to live as a trans person in certain locales. It is a legal onslaught seemingly meant to cleanse public spaces of all those who are neither cisgender nor gender conforming. NCTE has produced an analysis of the proposed legislation that involves the use of six different categories:

1) Limit health care coverage of trans individuals
2) Limit trans individuals from changing identity documents
3) Prohibit trans individuals from using facilities consistent with their chosen gender
4) Mandate certain policies in school bills (usually also involving restroom and locker room use)
5) Preempt the passage of bills that protect LGBTQ individuals from discrimination
6) Identify carve-outs that allow discrimination of trans folks as exceptions to already enacted laws.

Because the last two types of legislation are being used to target LGBTQ persons more generally, for the purpose of this short essay I will consider the ramifications of those proposed laws that directly target trans individuals (folding the proposals regarding schools in with bathroom bills, generally).

III. STATE-SANCTIONED HEALTHCARE DISCRIMINATION

The first category of proposed legislation includes those bills meant to decrease access to adequate healthcare. This kind of legislation may come in the form of prohibiting gender affirming surgeries in state prison (Arizona H.B. 2293), prohibiting such surgeries for those on Medicaid (Arizona H.B. 2294), allowing medical insurance to specifically exclude trans-related care (Minnesota H.F. 1183), and so-called “religious freedom” bills such as Arkansas H.B. 1628, which allow medical providers the option of refusing treatment to trans individuals due to their religious beliefs. It has been well established that access to gender-affirming medical interventions, including surgery and hormone replacement therapy (HRT), is medically necessary for many trans individuals. To deny this kind of medical care is in direct conflict with the recommendations of the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, and other health professional organizations. In fact, to deny medically necessary healthcare to trans individuals in this way is to send the message and instantiate a policy that the health and well-being of these persons is of no moral importance. Targeting those in prison, already facing trans-directed violence and discrimination, and the poor, who are often economically vulnerable due to discrimination, is clearly an effort to target the already severely marginalized. Lastly, so-called “religious freedom” bills encourage discrimination by medical providers, adding to the already serious problem of trans healthcare access. The data gained for nearly a decade has been consistent; nearly one in three trans persons already experience healthcare-related discrimination, often to the point of having the provider refuse treatment or having the trans person simply give up on receiving respectful and appropriate healthcare. If enacted, this “weaponization” of healthcare (in)access, in an attempt to bolster a transphobic and heterosexist ideology, will make this problem considerably worse. More substantially, providing government support for denying medically necessary healthcare to targeted groups is a form of state-sponsored violence. The potential consequences of being denied healthcare are well known, but for advocates of these policies, the harmful effects are simply seen as less important than attempting to maintain a worldview whose adherents have come to feel threatened by the Obergefell ruling.

IV. PROHIBITIONS ON IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

The second category of anti-trans legislation involves limiting trans individuals’ ability to change personal identification documentation, such as Indiana H.B. 1361 and Arkansas H.B. 1894. While this kind of legislation obviously disregards the identity claims of trans persons requesting such changes, it can also couple with so-called “bathroom laws” that restrict access to the gender identified on their birth certificates. It should be noted that while none of the above bills passed, there are still four states (Idaho, Kansas, Ohio, and Tennessee) that already prohibit birth certificate gender revision, and many other states still require a surgeon’s letter that attests that specific surgeries have been completed. With regard to the latter, this kind of rule
can, in some cases, require serious medical procedures that are neither medically necessary nor desired by the individual. Not all gender transitions require the same procedures. Additionally, even if the medical intervention is required for the individual’s well-being, it may be inaccessible for at least two reasons. First, these kinds of procedures are not always paid for by healthcare insurance or Medicaid, and these benefits are in danger of being decreased by the repeal of the Affordable Care Act or other specifically anti-trans legislation as discussed above. So those for whom the procedure is medically necessary may find the treatment inaccessible due to financial cost. In addition, a lack of access may result in rural or otherwise geographically remote areas due to a lack of skilled medical professionals. In cases such as these, correcting the birth certificate becomes practically impossible.

Correcting some documents, especially if it is a birth certificate, can lead to more easily changing other documents (e.g., driver’s license, social security card, voter registration, military identification, immigration paperwork, housing/employment forms) and can make a person less vulnerable to transphobic violence, harassment, or discrimination due to being unnecessarily outing based on uncorrected gender designations. Yet, in addition to these serious yet practical concerns, having correct documentation is terribly significant in its own right. The importance and meaning of documentation is not limited to that which identifies gender, but also that which is related to other aspects of one’s personhood. Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s essay “On Documents and Subjectivity: The Formation and Deformation of the Immigrant Identity” focuses on the meaning of immigration documentation and its relationship to S.B.1070, an anti-immigrant bill passed in Arizona in 2010. Sánchez gives a phenomenological account of identity documents, such as those allowing one to work and reside in the US, what they can mean to one who has had obtained them, and for those who wish to do so. As he explains, the meaning of the document far exceeds that of the material or physical existence of the document itself. Instead, documentation, whether it certifies a worker’s or immigrant’s legal status, or, I would add, the gender marker on one’s driver’s license or birth certificate, has a relation to identity, belongingness, and narrative. His focus was on Arizona S.B. 1027 (now somewhat revised), which required Arizona law enforcement officers to ask for documented papers of any individual they suspected of being in the country illegally. It also required that such documentation, for those who look undocumented according to common racist stereotypes, be on one’s person at all times. The effect of the bill was that those who looked like an undocumented worker—in this case, having brown skin, speaking Spanish, etc.—were likely to be approached and questioned by police whether or not they possessed official permission to reside and work within the US. Undocumented workers that appeared white were not targeted by the bill nor by the police. This is why the bill, in essence, required racial profiling. Those who did not fit the profile were targeted to such a degree that simply participating in society, by driving, walking shopping, recreating, etc., was likely to attract negative attention from police officers and result in detention or worse. As Sánchez explains, to attain permission to work in the US cannot be reduced simply to attaining a certain kind of document like a green card. Instead, it can signify the end of a long journey in which security for oneself and one’s family, dignity, and belongingness are the goals, and a sense of a kind of identity is part of the result.

Having a green card is socially, culturally, politically, and existentially significant. It is significant in the first three senses because, obviously, to be given one is to exist within the space of the law; it is significant in the last sense, because to be given one is to be given the security of living freely within one’s own existential possibilities.

Due to the fact that this bill required police to stop all those who might have brown skin or a certain accent or a certain “being-in-the-world,” the promise of documentation proved a lie; one’s narrative changed from one of a successful journey to one of always being Other; social participation, meaningful recognition, and even many aspects of agency itself become impossible.

Many of the ways that documentation is relevant to the life, narrative, and identity of an immigrant (whether cisgender or not) that Sánchez describes are also relevant to the experiences of many trans persons (immigrant or not). Attaining a driver’s license, immigration status paperwork, social security card, voter, military or employment ID, or birth certificate with one’s appropriate gender marker and name is a reason for celebration, often in ways that memorialize the day that the name-change court order was given, or the new identification card was first handed over. From my own perspective, being pleased with this kind of event is not so much because the issuing office is seen as an authority on one’s identity, but it is instead an outward sign of a certain kind of social recognition. It is, especially with the birth certificate, a setting the record straight so that one’s life, and the human artifacts that are used as a physical representation to seen and unseen characteristics of that life, tells a story that is consistent with one’s own experience. Indeed, the birth certificate records the first moment of physically being seen and recognized as oneself, of first experiencing this world as an individual human; it is the most significant and defining moment of one’s life.

V. BATHROOM BILLS

In the spring semester of 2016 I was teaching a course on trans theory. The class focuses on theory, but also includes a good bit of attention to reading and discussing a diversity of trans narratives as well as some attention to current events. From the late-night passage of H.B. 2 in North Carolina that required trans individuals to use certain public facilities that correspond to the gender designated on their birth certificate, to the outrage and boycotts that followed, to the cascade of states that threatened to pass similar legislation, it was difficult to keep a consideration of current events from consuming the course. In the rush for politicians to demonstrate their commitment to what are often mistakenly called “traditional values,” trans persons were caught in the crosshairs of a legislative lunacy that would spread to communities across the nation.
Notoriously, North Carolina’s H.B. 2, which was passed on March 23, 2016, restricted individuals in schools, including postsecondary education, and government facilities to use only those multi-occupancy restrooms that are consistent with the gender designated on their birth certificate. It also made it illegal for any local municipality in the State of North Carolina to pass nondiscrimination policies, which the City of Charlotte had done, on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. On my analysis, it was the Charlotte bill that served as the “Enough is Enough!” moment in which the heterosexist and cisgender assumptions of the presumed majoritarian culture were so severely threatened that lawmakers felt that drastic and immediate action was necessary to avoid the proverbial slippery slope into a state of queer-sponsored heretical immorality. While this bill and its revised version are both clearly unacceptable in all aspects, it is the restrictions on public bathroom use that made North Carolina the subject of massive national boycotts. Backlash against the bill was swift and significant. Some estimate that boycotts cost the state upwards of $400 million. Indeed, whether or not economic boycotts are the best way to respond to such legislation, it was the economic backlash that may have persuaded some other states (Georgia and Indiana) from following in the steps of North Carolina.

Anti-trans legislative proposals regarding the use of bathrooms and locker rooms did continue in 2017. In this year alone, dozens of separate bills were introduced in legislatures across the country seeking to make using the restroom a crime in public spaces and schools. Such states include Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. While the bills all target the same population of individuals, there are some differences. For example, some bills such as North Carolina’s stipulated that one may only use facilities (e.g., multi-use restrooms, locker rooms) that correspond with the gender identified on one’s birth certificate (South Dakota, New York), while others instead stipulated that it was one’s chromosomes and birth genitalia that is of relevance to legal bathroom use (Kansas, Kentucky). Of course, few such proposals ever seem to consider exactly how chromosomal tests are going to be administered, funded, and the test results policed for obvious reasons. Still other states attempted to prohibit policies that are supportive of trans individuals using facilities consistent with their identity (Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina), while others specifically allow businesses to restrict trans bathroom use (Washington) or attempt to make it easier for individuals to sue schools that do allow transgender individuals using a bathroom consistent with their identity (Virginia).

These sorts of bathroom bills represent an attempt at a kind of “social cleansing” of public spaces of trans individuals. Given the basic human activities of urination, defecation, and menstruation, coupled with needs to empty medical bags, wash one’s hands, give oneself an injection, breastfeed in places that do not allow it in public, check or revise one’s appearance for significant and trivial reasons, no one can reside in a location for more than a few hours without needing to use a restroom. In this way, bathroom bills make social participation in the sense of having certain kinds of employment, attending school (secondary or postsecondary), accessing various types of public areas, even the right to publicly protest at government buildings, exceedingly dangerous or unlawful. As many gender nonconforming individuals can attest to, and contrary to the arguments posed in favor of these regulations, it is not cisgender girls and women who are regularly put in danger when using multi-user restrooms, but those that do not conform to rigid and traditional binary gender expectations. Forcing trans individuals to use a restroom that is inconsistent with identity not only disrespects that identity and one’s epistemological competence with respect to this kind of self-knowledge, it also puts that individual at risk because they are outed for being trans and/or are seen as Other to those who would witness them in that bathroom. While arguments for such bills demonize trans women in a way that is reminiscent of Janice Raymond’s trans-hysteria of some forty years ago, trans men’s identities and experiences are ignored, as are the ramifications that we would now be required to use women’s facilities.

Due to the increased level of surveillance that such proposals support, gender nonconforming individuals are also at risk. One can become targeted for harassment, police detention, and fines simply by appearing as if one is transgender and/or is gender nonconforming, after which one’s guilt or innocence is largely determined by the shape of one’s genitals at birth. Such a blunt reduction of personhood to genital characteristics would, thanks to years of feminist activism and scholarship, seem both ludicrous and immoral if applied to either cisgender women or men.

Still, amidst this anti-trans frenzy, there is some good news. Of the numerous bathroom bills proposed, few have actually passed into law as of early July 2017. North Carolina’s replacement for H.B. 2 (H.B. 142) did pass, prohibiting local ordinances from mandating equal restroom access as well as a three-year moratorium on local ordinances of LGBTQ nondiscrimination policies. Additionally, Tennessee’s H.B. 1111, which broadly mandates that all terms used in the law be interpreted “by their natural and ordinary meanings,” became law in that state. The history of this bill (earlier proposed as H.B. 33, which failed) attempted to mandate that terms like “mother,” “father,” “husband,” and “wife” must be interpreted in legal contexts according to biological distinctions. The intent of this bill seems clearly to lay the foundation for discrimination against those in same-sex marriages and families, but it could also be used to interpret the terms “boy,” “girl,” “man,” and “woman” according to traditional cisgender meanings, thus encouraging restrictions of bathroom use. The fact that so few of these bills have passed is perhaps reason for measured optimism, but explanations for this are far from simple. Their failure may quite possibly be a response to the economic backlash that North Carolina received due to H.B. 2 or may involve recognition of the significant moral and practical harm inflicted by these bills. Additionally, there is also a solid argument that perhaps few of the lawmakers who are proponents of these bills are actually committed to the content of the bills themselves, but are instead committed to showing their constituencies that they support a heterosexist and transphobic worldview. Their
message to their conservative constituencies may be “Like you, I am outraged over the direction of the country and the legalization of same-sex marriage, and I am going to do something about it!” But conveying this message does not require actually passing a bill. Introducing such legislation and a few carefully produced commercials may be all that is needed to win votes. Nevertheless, as I compose this essay, politicians in Texas are debating their own bathroom bill and other state lawmakers may be doing the same. (It has just been reported that the Republican House speaker in Texas, Joe Straus, is considering not signing his state’s bill for the reason that it might lead to transgender suicide, While I applaud Mr. Straus for acknowledging the horrifically high rates of suicide among trans individuals, I would hope that he is also considering the many other reasons why this legislation is unjust. 13) Additionally, the new administration is not supporting President Barack Obama’s directive to schools that bathroom access be tied to Title IV requirements, so there is now little reason to pass state-wide restroom/locker room restrictions for school-aged persons, since schools are free to enforce their own policies with less fear of litigation or liability. To the extent that denying the value and authenticity of trans lives is seen as a litmus test to one’s degree of commitment to heterosexism and transphobia, I worry that the threat of discrimination in the use of such facilities is far from over.

I have attempted to offer an overview on the recent anti-trans backlash since the marriage equality ruling of 2015. The quantity and content of the bills proposed support the judgment that it is trans and gender nonconforming individuals who are an obvious target of those who feel threatened by same-sex marriage and recognition of the humanity and value of lesbian women and gay men. I have not commented on so-called “religious freedom” bills that target transgender individuals as well as lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and queer folks. These may be a significant threat to LGBTQ equality in many locations and will lead to more court cases and more contested decisions. My focus here has been on anti-trans legislation because the sheer quantity of the proposals and the potential to decrease the well-being of trans persons does warrant more attention. As trans individuals, in the minds of some, we represent the most egregious deviation from the cisgender heterosexist norm. We represent what the world is coming to, and thus society must be protected from our very existence and participation in society. It has been over three years since Time magazine’s article “Transgender Tipping Point,” which featured Laverne Cox on the cover, and while there has been a great deal more visibility of trans individuals (especially those that are otherwise gender normative and wealthy), the legislative history of the last two years makes it clear that such visibility has not translated into acceptance, or a life that is free from discrimination and violence, especially for those most marginalized. 14

NOTES

1. By the word “trans,” I mean to include all of those individuals who identify as such. There are no necessary requirements attached to this inclusion. There are also times in this essay I use the term “gender non-conforming” since some of the proposed policies also affect individuals who do not conform to social expectations of the gender binary, even though they do not perhaps identify as trans. As I am trans myself, I tend to use the plural “we” or “us” when discussing trans persons as a collective, but this should not be understood that I believe that all trans experience is the same or that I assume that only trans people will read this essay.

2. The ruling only affected same-sex relationships by extending the right to marriage to all citizens regardless of gender. The ruling said nothing regarding trans individuals that may be in heterosexual relationships, and/or identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pan/omnisexual, etc.

3. Alex Schmider, “2016 Was the Deadliest Year on Record for Transgender People,” November 9, 2016, https://www.glaad.org/blog/2016-was-deadliest-year-record-transgender-people


5. I should mention here, that in using the term “vulnerable,” I do not mean to suggest that trans persons or those of other marginalized identities are inherently physically or psychologically unfit, but that they are made vulnerable by the cultural conditions that relentlessly target individual and collective efforts to flourish.

6. See http://www.transequality.org/action-center

7. My evidence for this claim comes from one of the first studies regarding the transgender experience, titled “State of Transgender California, Results from the 2008 Transgender Economic Health Survey,” by the Transgender Law Center, https://transgenderlawcenter.org/pubs/state-of-transgender-california and more recent publication, “Report of the 2015 Transgender Survey” by the National Center for Transgender Equality, http://www.ustranssurvey.org/report

8. Again, the American Medical Association’s position on this issue is that genital or sex-reassignment surgery should not be required for a person to receive corrected documentation.


10. Ibid., 201.


Resisting the Inadequate Resistance to House Bill 2 at a Private University in North Carolina

Claire Lockard
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO, CLOCKARD@LUC.EDU

In March of 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the “Act to Provide for Single-Sex Multiple Occupancy Bathroom and Changing Facilities in Schools and Public Agencies and to Create Statewide Consistency in Regulation of Employment and Public Accommodations.” Better known as House Bill 2 (H.B. 2), the bill was passed in order to nullify a Charlotte ordinance that extended civil rights protections to members of the LGBTQ community. H.B. 2 required all people in North Carolina to use the
The bill was amended in July of 2016 to restore the right to sue for workplace discrimination, but the statute of limitations for filing a lawsuit was changed from three years to one year, and there remains no state law to protect LGBTQ people from workplace discrimination. On March 30, 2017, H.B. 142 repealed H.B. 2 with a few key stipulations: state-funded institutions still cannot regulate access to bathrooms at all unless they comply with General Assembly regulations, and cities cannot pass ordinances changing access to these facilities until December 1, 2020.

H.B. 2 was part of the ongoing proposal and passage of anti-trans legislation in the US, prompting many states to introduce similar bathroom bills. The ACLU reports that twenty-six such bills have been debated across the country since the beginning of 2017. There are many critiques that queer and trans communities, activists, and scholars have rightfully lodged against H.B. 2 and the broader violence against trans communities it perpetuates. Here I want to offer an additional critique, not of H.B. 2’s blatant transphobia, but of the transphobia that institutional denouncements of H.B. 2 can quietly reproduce. These inadequate institutional responses to H.B. 2 can be thought of as symptoms of broader problems with institutional speech-acts as described by Sara Ahmed: diversity work is often reduced to the circulation of equality policies and other documents that do not do what they say. These nonperformative documents can contribute to the creation of what Ahmed calls institutional walls: the blockages that emerge when institutions are resistant to change because they believe they have already done all the diversity work they can or should do.

I write from my position as a cisgender queer white woman who was an undergraduate student in North Carolina the year that H.B. 2 was signed into law. I use my experiences here to explore the problem of resisting H.B. 2 at an institution that has officially denounced it: What are campus activists to do when they feel called to resist an injustice, but also to resist an inadequate or problematic institutional response to that injustice? In other words, how can we resist H.B. 2 on our campuses while also resisting the kinds of institutional statements, actions, and practices that claim to resist H.B. 2 and support the queer and trans community, but that actually further marginalize that community and falsely paint the institution as a beacon of progressive hope?

Trans Studies theorists have been working to center the experiences of trans students, staff, and faculty in order to critique institutions of higher education and suggest ways that they can be more inclusive of trans communities. Erich Pitcher finds that even when working at outwardly trans-inclusive institutions, trans* faculty members report many microaggressions that accumulate over time and become what Pitcher calls “minoritized stress.” Pitcher points out that these microaggressions can be interpersonal (like when people misgender or mispronoun trans academics), but they can also be “systemic and environmental” forms of microaggression that emerge from inhabiting spaces that do not accommodate trans bodies, like sex-segregated bathrooms. Z Nicolazzetto et al. identify trans-inclusive spaces on campuses as key factors for trans* students’ ability to form kinship networks. Pitcher contends that while trans* students and faculty often find ways to navigate and resist their marginalization on campus, “universities have much work to do in creating environments wherein trans* people feel expected and welcome.”

To add to this conversation in Trans Studies about the ways that colleges and universities could better serve trans communities, and to address my own questions about how to resist an inadequate resistance to H.B. 2, I focus here on my own institution’s initial response to H.B. 2. I first describe this response, using Sara Ahmad’s work on nonperformative institutional speech-acts to argue that its denouncement of H.B. 2 shielded my university from critique by serving as evidence that they were doing all they could to fight transphobia. Next, I suggest that deploying Alison Bailey’s idea of “strategic ignorance” might illuminate some additional useful strategies for resisting inadequate institutional resistance to H.B. 2, but that people of different identities are called to deploy this ignorance in different ways (and sometimes, not at all). I want to emphasize before I proceed that my position as a cisgender person informed and limited my own interpretations of and reactions to the institutional denouncement of H.B. 2. While my analysis is necessarily limited by my own experience, I hope that it can still be helpful to queer and trans students, staff, and faculty members looking for a variety of strategies as they navigate transphobia, homophobia, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity on their campuses.

I. ELON UNIVERSITY’S NONPERFORMATIVE RESPONSE TO H.B. 2

In the spring of 2016 when H.B. 2 was passed, I was an undergraduate student at Elon University, a private, non-religiously-affiliated, mid-size university in suburban North Carolina. The university understands itself to have what it calls an “unprecedented commitment to diversity,” but such a commitment is often not experienced by students as an authentic or meaningful one. In fact, during my time there, minority students typically made jokes about this “unprecedented commitment” because of how much it clashed with our lived experience of the university. Elon was and is a very heteronormative and cisnormative campus. The university has, as far as I can tell from the limited available data, an extremely small number of queer students and an even smaller number of trans or genderqueer students who are out. The university has only recently begun collecting data on students’ sexualities and gender identities: 4 percent of the Class of 2019 identifies as part of the
LGBTQIA community (though the distribution of students with these identities is not specified in the available data).\(^\text{10}\) The numbers of LGBTQIA college students nationwide is unclear, so it is difficult to say how Elon compares to other institutions, or other institutions of its type. This number might also have been lower in previous years when I was a student there, but Elon was not collecting data at that time. In any case, the data alone gives an incomplete account of the campus climate for queer and trans students.

It is difficult to describe the feeling of being queer at Elon. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed describes being on vacation with her partner at an island resort. She is taken aback when she walks into the resort’s dining room and sees “couple after couple, taking the same form: one man sitting by one woman around a ‘round table,’ facing each other ‘over’ the table.”\(^\text{17}\) Struck by this repetition of straightness, Ahmed wonders, “How is it possible, with all that is possible, that the same form is repeated again and again? How does the openness of the future get closed down into so little in the present?”\(^\text{18}\) This, to me, is what it felt like to exist as a queer person on Elon’s campus: I was encountering the same form of heterosexuality over and over again, no matter which spaces I entered.

During my time as a student, I knew only a handful of other queer students, and I knew even fewer genderqueer and trans students. The queer and trans students who were on campus were, on the whole, fairly scattered from one another. The queer and trans peers and friends I did have often talked about how isolated we often felt from one another, and the ways we felt tokenized by the institution as symbols of how diverse the school was becoming. It is possible that the LGBTQIA community was larger than I ever realized, but that not many of us were out, or we did not feel safe or comfortable enough to form closer-knit communities.

Informing my experience of my own queerness at Elon, and the experiences of others in the queer and trans community, were echoes of what has become known as the Chick-Fil-A Controversy. During my first year on campus, a group of queer students on campus began advocating for the removal of Chick-Fil-A from campus because of the company’s donations to anti-LGBTQIA organizations.\(^\text{19}\) This campaign to remove Chick-Fil-A sparked massive backlash from conservative students. A member of the Student Government Association even initiated a “Chick-Fil-A Appreciation Day” as a way to intimidate the students pushing to remove it.\(^\text{20}\) After an entire academic year of campus debates, online harassment of students proposing the restaurant’s removal, and back-and-forth with SGA and Elon’s administration, it was decided that Chick-Fil-A would remain on campus, but that Elon would establish a Gender and LGBTQIA Center the following year in order to improve campus climate for queer and trans students.

My experience as a first-year student embroiled in this debate about Chick-Fil-A set the tone for my experiences as a queer student throughout my time at Elon: there were pockets of safe, welcoming spaces to be queer, but as a whole, the campus was at best, overwhelmingly heteronormative and at worst, hostile to LGBTQIA students.

As the university worked to recover from the damage done to the community by the Chick-Fil-A debates, various reforms proposed by students, faculty, and staff were met with sympathy or even enthusiasm, only to be denied or ignored later on.

Given Elon’s recent history of difficulty responding to the needs and requests of LGBTQIA students, many of us in the queer and trans community were saddened and angered, but not shocked, by the university’s response to H.B. 2. There were a number of institutional and community responses to the bill. Here I focus on the most publicly visible “action” the university took. A day or so after H.B. 2’s passage, Elon released a two-paragraph statement, explaining that the members of the university administration “wish to reaffirm that Elon remains committed to inclusion and equal protection for all people. Elon does not discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The new law does not apply to private institutions and will not impact Elon’s policies and practices.”\(^\text{21}\) Duke University, another private school in North Carolina, responded similarly, saying that “activities on its campus will not be impacted by a new state law that prevents local governments from opening bathrooms for people to use based on their gender identity” and reiterating Duke’s nondiscrimination policy.\(^\text{22}\) I cannot explore it in more detail here, but I want to note briefly that private universities were in a privileged position that allowed them to refuse compliance without risking the loss of funding, while public universities were unable to ignore H.B. 2 without risking this loss.\(^\text{23}\)

While it seems on the surface to say some of the right things, Elon’s statement angered many in the queer and trans community who felt that the institution was opportunistically using the passage of H.B. 2 to tout its commitment to the LGBTQIA community’s well-being, without doing meaningful work to make that community feel safe or supported in the wake of H.B. 2 (or more generally). Furthermore, the statement never used the words “queer” or “trans,” and the university retains many policies that suggest what this omission points to: a distinct lack of commitment to the inclusion and protection of actual queer and trans people.

Sara Ahmed’s account of non-performative institutional speech-acts can help us understand how statements like those from Elon function within higher education to preserve the status quo and deflect far more impactful trans-inclusive policies.\(^\text{24}\) In her book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Ahmed offers a critique of dominant diversity discourse in higher education. She argues that often, turning toward a discourse of diversity allows institutions to avoid taking adequate responsibility for systemic racialized and gendered oppression because the term “diversity” connotes a happy mixing of different groups rather than encouraging the transformation of dominant, unjust power structures. As part of this critique, Ahmed explores the ways that universities’ statements of commitment to diversity can be understood as appearing to bring about what they name. For instance, a university with a stated commitment to antiracism can be read as being antiracist simply because they put out a statement saying that they have this commitment.\(^\text{25}\) Ahmed explains
that “declaring a commitment to opposing racism could even function as a form of institutional pride: antiracism, as a speech act, might then accumulate value for the organization as a sign of its own commitment.” For Ahmed, the problem is that these statements of commitment can then be used to “block the recognition of racism within institutions.” We can easily imagine that when confronted with its own systematic racism, a university would issue a response that reads something like “we are not racist because we have made official, public statements claiming that we are not racists, we do not discriminate, and we are against racism.” Indeed, Elon has recently put out just such a statement after being sued by a former faculty member for racial discrimination. In their official response to this lawsuit, the university reiterated their nondiscrimination policy, effectively pointing to this equality statement as evidence that the allegations of racism could never be true. This is a strategy used widely by institutions when they are accused of racist practices.

Ahmed understands these institutional commitments to diversity as a type of nonperformative speech-act described by J. L. Austin. For an utterance to be performativ, it must do what it says, or bring something into effect. The speech must be uttered, as Ahmed explains, “by the right person, to the right people, in a way that takes the right form.” For example, an apology is not a performative speech-act unless it is uttered by the sorry person to the person they have wronged, and it must be uttered sincerely. Ahmed departs from the traditional Austinian notion of nonperformatives, explaining that “in my model of the non-performative, the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but it is actually what the speech act is doing.” For Ahmed, institutional commitments to diversity or antiracism are often taken up as performatives, as if they have brought about antiracism or diversity already. She explains that naming an institution as diverse or antiracist can actually be a way of keeping that institution nondiverse and racist because institutions can point to the statements as evidence for diversity and thus block future diversity efforts from making their way through the institutions. What these speech-acts are doing is failing to bring about the effects they name, which allows an institution to maintain the status quo. For Ahmed, nonperformatives are performing something: failure.

Ahmed’s focus is on institutional racism, and while I do not want to suggest that institutional racism and institutional homophobia or transphobia are perfectly analogous, I think Ahmed’s analysis of nonperformative institutional speech is helpful in understanding Elon’s response to H.B. 2. The first line of the statement reads, “In response [to the passage of H.B. 2], we wish to reaffirm that Elon remains committed to inclusion and equal protection for all people.” This reaffirmation of commitment seems innocuous enough at first, and perhaps even reassuring or comforting to marginalized communities. But Ahmed reminds us to pay attention to the negative effects that institutional statements of commitment often have. Ahmed explains that “statements of commitment (to diversity and equality) can be used in or even as an institutional response to racism, often taking the form of an assertion disguised as a question: ‘how can we be racist if we are committed to equality and diversity?’” Or in Elon’s case, the implicit question is: How can we be homophobic and/or transphobic if we are committed to equality and diversity?

These statements make it increasingly difficult to challenge a university or institution because they render less visible the institutional injustices present. If a university is publicly committed to equality and diversity, people mistakenly believe that the university is already a welcoming place for marginalized communities or that the university does not need to do anything else in order to become more welcoming. After putting out an equality statement, the university can cite these statements in order to shut down critiques of its practices, or even avoid being sued for discrimination. In some cases, equality policies only exist because they are legally mandated. These required policies are often in turn used as evidence of universities’ good diversity practices.

In Elon’s case, the post-H.B. 2 statement of commitment to equality was taken up as evidence of that commitment and equality, making it harder to recognize the very real instances of homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity that pervade the campus. And it was not only members of the university administration who took this statement as performative (and thus helped it fail to perform): when I expressed frustration at the inadequacy of Elon’s response to H.B. 2, many of my cisgender, straight peers would respond with “well, at least they said something!” One genderqueer person at Elon had a similar experience because they were frustrated when their peers insisted that the university’s response was well-formulated and swift, which was interpreted as a sign of improvement in Elon’s ability to navigate issues of LGBTQIA discrimination. The university’s declaration of support falsely became the performing of the support.

Another problem with Elon’s statement was that the nonperformative affirmation of diversity and nondiscrimination was followed by an emphasis on one resource the university does have for trans students: gender-neutral bathrooms. The statement reads, “In regard to the use of restrooms, we reaffirm our position that individuals should use facilities in which they feel most comfortable and align with their gender identity. To support the needs of our community, Elon maintains a list of more than 90 single-occupancy universal bathrooms on campus that protect the privacy of the users. A list can be found online.” Here, not only does Elon’s statement of commitment position the university as authentically committed to queer and trans inclusion, it also seems to use the passage of H.B. 2 as an opportunity to highlight the apparent progress Elon has made toward queer and trans inclusion. This progress, incidentally, is not quite what it appears. Of these ninety bathrooms, at least fifteen are located in residence halls where only students who live there have unrestricted access to them. A colleague pointed out to me that there are entire regions of campus, including the academic buildings where most classrooms are, where there are no gender-neutral restrooms at all. This blocks access for students during class time, and also for faculty and staff who spend most of their time on campus in these academic areas.
Furthermore, even if all ninety of these bathrooms were accessible to every person on campus, by highlighting the privacy of these single-occupancy bathrooms, the statement can send a coded message to transphobic members of the Elon community: don’t worry, the only gender-neutral restrooms we have are single-occupancy, so trans people will be kept separate from you! Terry Kogan argues that multi-use gendered restrooms were first established “in the spirit of manipulating public space to protect weak and vulnerable women.” This myth of weak and vulnerable women operates today in debates about bathroom accessibility for trans people. It is assumed that transwomen are “really” men trying to sneak into women’s bathrooms in order to assault or attack them. Of course, there are no reported cases of trans people attacking anyone in a bathroom, even though trans people are themselves at risk for being attacked in bathrooms.

Purposefully or not, by highlighting single-occupancy restrooms, Elon perpetuated the idea that for the safety of cisgender women, trans people must be restricted to single-occupancy bathrooms.

There is one final problem with Elon’s statement: the university claimed that “the new law does not apply to private institutions and will not impact Elon’s policies and practices.” Here, a strange distancing strategy seems to be at work. Elon claims that because it is a private institution that does not practice discrimination, the university will be insulated from H.B. 2’s effects. Faculty members criticized this way of responding to H.B. 2, putting out their own resolution that emphasized the ways that all Elon community members engage with the broader NC community. But it is almost as if the authors of the original university statement imagine Elon as separate (or separable) from the state in which it is located. Indeed, many students, faculty, and staff speak of the “Elon Bubble,” criticizing one another for failing to reach out to the Burlington, North Carolina, community and beyond. But with this H.B. 2 statement, the Elon Bubble is doing important work to create a perceived distance from an apparently inclusive and accepting university and a demonstrably discriminatory state government.

Elon’s response to H.B. 2 seemed to help the university gain credibility as a progressive school in a not-so-progressive state, but this did not ring true to the trans and queer community (to the extent that we had a community during my last year at Elon). When I did try to utilize policies intended to help queer and trans students feel welcome on campus, I was often disappointed. For instance, I could not have a male-identified roommate in my on-campus apartment without us both outing ourselves as queer during a meeting with the assistant director of residence life. As the president of the queer-straight alliance, I was told by the Gender and LGBTQIA Center director that members of the administration did not want me to publicly share the news that certain housing could be made gender-neutral upon request; after serving on a task force designed to make recommendations about improving the experiences of LGBTQIA students, staff, faculty, and alumni, I was not given access to the report we wrote and then not invited to be a member of the implementation team that was tasked with making sure our recommendations were followed. So, in addition to my state of residence passing a dangerous and discriminatory law, my university was capitalizing on this law in order to portray itself as supportive of queer and trans students in a way that not only felt disingenuous, but also dangerous (indeed, Elon continues to inaccurately promote itself as one of the “Top 10” universities for LGBTQIA inclusion, a manipulation of data that, in the wake of H.B. 2, I can only imagine will cause direct harm to students who take this ranking seriously). These experiences are my own, but in my view they point to a broader lack of commitment to queer and trans people. With its statement about H.B. 2, Elon failed to address the concerns of queer and trans people who attend the university, accept jobs there, live in the surrounding area, and have family and children who use public schools or work for the state. Thus, it became necessary to resist trans and queer oppression in two forms: resisting H.B. 2 itself and resisting the university’s unjustified use of their denouncement as evidence of their commitment to queer and trans inclusion.

This second type of resistance, which may not surprise those who have tried to enact it, was immensely difficult. One difficulty was that many straight, cis people on Elon’s campus read the public statement as an unproblematic example of Elon speaking out against injustice, even though many in the queer and trans community were not so impressed. We understood the statement as a self-congratulatory denouncement without action, and the phrasing of the denouncement read to us as the university patting itself on the back for having no discrimination such as providing restrooms where gender would not be an issue.

II. RESISTING HOUSE BILL 2 AT ELON UNIVERSITY

In response to Elon’s nonperformative, self-congratulatory response to H.B. 2, some friends and I got together. I regret to say that we did not work together with queer and trans students across the state. I suspect that had we strategized with other North Carolina college and university students, we could have made a far larger impact at Elon. We were a group of queer students and allies. Although none of us were trans ourselves (Elon’s trans and genderqueer population is extremely low as far as we know, though there is no available data for the 2015-2016 academic year), we wanted to highlight the ways that H.B. 2 impacts trans and gender nonconforming people in particular. We also wanted to make it clear to the campus community that H.B. 2 was not an injustice happening “out there,” as the administration had implied. One action we took was to print up alternative bathroom labels, using binaries like “dog person” and “cat person.” For one week, each morning a team of us relabeled the bathrooms using these alternative binaries. The signs also included the statement, “Think this binary is ridiculous? Or that it doesn’t include you? This is exactly what H.B. 2 is doing to transgender people in our community. And 90+ single-occupancy gender-neutral bathrooms is NOT enough.”

We also wanted to speak with the Gender and LGBTQIA center about Elon’s response to H.B. 2. A friend and I set up a meeting, where we talked about various ways that we
felt our needs as queer students were not met throughout our time at Elon, and one point we emphasized was that the institutional response to H.B. 2 was self-congratulatory and stood in contrast to how we and others in the queer and trans community we had spoken with experienced Elon’s climate. We were essentially told that we should be grateful for what the university was able to say and that we should not expect the Gender and LGBTQIA Center to speak critically of the institution in any way, even to affirm their response and challenge them to make further progress on policy changes. While the risks of speaking against one’s own institution are high, we were disheartened to learn that even strategically working with Elon’s response in order to push for progress seemed out of the question.

Sara Ahmed’s work can again help us understand how students pointing out the problems with the response to H.B. 2 suddenly became problems themselves. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois describes the feeling of being a problem, explaining that he had to learn to see himself through the eyes of racist others. In her 2015 blog post “Against Students,” Ahmed explores another case of being a problem. She argues that university administration, faculty, and staff often turn marginalized students into problems: they deploy the figures of the consuming student, the censoring student, the over-sensitive student, and the complaining student in order to position students as the real threats to the status quo of the higher education system (rather than the corporatization of the university, or the whiteness of America’s higher education system). The H.B. 2 resisters at Elon were, it seems to me, categorized as the over-sensitive students: those who are “sensitive to that which is not over.” This inability to “get over” Elon’s past and present homophobia and transphobia was framed as the real issue, the real barrier to progressivism. And our refusal to get over it made it easy for some at Elon to claim that if the over-sensitive students could just be satisfied with incremental progress, progress would actually be made. This shift in focus is, it seems to me, another way that nonperformative institutional speech-acts are actually performing failure: the statements against discrimination position those who would speak critically of these statements as the true impeders of reform, and thus help the critiques fail to gain traction.

III. “STRATEGIC IGNORANCE” AS ANOTHER WAY OF RESISTING

None of our resistance strategies worked as well as we hoped they would. Elon has a very polite and nonconfrontational campus culture. Because students do not engage in protests very frequently, any act of resistance to the status quo risks being read as rude, loud, or extreme. Relabeling the bathrooms was read from within the institution as too confrontational and too critical of Elon when apparently all it had done was be supportive. And some outside the “Elon Bubble” who have more experience with campus protests than we did might suggest that this relabeling was actually not confrontational enough because it did not generate a direct institutional response. And talking directly with the Gender and LGBTQIA Center, the very place ostensibly constructed for this purpose, once again turned us into the problem: the over-sensitive (or better yet, the overly critical) students were asking it to take on some of the work of becoming a “problem” for the university, and this was not something the Center was willing (or, to be more charitable, able) to do.

After participating in these efforts to resist Elon’s problematic H.B. 2 response, I came to believe that a wider variety of strategies of resistance should have been used, depending on the identities of those resisting. As a queer person, I was, I think, only taken somewhat seriously when I tried to point out the shortcomings of Elon’s statement regarding H.B. 2. I was heard as overly critical, overly sensitive, and insufficiently grateful for the progress that the university had made for queer and trans students (or rather, the progress that the university understood itself to have made). I was even heard this way by Elon’s Gender and LGBTQIA Center because it was suggested that I did not have realistic expectations of Elon’s institutional and public response.

It seems to me that our resistance efforts may have been more successful if we had undertaken different actions depending on our levels of privilege. For instance, straight and cisgender allies, less likely to be heard as complaining or ungrateful, could have taken a more direct tack by talking with administrators or student life professionals about reframing their denouncements of H.B. 2. But queer and trans students may have needed to get a bit more creative in our resistance. We might, for instance, have benefited from deploying Alison Bailey’s concept of “strategic ignorance.” Thinking within the framework of epistemologies of ignorance, Bailey is interested not only in the ways that ignorance is socially produced by those in positions of power, but also in how “expressions of ignorance can be wielded strategically by groups living under oppression as a way of gaining information, sabotaging work, avoiding or delaying harm, and preserving a sense of self.” In other words, Bailey wants to explore the ways that ignorance can be used as a tool for the oppressed.

Bailey uses Maria Lugones’s work on multiplicity and curdled logic to suggest that people of color can engage with white ignorance in advantageous ways and that we should see this engagement as resistance. In her essay “Purity, Impurity, and Separation,” Lugones contrasts the “conceptual world of purity” with the conceptual world of multiplicity. She argues that dominant logics understand identity as unified, pure, and separable into distinct parts, but that these dominant logics do not capture the experiences of living with multiple oppressed identities. The fundamental assumption underlying a logic of purity is that “there is unity underlying multiplicity”; a logic of purity, for instance, would suggest that people have one unified identity and one set of clear motivations for their actions. Rather than conceptualizing identity through the logic of purity, Lugones centers the experiences of Latina writers in order to argue for a logic of curdling or multiplicity. This logic of multiplicity does not reduce identity into pure parts or assume one unified experience of the world.

The defiance of this dominant logic is, for Lugones, a source of hope for the future. She explains that “we [marginalized subjects] can affirm the positive side of our
being threatening or ambiguous...it [defying dominant logic] can become an art of resistance, metamorphosis, transformation.” In her view, people with marginalized identities actually have an opportunity to use their defying of dominant logic for political gain. For Lugones, resisting fragmentation and unity is what generates creativity and sets up the conditions for exploring more possibilities.

Bailey applies Lugones’s concept of curdled logic in order to show the ways that working with and taking advantage of the ignorance of dominant groups can, rather than being viewed only as submission, also be viewed as a kind of sneaky or undercover resistance. Although Bailey is thinking specifically about people of color using “strategic ignorance,” she defines it fairly broadly as, “a way of expeditiously working with a dominant group’s tendency to see wrongly.” She explains, for example, how Frederick Douglass tricked white boys into teaching him to read by pretending not to know the letters, and enticing the boys into showing him more and more complicated words. In Bailey’s view, one way of using strategic ignorance is to play dumb as a means of gaining information or getting what you want.

A logic of purity would only understand Douglass’s playing dumb as a submission to a harmful stereotype. But Bailey suggests that if we use a curdled lens to analyze this situation, we notice that at the same time Douglass played into the harmful stereotype, he also gained the information that would help him resist his own oppression in the long term. As Bailey explains,

Navigating the dominator’s world requires that oppressed resisting subjects employ ways of knowing that reduce the risks of oppression. To extend Audre Lorde’s metaphor, the master’s tools may not be able to dismantle the master’s house, but they might just come in handy when walking through his neighborhood, attending his schools, or working on his assembly line.

We can, according to Bailey, understand “strategic ignorance” as a type of resistance to oppression that ensures the continued survival of oppressed groups, even if from one perspective it looks like compliance.

I wonder if queer and trans community members at Elon could have done (or might still do) something similar when confronting the institution about trans and queer oppression on campus. Many of us recognized Elon’s statement as a nonperformative political move designed to position the university as a progressive safe haven for queer and trans students. But showing that we recognized this didn’t seem to gain us much traction. In fact, it might have made the university less likely to take our concerns seriously. Maybe instead of revealing our knowledge, we could have pretended not to recognize the statement for what it was. Ahmed reminds us that while nonperformative institutional speech-acts can be frustrating, they can also be used as tools to nudge the institution forward: “if organizations are saying what they are doing, then you can show they are not doing what they are saying.”

I can imagine queer and trans students at Elon using the statement as a tool by pretending to take the institutional statement as an earnest one, and acting as though it were a promise. We could have suggested to the administration that since Elon has spoken out against H.B. 2, surely they are supportive of making various changes to campus that would improve the experiences of queer and trans students. Their denouncement of H.B. 2 could have been used as evidence for why Elon should follow up with establishing multi-stall gender-neutral restrooms, providing gender-neutral student housing in residence halls, or beginning a scholarship fund for LGBTQIA students. My own instinct is to be critical of nonperformative institutional speech, but it may have been in my best interest to act as though I took Elon’s statement of commitment to diversity and inclusion seriously. I could have helped urge Elon to adopt more queer and trans-inclusive policies and commitments.

One complicating factor about deploying strategic ignorance is that we cannot always tell when it is being used or by whom. For instance, some administrators at Elon might have been taking strategically ignorant stances about the response to H.B. 2. Ahmed explains that many diversity practitioners use the limited language and frameworks of diversity because it “allows practitioners to work ‘with’ rather than ‘against’ an institution.” Similarly, it is possible that diversity practitioners at Elon were, in fact, critical of the institution’s H.B. 2 statement (perhaps even its authors). Because of this difficulty with strategic ignorance, it seems that differently positioned people within the institution may need to take different types of action. Perhaps straight, cis allies can be more direct in their critiques of the institution than queer and/or trans people. They are less likely to be heard as complaining or ungrateful, so after listening to the concerns of the LGBTQIA community, they could have taken on the work of seeking out administrators to talk with them about new ways to frame denouncements of anti-trans legislation. Allies might have written op-eds for the school newspaper, or talked with their friends about why it matters not just that Elon resists H.B. 2, but how that resistance is framed.

I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting that queer and trans students step back and have allies speak for us at all times. Rather, I want to explore the ways that strategically going along with university statements about oppression should be recognized as a form of resistance for people who might not be well-positioned to offer a more pointed critique. And while some queer and trans students may justifiably continue with more direct resistance strategies, I hope I have highlighted some additional opportunities for H.B. 2 resisters.

IV. CONCLUSION: ARE NONPERFORMATIVE RESPONSES THE LEAST OF OUR WORRIES?

I am left with many lingering questions about resisting injustice at universities and other institutions that might have an interest in portraying their values as progressive: How might straight, cis allies best use their privilege to convey the concerns of queer and trans students? By suggesting “strategic ignorance” as one useful strategy
for navigating non-performative institutional speech, have I in effect “blown its cover,” such that the strategy is less likely to be effective? If an institution doesn’t have enough allies willing to do their part, does the strategic ignorance of queer and trans students look too much like complicity with institutional norms? What sorts of denouncements of H.B. 2 might have been performative? Are there ways that statements like these do perform helpful functions and if so, what are they and how can they be used as leverage points for further progress? Is “strategic ignorance” too subtle of a strategy in a world where, for trans and genderqueer people, using the bathroom can become dangerous and traumatizing?

I am not optimistic about this. Now that we’re in the midst of the Trump administration, I am tempted to be much more grateful for Elon’s denouncement, as unhelpful and ineffective as it was. It is very easy, particularly at this moment, to feel something like: “At least Elon thinks trans and queer people are people and that they deserve equality. So many institutions do not, and it is only going to get worse in the next four years.” But Elon’s actions do not make it clear trans and queer people really are valued by the institution. I think now is a particularly important time to reveal the ways that problematic denouncements of injustice can allow for the perpetuation of those injustices, even by institutions that understand themselves as progressive. It can be exhausting, particularly for the queer and trans community, to resist universities’ use of their H.B. 2 denouncements to boost their diversity credentials while also resisting H.B. 2 itself, but I think efforts are more likely to be effective if we understand the dual nature of the problem and mobilize in multiple ways that are sensitive to relevant privilege and power differentials.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Kirstin Ringelberg, Andrea Pitts, Jean Clifford, and Sarah Babbitt for their feedback on earlier drafts of this paper; to the Society for LGBTQ Philosophy for organizing the Central Division APA meeting session “Bathroom Bills, Religious Freedom, and Anti-LGBTQ Legislation in the US,” where this paper was first presented; and to the attendees of that session for their helpful comments.

NOTES

1. Henderson and Funk, “Understanding the HB2 Repeal Law – What It Does and Doesn’t Do.”
4. Youth Organizing Institute Blog, “#Blacktranslivesmatter Queer and Trans People of Color Coalition Response to NC HB2.”
5. Campbell and Bonner, “Legislature Approves Limited Changes to HB2.”
10. Pitcher, “‘There’s Stuff That Comes with Being an Unexpected Guest’: Experiences of Trans* Academics with Microaggressions,” 688.
11. Ibid., 691.
13. Pitcher, “‘There’s Stuff That Comes with Being an Unexpected Guest’,” 700.
17. Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others, 82.
18. Ibid.
19. Wilder, “University Has Chick-Fil-A Debate.”
20. Kansky, “Elon Chick-Fil-A Debate Shows Division on Campus.”
23. Thank you to Andrea Pitts for prompting me to consider the additional constraints places on public universities in the state.
24. Thanks to Andrea Pitts for suggesting I frame the problem in this way.
26. Ibid., 116.
27. Ibid.
28. Groves, “Former Elon Professor Sues, Claims Discrimination.”
30. Ibid., 117. Emphasis in original.
32. Ahmed, On Being Included, 116
33. Ibid., 86.
34. Anderson, “Elon Statement Regarding NC Legislative Action.”
36. Ibid., 1223.
37. Brady, “When a Transgender Person Uses a Public Bathroom, Who Is At Risk?”
39. Elon University Faculty, “Faculty Resolution Regarding HB2: The Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act.”
40. Ringelberg, “A Closer Look at Elon’s Campus Pride Ranking.”
42. Ahmed, “Against Students.”
43. Ibid.
44. Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 77.
45. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 144.
49. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 85.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Potty Humors: Melancholic and Choleric Presidents, Sclerotic Voters, and the Federal Courts on Title IX in School Bathrooms

Richard Nunan

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON, NUNAN@COFC.EDU

Bathroom bills and other transphobic legislative measures have become, as many have observed, the latest battleground in social conservatives’ efforts to regain some of the lost ground in the marriage equality war. It is an odd and ultimately quixotic enterprise in a culture that becomes increasingly secular as a direct result of these misguided efforts to impose a loosely evangelical Christian religious orthodoxy on public policy. Just as newspapers are now reporting increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage even among conservative communities, the day will come when there is broad acceptance of the moral legitimacy...
of trans identity. Politically engaged social conservatives ultimately hasten that evolution by drawing increased attention to their mean-spirited targeting of a long-abused “discrete and insular” minority.1

In the meantime, however, there is a serious question as to just how far the targeting efforts might go, and how prolonged they might be with respect to our legal environment, especially with the current ascendancy of Trumpism: an unreflective (and largely headless) lashing out at “others” as the alleged sources of social ills. As is becoming increasingly apparent, Donald Trump’s impulsive populist demagoguery is more a reflection of such attitudes embedded in a fearful, insular, and equally unreflective segment of the electorate, than their root cause. (Trump’s rhetoric, however, together with that of increasingly right-wing Republicans, certainly fans the flames and reaffirms these attitudes). To what extent might our social institutions put the brakes on transphobic legislative excesses in the meantime?

In this article I review the three most widely publicized recent developments in this area with regard to the legal landscape, and what they might portend in the near term: (1) North Carolina’s “bathroom bills”; (2) the Obama Administration’s interpretation of Title IX’s mandate for non-sex-discriminatory policies in educational institutions, its fallout in Gavin Grimm’s Fourth Circuit case, and in the preliminary injunction issued by a Texas federal district court judge; and (3) Jeff Sessions’s reversal of the Obama Administration’s Title IX interpretation, in his capacity as Donald Trump’s attorney general. (This was almost certainly done at Sessions’s own initiative. Trump himself appears to be indifferent to policy questions governing sex and gender, except to the extent that they afford him opportunities to be indifferent to policy questions governing sex and gender, except to the extent that they afford him opportunities to score points with Republican lawmakers and conservative voters who Trump and his acolytes assume to be ripe for endless manipulation.)

I. NORTH CAROLINA’S H.B. 2 AND H.B. 142

In the short run, the news is not good. This is particularly in evidence in the North Carolina case, where newly elected Democratic Governor Roy Cooper signed H.B. 142 into law to replace H.B. 2, the original product of the state’s Republican legislature, which incurred so much popular antipathy and corporate retaliation. Despite campaigning against incumbent Republican Pat McCrory with a promise to repeal that odious bill, Cooper signed a replacement bill, also crafted by the Republican legislature, which was arguably just as bad.

The original provocation for H.B. 2 was a Charlotte municipal ordinance that prohibited LGBTQ discrimination within the city’s borders. H.B. 2 nullified this particular ordinance and any other local ordinance that might provide greater protection than state law did. This was on top of the more famously notorious element of H.B. 2: requiring that individuals had to use public multiple-occupancy restrooms that corresponded to their “biological sex” as listed on their birth certificates, a provision that applied not just to highway rest stops and facilities in government office buildings, but also in public K-12 schools and universities. The replacement bill modifies this practice in name, but not in deed. Instead of ordering individuals to conform to prescribed bathroom behavior by requiring state agencies to enforce anti-trans usage policies in all multiple-occupancy bathrooms, the legislature’s new dispensation prohibits state agencies, all the way down to local boards of education, from regulating “access to multiple occupancy restrooms, showers, or changing facilities.” So, in the event of public hostility towards trans users of multiple-occupancy bathrooms, of any kind, the agencies that function as the custodians of those bathrooms have to await permission to institute protective policies. Such permission is unlikely to be granted in the foreseeable future in North Carolina’s overtly transphobic, heavily Republican, and heavily gerrymandered, state legislature.

Even more critically, because more broadly, the new legislation imposes a ban on any future local ordinances or administrative initiatives designed to protect LGBTQ residents against any employment or public accommodation discrimination. Under H.B. 142, this ban, which didn’t exist prior to H.B. 2, will be in force through 2020, with the potential for future extensions by a hostile state legislature. In other words, just for starters, advocates of local anti-discrimination measures are being asked to wait for permission for almost four years.

This last feature of the bill may prove its eventual downfall in the federal courts. On April 14, 2017, Jeff Sessions, behaving true to form, dropped the federal suit against H.B. 2 instituted nearly a year earlier by Loretta Lynch on behalf of the Obama Administration, on the specious excuse that the lawsuit was now irrelevant, since the North Carolina legislature had nullified H.B. 2, even though H.B. 142 bears many of the same constitutional defects. Joaquin Carcaño and his fellow citizen plaintiffs, with the support of the ACLU and Lambda Legal, have already filed notice, on April 28, 2017, that they will amend their previous complaint to replace H.B. 2 with H.B. 142.2

The central difficulty for the North Carolina legislature, as I see it, is that this kind of preemptively anti-democratic move by a state government has already been litigated unsuccessfully before the US Supreme Court in Romer v Evans,3 more than two decades ago. There the issue was a 1992 amendment to the Colorado State Constitution: “Neither the state nor its subdivisions could enact or enforce any statute, regulation, ordinance or policy according anti-discrimination protection to lesbians, gay men or bisexuals.” The Court’s decision turned partly on the inability of Amendment 2 to satisfy even the low-level deferential rational basis standard of judicial review, and partly on its anti-democratic nature. In his majority opinion, Anthony Kennedy framed the issue in this way:

[The amendment’s] sheer breadth is so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seems inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class it affects; it lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests. . . . The resulting disqualification of a class of persons from the right to seek specific protection from the law is unprecedented in our jurisprudence. . . . A law declaring that in general
it shall be more difficult for one group of citizens
than for all others to seek aid from the government
is itself a denial of equal protection of the laws in
the most literal sense. . . . A State cannot so deem
a class of persons a stranger to its laws. (Romer v.
Evans, 633, 635)

It is just conceivable, I suppose, that today’s Court might
circumvent applying the rational basis standard to H.B.
142’s targeting of trans-identified individuals’ public
accommodations for the exercise of basic bodily
functions, if it chooses to buy into the fiction that H.B. 142
doesn’t actually do that because, unlike H.B. 2, the new
bill no longer overtly prohibits individual choice of most
appropriate public access multiple-occupancy bathrooms.
But even then it is unlikely that the Court would regard a
bill that excludes LGBTQ individuals generally from access
to democratic means of vindicating their equal protection
rights at the local level for such a prolonged (and potentially
indefinite) period as constitutionally permissible. To do
otherwise would be to reverse the Romer precedent.

II. GAVIN GRIFF AND THE OBAMA
ADMINISTRATION’S READING OF TITLE IX’S
BATHROOM PROVISION

During the 2013-2014 academic year, his first year in high
school, Gavin Grimm began hormone therapy treatment
as part of a parentally supported transition to more fully
realize his own sense of his true gender identity. When he
returned for his sophomore year, school administrators
were supportive of Grimm’s request to be treated as
a boy, allowing him to use the boys’ bathrooms at the
school. (Locker rooms were not an issue, as Grimm did not
participate in the school’s physical education program.)
This continued without incident for seven weeks, until
community members complained to the local school
board, which then issued a mid-year directive requiring
all students to use bathrooms and locker rooms assigned
to their biological sex. For students like Grimm, the board
carved out a private bathroom exception: “students with
gender identity issues shall be provided an alternative
appropriate private facility.” This policy, of course, ignores
the message it delivers to trans students: that they are
freakish anomalies unfit to consort with other students with
whom they share a gender identity, a policy which brings
racially segregated bathrooms of the Jim Crow era to mind
(although the parallels are not identical).

While Grimm and the school administration were trying to
accommodate themselves to the new regime, Emily Prince,
a D.C.-area trans rights lawyer, wrote to the US Department
of Education on December 14, 2014, the day the Gloucester
County School Board’s new policy went into effect, inquiring
as to the DOE’s interpretation of the relevant provision of
the 1972 Education Amendments to Title IX, which states,
“No person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded
from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be
subjected to discrimination under any education program
or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (20 U.S.C.
§1681(a)). More specifically, the Department of Education’s
Title IX implementation regulations take this particular
Title IX language to require provision for “separate toilet,
locker room, and shower facilities on the basis of sex, but
such facilities provided for students of one sex shall be
comparable to such facilities for students of the other sex”
(34 C.F.R. §106.33). So, the relevant question becomes,
what does the DOE mean by “sex” in this context?

On January 7, 2015, the DOE’s Office for Civil Rights
(OCR) issued an administrative opinion letter responding
forthrightly to Price’s query about how DOE’s implementation
regulation should apply to transgender individuals: “When
a school elects to separate or treat students differently on the
basis of sex in those situations [sex-segregated restrooms,
locker rooms, shower facilities], a school generally must
treat transgender students consistent with their gender
identity.” Under this gloss, not previously explicit in DOE
regulations, the Gloucester County School Board’s bathroom
policy was in clear violation of the DOE’s understanding
of Title IX. On the strength of that interpretation, Deirdre
Grimm, Gavin’s mother, filed suit on his behalf against the
school board in June 2015, at the end of his sophomore year.
The suit was based in part on the new Title IX interpretation,
a matter of statutory and administrative law, and in part on
a constitutional claim under the Fourteenth Amendment’s
equal protection clause.

In September 2015 Robert Doumar, in the East Virginia
Federal District Court, ruled against Grimm’s request for
a preliminary injunction against the school board’s policy
on Title IX grounds. Judge Doumar reasoned that Title IX
prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and not on the
basis of other concepts such as gender, gender identity,
or sexual orientation. In making this argument, he relied
on the Department of Education’s official implementation
language permitting restroom facilities segregated by sex.
Doumar argued that the new interpretation of that language
issued by the DOE was mistaken, because “on the basis of
sex” means, at most, on the basis of sex and gender together,
it cannot mean on the basis of gender alone. This lack of
judicial deference to executive branch interpretation of the
language of its own administrative law, at the district court
level, is quite unusual. The Obama Administration argued
that it was merely resolving statutory ambiguity. Finally,
exhibiting a lack of imagination and empathy echoed later
in the US Supreme Court, Doumar also contended that
requiring Grimm to use the unisex restrooms while his
lawsuit was pending was not unduly burdensome, that it
was at least less burdensome than requiring other students
made uncomfortable by his presence in the boys’ restroom
to themselves use the unisex restrooms. (Doumar did not
address Grimm’s equal protection claim.)

In its April 2016 review of the District Court dismissal of
Grimm’s preliminary injunction request, the Fourth Circuit
Court remanded the question to the District Court for
further consideration, pointing out first that federal courts
already have a standard for deference to administrative
interpretation of administrative law in place. That standard
is articulated in Auer v. Robbins, 519 US 452 (1997),
which requires that an agency’s interpretation of its own
ambiguously worded regulations be given controlling
weight unless the interpretation is plainly erroneous or
inconsistent with the regulation or statute. The Fourth Circuit
declined to regard the interpretation as unreasonable:
We conclude that the regulation is susceptible to more than one plausible reading because it permits both the Board’s reading—determining maleness or femaleness with reference exclusively to genitalia—and the Department’s interpretation—determining maleness or femaleness with reference to gender identity." (G.G. v. Gloucester Co. School Board 20)

Conceding that, the Court points out that at least the Obama Administration’s DOE/OCR interpretation has the virtue of providing a clear resolution of the ambiguity, while the School Board’s approach does not:

It is not clear to us how the regulation would apply in a number of situations—even under the Board’s own “biological gender” formulation. For example, which restroom would a transgender individual who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery use? What about an intersex individual? What about an individual born with X-X-Y sex chromosomes? What about an individual who lost external genitalia in an accident?” (G.G. v. Gloucester Co. School Board 20)

Paul Niemeyer, the lone Fourth Circuit panel dissenter in this case, argued that the OCR standard would render enforcement of bathroom segregation impossible because it "would require schools to assume gender identity based on appearances, social expectations, or explicit declarations of identity." But Henry Floyd, the author of the majority opinion, points out that this is no less true of the board’s standard, despite its vague expression of “amorphous” safety concerns (G.G. 25, fn8). If the issue is hypothetical concern about sexual responses “prompted by students’ exposure to the private body parts of students of the other biological sex,” such arguments apply with equal plausibility to the presence of gay and lesbian students in traditionally segregated bathrooms (G.G. 28, fn11). In his concurrence, Senior Judge Andre Davis went further, arguing that the Fourth Circuit could itself order a preliminary injunction against implementation of the school board’s restrictive bathroom policy. Less than three months later, the Court followed this up by granting certiorari to review the policy’s merits, with oral arguments scheduled for March 28, 2018.

III. THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION’S READING OF TITLE IX AND ORIGINAL INTENT

The separate jurisdictional conflict issue arose on August 21, 2016, when Reed O’Connor, a forum-shopped North Texas Federal District Court judge, took with a prior history of defying the Obama Administration, granted thirteen plaintiff states, state agencies, and school authorities preliminary injunctive relief against Obama Administration’s May 13, 2016, interpretation of Title IX’s mandate for non-sex-discriminatory policies in educational institutions and Title VII’s prohibition of sex discrimination in employment contexts. O’Connor applied the injunction nationwide, which is a pretty breathtaking scope of authority for a district court to take upon itself, when the complaining parties were confined to thirteen states.

O’Connor granted his injunction partly on procedural grounds concerning inadequate notice by the executive branch, but also, and much more contentiously, on grounds of contradicting existing legislative and regulatory texts concerning the plain meaning of “sex” in Title IX’s (and Title VII’s) language about discriminatory practices. The first of these concerns blends into the second in O’Connor’s language:

Although Defendants have characterized the Guidelines as interpretive, post-guidance events and their actual legal effect prove that they are “compulsory in nature”... The Guidelines are, in practice, legislative rules—not just interpretations or policy statements because they set clear legal standards. As such, Defendants should have complied with the APA’s [Administrative Procedure Act] notice and comment requirement. Permitting the definition of sex to be defined in this way would allow Defendants to “create de facto new regulation” by agency action without complying with the proper procedures. (Texas v. US 26-27)

The idea that “merely clarificatory” interpretation of statutory language would not have compulsory legal
consequences, while the Obama Administration’s interpretation is “legislative” because the “Plaintiffs . . . are legally affected in a way they were not before . . . the [Obama Administration] issued the [new] Guidelines” (27) is a pretty incoherent contention on its face. Interpretive policies might reasonably be accompanied by grace periods for adjustments, but interpretations with no consequences are pointless.

O’Connor’s ruling on the merits of the interpretation is a much more philosophically interesting argument because it invites questions about the appropriateness of interpretive discretion over time. “Auer deference is warranted only when the language of the regulation is ambiguous,” O’Connor informs us (Texas v. US 30). But the relevant Title IX DOE implementation language is not ambiguous, in his view: “It cannot be disputed that the plain meaning of the term sex as used in §106.33 when it was enacted by DOE following passage of Title IX meant the biological and anatomical differences between male and female students as determined at their birth.” Since it is unlikely that, back in the early 1970s, either Title IX legislators or Nixon Administration DOE officials ever gave any thought to the idea that gender might be distinct from biological sex or from physical genitalia, O’Connor offers this categorical denial on the strength of what commonly recognized usage would have been at the time: “When a term is not defined, courts may generally give the words their common and ordinary meaning in accordance with legislative intent” (Texas v. US 30).

As an interpretive principle, this presumption has its attractions. It gives the appearance of judicial deference to the deliberations of elected officials in the absence of more direct evidence of their intentions, and provides a seemingly neutral substitute for more ideologically motivated opinions that individual judges might otherwise craft. In actuality, it constitutes a socially or politically conservative form of judicial activism disguised as judicial deference. The assertion that legislators thought X, in the absence of any evidence that X even occurred to them, let alone that they endorsed X, is not deference but an expression of judicial preference for X. One of the most notorious problems with original intent is the unreflective presumption that it exists in the first place. Different legislators frequently vote for particular legislative compromises for different reasons, precisely because statutory language almost always is a compromise. The idea that there ever was a clearly recognizable underlying intent is just a pious fiction offered as a distraction from the subsequent judicial choices that are actually being made, quite ahistorically, or rather, heavily dependent on the cultural history of the present moment, as it has influenced the judge or judges in question.

O’Connor’s decision is a nice illustration of this point. If, contrary to fact, X were to have occurred to legislators or administrative actors of a particular era, how should we expect them to have behaved with regard to X? Bear in mind that the legislators in question were less politically divided than they are today. Both Democrats and Republicans voted for Title IX. Although both houses had Democratic majorities, the Senate supported the Education Amendments of 1972 overwhelmingly (88-86), and the House of Representatives by a much larger margin than the party split (275-125, where Democrats enjoyed a 255-180 edge). A Republican president signed the bill into law and directed his administration to formulate implementation regulations, including the language at issue in Texas v. US. Imagine what might ensue, if the question were framed to Republican executive branch appointees during the pre-Watergate Nixon era, or to the Bill Clinton’s Democratic and Republican legislative authors, in such a way that contemporary cultural attitudes were brought to bear, if they were informed of the view that a sense of one’s own gender identity, and consequently one’s gender presentation, might not depend exclusively on genitalia. How might they respond to that contention? Would they simply dismiss it out of hand, as Reed O’Connor apparently has done?

It’s not actually clear that they would. In the first place, Nixon-era Republicans don’t much resemble contemporary Republican legislators or political appointees. The Republican Party of that era was still significantly laced with moderate Nelson Rockefeller Republicans (who are now almost all Democrats). Richard Nixon himself was no Barry Goldwater. The Reagan Administration, and more importantly, the rhetoric of Gingrich’s Republican Revolution, and polarizing aspects of both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, the extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts, and the unsubtle Republican race-baiting rhetoric employed during the Obama years have all contributed to a cesspool of political viciousness that Nixon-era administrative employees or legislators would probably find pretty alien.

In addition to the problem of indulging in culturally ahistorical attributions to people who arguably did not much resemble 2017 Republicans, there is the further question of just how we are to evaluate the hypothetical in question. Should we apply our best guesses about the political sensibilities of earlier Republican administrative appointees directly involved in the crafting of Title IX implementation language? Or should we make such guesses about the political sensibilities of the various legislative factions who supported Title IX in the first place? The latter is a much taller order, and probably not something of which any flesh-and-blood federal judge is actually capable.

And to what should we apply those guesses? Should we rely on early 1970s attitudes about “transsexuals,” when the most sympathetic popular view might have been that such individuals were a species of circus freaks burdened with an unfortunate psychological affliction that was more to be pitied than censured? (Thinking about trans identity had not evolved much since Ed Wood’s sexploitation “documentary” Glen or Glenda?, amateurishly but somewhat sympathetically cobbled together twenty years earlier to capitalize on Christine Jorgensen’s notoriety.) Or should we ask those administrative cobbled together twenty years earlier to capitalize on Christine Jorgensen’s notoriety.) Or should we ask those administrative appointees or legislators from a bygone era to reflect instead on contemporary accounts of trans identity by contemporary trans theorists like Kate Bornstein, Dean Spade, Shannon Minter, Julia Serano, Rachel McKinnon, and other non-trans-phobic
feminist gender theorists? Somehow, we should then ask these time-traveling legislators or administrators to bring their own political sensibilities to bear on the issue, so understood. Otherwise, the principle of original intent has no traction left.

Of course, this task is impossible. We cannot reliably resurrect the political sensibilities of such people from the cultural graveyard of the early 1970s and apply them to contemporary cultural debates quite alien to that era. But why would it be any more sensible to rely on prevailing attitudes concerning trans-identified individuals from that earlier era? If the Carolene Products footnote 4 rhetoric about a judicial responsibility to protect “discrete and insular minorities” from majoritarian tyrannies means anything, as it did in US Supreme Court vindication of the rights of oppressed groups in the 1950s through the 1970s, it means not relying exclusively on hostile majoritarian characterizations of those minorities in the first place. The Warren Court defied prevailing racist sentiment about the intellectual abilities and appropriate social roles for African Americans in Brown v. Board of Education, and prevailing sexist sentiment about the proper social roles for women and girls throughout the 1970s. When judges like Reed O’Connor make decisions to reaffirm different majoritarian sensibilities, against the principle expressed in Carolene Products, not out of judicial deference to the imaginary content of nonexistent original intent of elected officials.

IV. THE PHENOMENON OF NATIONALLY APPLICABLE DISTRICT COURT INJUNCTIONS

O’Connor’s ruling was also noteworthy because despite the social conservatism, and alleged judicial conservatism, of its content, it was strikingly nonconservative in its reach: a district court issuing a nationally applicable injunction. The injunction’s reach was sufficiently unusual that O’Connor had to resort to a 1979 Supreme Court precedent, Califano v. Yamasaki,14 for an alleged authority for such comprehensive action: “Absent the clearest command to the contrary from Congress, federal courts retain their equitable power to issue injunctions in suits over which they have jurisdiction” (Califano v. Yamasaki, 705).

The question at issue is just how far that jurisdiction extends. O’Connor uses the language of the earlier decision to contend that even a district court could sometimes issue nationally applicable injunctions: “[T]he scope of injunctive relief is dictated by the extent of the violation established, not by the geographical extent of the plaintiff class.” This is because “federal courts retain their equitable power to issue injunctions in suits over which they have jurisdiction” (O’Connor quoting Califano v. Yamasaki, 702, 705, at Texas v. US, 36). But Califano is an implausible precedent for O’Connor’s action for two reasons. First, the injunction applied there covered Hawaii residents only, a region which clearly falls within the Hawaii Federal District Court’s geographic jurisdiction. That court certified a class protected by the injunction consisting of “all social security old age and disability benefit recipients resident in the State of Hawaii, who are being or will be subjected to adjustment of their social security benefits pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 404 (a) and (b) without adequate prior notice of the grounds for such action and without a prior hearing on disputed issues relating to such actions” (Califano v. Yamasaki, 688).

The other sense in which this case is an inappropriate precedent has to do with the line quoted by O’Connor to the effect that injunctive relief is restricted only by the extent of the violation established, not by “the geographical extent of the plaintiff class.” That line concerns the possibility that plaintiffs in a case may be similarly affected because of their activities in multiple jurisdictions, not just the one governed by a particular court, in which case they may also receive protection covered by the injunction in those other jurisdictions. That is not the issue in Texas v. US, since the actions of school boards, school administrators, and even state legislatures are confined to their own jurisdictions. Thus, Califano is a very narrowly tailored precedent for expanding the scope of injunctions beyond the established geographic boundaries of the court issuing the injunction, limited to providing relief on the plaintiff complaint before the court within its customary geographic jurisdiction, and applied in other jurisdictions only to the extent that those local plaintiffs are directly affected in those jurisdictions via the complaint before the court. The plaintiffs themselves are customarily expected to have residence or evidentiary connections to the presiding court’s geographic jurisdiction.

Geographic latitude is not cast more broadly than this because it would otherwise invite forum shopping of precisely the sort that has occurred in Texas v. US, where numerous government plaintiffs involved with school jurisdictions far beyond the court’s North Texas boundaries joined the litigation. If such behavior runs unchecked, federal district courts in one part of the country can potentially interfere with higher court deliberations in another part of the country, as was theoretically in play with O’Connor’s injunction with regard to Fourth Circuit deliberations in Richmond on the G.G. case. It would also empower federal district courts to interfere nationally with executive and legislative branch policies, which would be a pretty extraordinary power to invest in district courts.

The US Supreme Court has yet to address this issue of District Court overreach. In the wake of the Trump Administration’s rescinding of the Obama Administration’s interpretation of the meaning of “sex” in Title IX (discussed below), the various state plaintiffs withdrew their Texas federal court suit on March 3, 2017, so it is no longer a live case.

Subsequent to O’Connor’s decision, however, a similar issue has arisen on the liberal end of the political spectrum, beginning with James Robart’s decision in Seattle to grant national injunctive relief in the form of a temporary restraining order against the Trump immigration ban executive order of January 27, 2017, in the Western District of Washington. That injunction, issued within a week of Trump’s initial ban against entry of all foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries, was promptly upheld by the Ninth Circuit in a three-judge per curiam decision on February 9, 2017.22 After such swift court action, the Trump Administration withdrew its initial ban, rerafted its language to be less overtly hostile to
Islam, and issued a revised ban against six nations (having withdrawn Iraq from the list) on March 6, 2017. The second ban was challenged in turn by Maryland and Hawaii federal district courts. The Maryland injunction was subsequently upheld in an en banc review by the Fourth Circuit, on First Amendment establishment clause grounds, and the Hawaii injunction upheld in the Ninth Circuit, but on statutory rather than constitutional grounds: such a sweeping executive order probably exceeded presidential authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act. 13

These cases are of interest with respect to the present discussion because of the national sweep of the Washington, Minnesota, Maryland, and Hawaii district court injunctions. Unlike Texas v. US, the Maryland and Hawaii cases, via their respective Circuit Court reaffirmations, remained live issues, and were subsequently taken up by the US Supreme Court in Trump v. International Refugee Assistance Project and Hawaii v. Trump. 14 On June 26, 2017, the Court agreed to review both cases on the merits and consolidated them, but also partially reversed the lower court injunctions in the meantime. They allowed the injunctions to remain in place for individual plaintiffs who had already established US ties, and for future similarly situated foreign nationals applying for entry from any of the six countries still designated as falling under Trump’s ban. But they struck down the injunction for any such foreign nationals “who lack any bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States” (Trump v. IRAP & Hawaii 9). What is striking about the Supreme Court’s response is its failure to address the question of the national scope of the Hawaii and Maryland district court injunctions. Although the Supreme Court called for a balancing test between competing interests, and thus narrowed the scope of the injunctions considerably, it did not restrict the national scope of the injunctions with respect to foreign nationals petitioning for entry when they possessed a genuine relationship with, say, a family member resident in the US, or a US university which had extended an invitation to the petitioner as a student, researcher, or faculty member. The only (oblique) comments on the inadvisability of district court injunctions of national scope came from Clarence Thomas in partial dissent, joined by Alito and Gorsuch. Thomas’s first instinct would be to quash the injunctions in their entirety. He conceded that they might be maintained for the particular plaintiffs already involved in the litigation, but not for an amorphous class of foreign nationals who might in future claim some relationship with US persons or institutional entities, in part, because he anticipated a flood of such litigants clogging the courts with an unworkable standard for establishing a relationship, and, in part (citing Califano v. Yamasaki, 702) because “injunctive relief should be no more burdensome to the defendant than necessary to provide complete relief to the plaintiffs” (Trump v. IRAP & Hawaii dissent 3). The implication of this quoted passage, not made explicit by Thomas, and certainly not in the Court’s per curiam decision, is that injunctions should be quite limited in scope. Whether that rules out national injunctions issued by lower courts, outside class action suits, is simply unclear (Thomas also notes on 3 that “no class has been certified” in Trump v. IRAP or Trump v. Hawaii). What Thomas might have said if Reed O’Connor’s national injunction against the Obama Administration’s reading of “sex” as including self-determined gender identity for Title IX purposes were before the Court instead of the immigration ban cases is, of course, also unclear.

The Supreme Court generally, and Thomas in particular, may be wary of taking a firm position on the issue of broad national injunctions issued by lower courts because of our current political circumstances: a mercurial and unpredictable president surrounded by a dubiously inexperienced set of high level executive branch appointees, likely at any time to entertain constitutionally, or statutorily, outrageous policies. Turning a blind eye to lower court injunctions of perhaps overly broad scope has its advantages. Lower courts can act quickly to slow Trump Administration excesses, and buy the Supreme Court some time to deliberate on the novel issues that may come before it in the near future. The Court may also be mindful of what can happen when it intervenes in haste, the most famous recent example being Bush v. Gore. The Court’s swift intervention into the 2000 presidential election results in Florida, when it really did not need to put itself in the position of effectively appointing George W. Bush on its own initiative, resulted in roughly half the nation, and the bulk of legal commentators at the time, concluding that the Court had behaved badly, a result that probably still makes the Court somewhat cautious about precipitous action.

The negative side of this judicial pragmatism is that it does open the door for lower courts to be broadly, rather than narrowly, obstructionist to administrative policies for which they have ideological distaste. The Trump Administration’s immigration ban was so clearly motivated by political calculations rather than genuine national security concerns, and so clearly antithetical to both our laws and the political traditions we like to think we (mostly) embrace, that the sweeping lower court injunctions were welcomed. But if such judicial behavior becomes frequent, it will inevitably injure the reputation of the federal courts, and embroil them in political disputes at a level we like to think the courts are above. Even though that’s not really true, even of the Supreme Court, maintaining the fiction does help the courts to sustain some distance from the ideological warfare into which American politics has now descended, and from the majoritarian tyrannies we are capable of exercising against discrete and insular minorities.

V. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S REVERSAL OF THE OBAMA TITLE IX INTERPRETATION

So what will happen next with transphobic public and school restroom policies? The short-term prospects are not good. On February 22, 2017, the legal terrain shifted again when Jeff Sessions, eleven days after becoming Donald Trump’s attorney general, coordinated with Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to jointly rescind the Obama Administration’s interpretation of Title IX’s sex discrimination language. The next day the Supreme Court responded to this, Sessions’s first significant official act, by inviting briefs from both sides in G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board as to how it should proceed. Two weeks later, on March 6, the Supreme Court sent the case back to Fourth Circuit, preferring to
hear from the lower court on the merits, despite responses from both the Gloucester School Board and Gavin Grimm that the Supreme Court should proceed.

Such a response is not that unusual for the Court. There were really two issues before it: (1) whether federal courts should be deferential to executive branch interpretation of its own administrative law, in this case Title IX single-sex school bathroom implementation regulations; and (2) whether Title IX’s statutory language which gave rise to this interpretation in the first place, the language prohibiting any federally supported education program from engaging in discriminatory policies based on sex, should be regarded as including gender identity as part of the word “sex” for regulatory purposes “on the merits”—i.e., regardless of administrative interpretation. The Fourth Circuit had really addressed only the first of these, obliquely, by issuing the temporary injunction against the school board’s policy in the first place because of the presence of the Obama Administration’s inclusive interpretation of Title IX single-sex school bathroom implementation regulations. Sending the case back, while bathroom bill debates are still going on in other jurisdictions, is a prudent way for the Supreme Court to get more input from the lower courts.

That’s where matters rest at present writing, except for the formal judicial action of the Fourth Circuit vacating the District Court’s June 2016 preliminary injunction against the school board policy, the injunction which was itself provoked by the Fourth Circuit’s reversal of the District Court’s original position (deferring to the school board) back in April 2016. That injunction, which would have permitted Gavin Grimm to use the boys’ restrooms at his high school during his senior year, had the injunction itself not been stayed by the Supreme Court in August 2016, was finally laid to rest near the end of Grimm’s senior year on April 7, 2017. Grimm had presumably long since given up hope of being treated like any other male at his high school. The order to vacate was accompanied by an eloquent concurrence by Andre Davis, joined by Henry Floyd. As a brief coda to this sad chapter in our legislative and judicial history, it is well worth reading.15

The merits of the case, the two issues summarized above, are still before the Fourth Circuit, not yet addressed, and the Court has refused to fast-track its deliberations. Oral arguments will not be scheduled earlier than fall 2017, and Gavin Grimm has now graduated. In light of the Fourth Circuit’s near unanimous en banc confirmation of its initial support of an injunction against the Gloucester School Board’s misguided policy, perhaps it will eventually rule positively on (2), and take the position that Title IX’s statutory language should indeed include gender identity as part of the word “sex” for regulatory purposes. But that is a tall order, requiring the Fourth Circuit to take a position on bathroom policies not unlike the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling on the fiction of “separate but equal” racial segregation of public schools, a novel reading of the language of existing law in light of new cultural developments. It is more likely that the Fourth Circuit will simply re affirm (1), citing Auer, and defer to the new executive branch reading of the law, however odious the individual judges on the Fourth Circuit bench may find Jeff Sessions’s behavior in this matter. That would be the more conventional approach. If instead the Fourth Circuit decides to press the US Supreme Court on (2), the Supreme Court is not likely to affirm, given its own current collective politics. But as I said at the outset, the negative public exposure of hostile legislative and administrative transphobia, even if reaffirmed in the federal courts in the short run, may ultimately hasten the evolution toward more tolerant policies.

NOTES

1. See Harlan Fiske Stone’s famous footnote 4 in US v. Carolene Products 304 US 144 (1938), at 152, in which Stone asserted that the Supreme Court did not need, in that particular decision, to assess, in cases involving “statutes directed at particular religious, or national, or racial minorities, whether prejudice against discrete and insular minorities may be a special condition, which tends seriously to curtail the operation of those political processes ordinarily to be relied upon to protect minorities, and which may call for a correspondingly more searching judicial inquiry.” The implication, of course, relied on by the Court in a number of cases since, is that a higher standard of judicial review might be in play when majoritarian tyrannies target such minorities, a natural inference with respect to the legislative and administrative initiatives under review here.


6. The Court as a whole subsequently declined to conduct an en banc review (a review by all members of the Fourth Circuit bench), again with Niemeyer as the only dissenter.

7. On December 31, 2016, O’Connor blocked a fictitious interpretation of the Affordable Care Act for a “likely” violation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act because its nondiscrimination clause allegedly violated doctors’ religious freedoms by forcing them to perform gender transition procedures and abortions, again by means of a national injunction. (What the ACA actually requires is nondiscriminatory treatment of trans patients and women who previously had abortions. They can’t be denied general medical care or health insurance coverage because of their prior medical histories.)

8. Texas v. US (2016), Civil Action 7:16-cv-00054-O. In addition to Texas, litigants include varying State authorities for Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.


14. Case numbers 16-1436 and 16-1540 were granted cert. on June 26, 2017, and consolidated as 582 U. S. ___ (2017). Since
CALL FOR PAPERS

The APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy invites members to submit papers, book reviews, and professional notes for publication in the fall 2018 edition. Submissions can address issues in the areas of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as issues of concern for LGBTQ people in the profession. The newsletter seeks quality paper submissions for anonymous review. Reviews and notes should address recent books, current events, or emerging trends. Members who give papers at APA divisional meetings, in particular, are encouraged to submit their work by the appropriate deadlines.

DEADLINE
The deadline for submission of manuscripts for the fall edition is July 1, 2018.

FORMAT
Papers should be in the range of 5,000–6,000 words. Reviews and Notes should be in the range of 1,000–2,000 words. All submissions must use endnotes, and should be prepared for anonymous review.

CONTACT
Submit all manuscripts electronically (MS Word), and direct inquiries to:

Grayson Hunt, Editor
APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy
Grayson.Hunt@wku.edu
The old philosophical question, how to set the boundaries of semantics versus syntax, is becoming an essential issue again based on the current challenges in computer engineering, such as various attempts at constructing "semantic web" and other semantic systems. Those are the systems able to understand and disambiguate natural language, with its metaphorical meanings of the words and context dependencies. In a broader sense, such semantic engines would be able to disambiguate the meanings in human and physical world encountered by self-driving machines, and other autonomous systems. Such ability "to know what's going on," as Riccardo Sanz would put it, is essential for smooth integration of (semi-)autonomous cognitive engines within the universe of human agents. We are delighted to publish Bill Rapaport's article "Semantics as Syntax," which is an important voice in this debate. The author views semantics as an interpretation over syntax, fully reducible to the latter. It is an important re-statement of Rapaport’s 1988 position that “purely syntactic symbol-manipulation of a computational natural-language-understanding system’s knowledge base suffices for it to understand natural language.” Rapaport’s new defense of this traditional view is an important contribution to the current debate.

We are glad to publish the third and last article by the duo of Jun Tani and Jeffrey White, who have recently moved from KAIST in Korea to the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST). In this article, important for philosophers and scientists alike, the authors develop the idea of “synthetic neurorobotics studies” as essential for grasping various senses of machine consciousness.

Kristen Zbikowski’s interview with Stephen Thaler brings to the readers several new ideas on machine consciousness, many of them already applied and functioning within the framework of imagination engines. Those are advanced cognitive architectures that implement dream-like information processing—based largely on image transformation and combination—in order to attain creative cognitive engines that seem useful in the areas so divergent as new product development, investment strategies, and the arts. We close the issue with a philosophical cartoon by Riccardo Manzotti, who is currently a Fulbright Scholar at MIT—those cartoons have become a yearly feature of this newsletter. The current cartoon develops a case for ontological relationism. We want to congratulate the author on his new position as professor of theoretical philosophy at the Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM University at Milan.

Last but not least, I want to emphasize the importance of the note from the chair of this committee, Marcello Guarini. The note includes up-to-date information about the sessions organized by the APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers for all the three APA divisional meetings in 2018—Central, Eastern, and Pacific. It also includes the list of all current committee members. It is exciting to see the committee being so active again!
At the time of publication, the times and dates have not been finalized. Please check the APA meeting programs as final particulars become available online. In the interest of building our community of scholarship, we encourage readers of the newsletter to attend the above events.

Readers of the newsletter also are encouraged to contact any member of the committee if they are interested in proposing or collaborating on an APA symposium that engages any of the wide range of issues associated with philosophy and computing. We are happy to continue facilitating the presentation of high-quality research in this area.

The current members of the committee are listed below:

Marcello Guarini (chair, 2019) (mguarini@uwindsor.ca)
Fritz J. McDonald (2018)
Gualtiero Piccinini (2018)
Gary Mar (2019)
Robin Smith (2020)
Susan G. Sterrett (2020)
Dylan E. Wittkower (2019)
Peter Boltuc (newsletter editor) (epetebolt@gmail.com)

The committee thanks Colin Allen and William Barry, whose terms have come to an end—their commitment to the committee and the community of scholars it serves is very much appreciated.

**Articles**

**Semantics as Syntax**

William J. Rapaport

DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS, AND CENTER FOR COGNITIVE SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

The Chinese room shows what we knew all along: syntax by itself is not sufficient for semantics. (Does anyone actually deny this point, I mean straight out? Is anyone actually willing to say, straight out, that they think that syntax, in the sense of formal symbols, is really the same as semantic content, in the sense of meanings, thought contents, understanding, etc.?)

My thesis is that (suitable) purely syntactic symbol-manipulation of a computational natural-language-understanding system’s knowledge base suffices for it to understand natural language. Does that make any sense? Yes: Everything makes sense. The question is: What sense does it make?

— Stuart C. Shapiro (in conversation, April 19, 1994)

1 SYNTAX VS. SEMANTICS

Does syntax suffice for semantics? John Searle famously says that it does not. I have argued that it does.

More precisely, I have argued that semantics is nothing but syntax. These slogans need to be casted out.

1.1 SYNTAX

Let’s begin with syntax. The word “syntax” has at least two meanings: a narrow or specific one, and a wide or general one. On the narrow (and perhaps more usual) meaning, the syntax of a language is its grammar, and the syntax of a logic is its proof theory.

The wide meaning, which is the one I want to focus on, includes both narrow meanings, but goes beyond them. It is roughly synonymous with Charles Morris’s “syntactics”: “the formal relation of signs to one another... in abstraction from the relations of signs to objects or to interpreters.” (The former relations are those of semantics, the latter are those of pragmatics.)

On the wide view, syntax is the study of the properties of the “symbols” of an (uninterpreted) “symbol system” and the relations among them, including how the symbols can be “manipulated.” But “symbol” is a charged term, used by some to mean an interpreted “sign”: a sign together with its meaning. Worse, “sign” is yet another charged term, because signs are supposed to be signs of something. I want to focus on the “sign” or “symbol” itself, devoid of any meaning, so I will use the more neutral terms “mark,” “mark system,” and “mark manipulation” instead of the
more familiar “sign,” “symbol,” “symbol system,” and “symbol manipulation.”

This is a kind of very “pure” syntax. It is “formal” syntax in the sense of Carnap, where an item

is to be called formal when no reference is made in it either to the meaning of the symbols . . . or to the sense of the expressions . . . but simply and solely to the kinds and order of the symbols from which the expressions are constructed. . . . Pure syntax is concerned with the possible arrangements, without reference either to the nature of the things which constitute the various elements, or to the question as to which of the possible arrangements of these elements are anywhere realized.

Dale Jacquette does not believe in the existence of such “pure syntax . . . . entirely divorced from semantics.” But all that he says in defense is that such marks “lack even derivative meaning or intentionality.” (“Intentionality,” by the way, seems to have two different, albeit related, meanings in the literature. In a technical sense deriving from Brentano, it means “directedness to an object”; in the sense in which Jacquette, Searle, and others use it in the context of the Chinese Room Argument; it seems to be roughly synonymous with “cognition,” “understanding,” or even “consciousness.”) Jacquette goes on to say that even purely syntactic computer programs . . . are always externally interpreted. I agree with the latter comment, but I still think that there is such a thing as pure syntax in the sense that I am using it here. But this debate would take us too far astray.

The (purely) syntactic properties of marks include their shape (what a mark looks like and how it differs from other marks in the system), an inventory of the marks of the system (an “alphabet” or “vocabulary” of “primitive,” or “basic,” marks), and relations spelling out how marks may be combined to form more complex ones from simpler ones (usually given by recursive rules that take primitive, or given, or “atomic” marks as the base case, and show how to combine them to produce “molecular” marks, or “well-formed formulas” [wffs]). This much would normally be called the “grammar” of the system if the system were to be thought of as a language.

As I noted above, some mark systems, especially those that really are languages (formal or otherwise) might have other syntactic properties and relations, in addition to shape, inventory, and grammatical combinatory relations. For instance, some molecular marks—well-formed formulas—might be taken as axioms. And some sets of molecular marks might stand in certain relations such that, whenever some of them have been collected together, others—called “theorems”—might then be “legally” allowed to be added to the collection. Here what I have in mind are transformation rules or rules of inference. Thus, in addition to “grammatical” syntax, a set might also have a “logical” or “proof-theoretic” syntax. The production of molecular wffs and theorems is usually what is meant by “symbol manipulation” (i.e., mark manipulation). Note, however, that I am not requiring the transformation rules to be “truth preserving,” because I take “truth” to be a semantic property. (I take correspondence theories of truth to be semantic. Coherence theories seem to be more syntactic, or holistic. We’ll come back to holism in §3.1.)

But I want to be even more general than Morris: I see no reason not to include systems that might not normally be considered to be languages. On my view, any set of objects has a syntax if the objects have properties and stand in relations to each other. On this view, even biological neural networks have syntax, as does the world itself. This seems to be consistent with Carnap: “The syntax of . . . any . . . calculus, is concerned . . . with the structures of possible serial orders . . . of any elements whatsoever.”

1.2 SEMANTICS

Semantics, of course, is the study of meaning and truth. The meaning of some piece of language (a word, phrase, sentence, what have you) might be its referent (if there is one), or something else, in the world, rather than in the language (with the exception, of course, of things like names of words, whose referents are other words in the language—after all, language is part of the world). Or the meaning of some piece of language might be its sense (Fregean or otherwise)—again, something else, outside of the language, though not, perhaps, “in the world.” Or it might be a Meinongian object or an idea in a mind. But, in any case, the meaning of a piece of language is not typically thought of as being part of the language; rather, it is something else that the piece of language stands in relation to. One exception is conceptual-role or holistic theories of meaning, but we’ll come back to that in §3.1.

So, whereas syntax only requires one domain (call it the “syntactic domain”), semantics requires two: a syntactic domain and a “semantic domain.” The syntactic domain is the thing that needs to be understood, to be interpreted. The semantic domain is the thing that provides the understanding, that provides the interpretation.

Following Morris, then, I take semantics to be the study of the relations between the marks of two systems. Because syntax is the study of the properties and relations of a single system, it would seem that, indeed, syntax does not suffice for semantics. Yet I argue that it does. Let’s look into this more closely.

2 TWO SYNTACTIC SYSTEMS

2.1 THE SYNTAX OF $L$

On the standard view, a syntactic domain is usually some (formal or formalized) language $L$, which is described syntactically—that is, in terms of its marks and rules for manipulating them. Thus, for instance, $L$ might be described as having terms, perhaps of two (simple, or atomic) kinds: individual constants $a, b, . . . , f$, (e.g., proper names or other nouns) and individual variables $u, v, . . . , g$ (e.g., pronouns). “New” (complex, or molecular) terms (e.g., noun phrases) can be constructed from previously given or previously constructed (“old”) ones (whether atomic or molecular) by means of function symbols of various arities, $f, g, . . . , f, g , . . .$ (e.g., “the father of . . .,” “the average of . . . and __”), together with “grammar” rules specifying the “legal”
structure (or “spellings”) of such molecular terms (say, if \( t_1, \ldots, t_n \) are terms, and \( P^n \) is an \( n \)-place function symbol, then \( P^n(t_1, \ldots, t_n) \) is a term).\(^{16}\)

In addition, \( L \) will have predicate symbols of various arities: \( A, \ldots, Z, A_1, \ldots \) (e.g., verb phrases); connectives and quantifiers: \( \neg v, v \), \( \ldots \) (e.g., “it is not the case that . . . ,” “. . . or . . . ” “for all . . . , it is the case that . . . ”); and more “grammar” rules specifying the “legal” structure of well-formed formulas (or sentences): If \( t_1, \ldots, t_n \) are terms, and \( P^n \) is an \( n \)-place predicate symbol, then \( P^n(t_1, \ldots, t_n) \) is a well-formed formula (wff); if \( \psi \) and \( \varphi \) are wffs, and \( v \) is an individual variable, then \( \neg \psi, \langle \varphi \psi \rangle, \langle v \varphi \rangle \) are wffs.

Note that \( L \) is a language. Sometimes \( L \) is augmented with a logic. Certain wffs of \( L \) are distinguished as axioms (or “primitive theorems”), and rules of inference are provided that specify how to produce “new” theorems from “old” ones. For instance, if \( \varphi \) and \( \langle \varphi \rightarrow \psi \rangle \) are theorems, then so is \( \psi \). A proof of a wff \( \psi \) (from a set of wffs \( \Sigma \) ) is a sequence of wffs ending with \( \psi \) such that every wff in the sequence is either an axiom (or a member of \( \Sigma \)) or follows from previous wffs in the sequence by one of the rules of inference.

And so on. I will assume that the reader is familiar with the general pattern.\(^{17}\) The point is that all we have so far are marks and rules for manipulating them either linguistically (to form wffs) or logically (to form theorems). All we have so far is syntax in Morris’s sense.

Actually, in my desire to make the example perspicuous, I may have given you a misleading impression by talking of “language” and “logic,” of “nouns” and “verb phrases,” etc. For such talk tends to make people think either that I was talking, albeit in a very strange way, about language and nouns and verbs—good old familiar languages like English with nouns and verbs like “dog” and “run”—or that I had something like “language” and “logic,” of “nouns” and “verb phrases,” etc. I want to show you a certain class \( K \) of marks of \( L' \). To talk about them, I’ll need another set of marks that are not part of \( L' \), so we’ll let \( A', B', C', B'_1, \ldots \) be variables ranging over the members of \( K \). Now, here are the members of \( K \):

1. \( A', \ldots, A_n \) \( \in \) \( K \)
2. If \( A, B \in K \), then \( \langle F_0(A), F_1(A, B), F_2(A, B) \rangle \) \( \in \) \( K \).
3. Nothing else is in \( K \).

We could ask questions of this formal mark system. For instance, which molecular marks are in \( K \)? By suitable mark manipulation, following (1)–(3), we can ascertain that \( A, A_{100}, F_0(A_{100}), F_3(F_0(A_{100}), F_3(F_3(A_{100})\rangle, F_3(F_3(F_3(A_{100}), F_3(A_{100})) \in K \\), but that \( F_3(F_3(A_{100}), B \notin K \).

Now, let’s make \( L' \) a bit more interesting. Let \( H \subseteq K \), let \( A, B \in K \), and let’s say that an \( (H, A) \)-sequence is a sequence of members of \( K \) such that \( A \) is the last item in the sequence, and, if \( B \) is in the sequence, then either \( B \in H \) or there is a set \( \{B_1, \ldots, B_n\} \subseteq K \) such that \( R(B_1, \ldots, B_n) \subseteq R \), where \( R \) is defined as follows (remember that \( R' \) is a mark of \( L' \) I am defining \( R \) as consisting of certain sequences of marks beginning with \( R' \)):

\[
R_1. \quad R(A; F(A, B)) \in R
R_2. \quad R(B; F(A, B)) \in R
R_3. \quad R(F(A, B), F(A, B)) \in R
R_4. \quad R(F(A, B), F(B); A) \in R
R_5. \quad R(F(A, B)); A) \in R
R_6. \quad R(F(A, B); B) \in R
R_7. \quad R(A, B; F(A, B)) \in R
R_8. \quad R(F(A, B), A) \in R
R_9. \quad R(B); F(B); F(A, B)) \in R
R_{10}. \quad R(A, A); A) \in R
R_11. \quad R(A, B); F(B) \in R
R_12. \quad R(A, B); F(A) \in R

We can now ask more questions of our system; e.g., which marks \( A \) are such that \( R(A); A \in R \)? By suitable mark manipulations, following \( R_1 \)–\( R_{12} \), we can ascertain that, e.g., \( R(A, A) \in R \) (this is actually fairly trivial, since \( A \) is an \( \langle A, A \rangle \)-sequence whose first item is \( A \)).

2.2 The Syntax of \( L' \)

So, let me offer a somewhat less familiar syntactic domain \( L' \), which I will call, this time, not a “language,” but merely a “mark system.” First, I need to show you the marks of \( L' \). To really make my point, these should be quite arbitrary: say, boxes, circles, or squiggles of various kinds. But I will make life a bit easier for the reader and the typesetter by using letters and numerals.

\( L' \) consists of the following marks:

\[
A_1, \ldots, A_n ;
F_1, F_2, F_3 ;
(,),,,;;
R
\]

[i.e., a left-parenthesis, a right-parenthesis, a comma, and a semi-colon]
Hard to read, isn't it? You feel the strong desire to try to understand these squiggles, don't you? (Are you, perhaps, beginning to feel like Searle-in-the-Chinese-Room?) You would probably feel better if I showed you some other domain—a semantic domain—with which you were more comfortable, more familiar, into which you could map these squiggles. I will. But not yet.

Of course, I could be sadistic and suggest that you "get used to" \( L' \) by manipulating its symbols and learning more about the members of \( K \) and \( R \). After all, as John von Neumann allegedly said, "in mathematics you don't understand things. You just get used to them." 15 "Getting used to" a syntactic domain is the base case of a recursive *Fundamental Principle of Understanding:* 20

To understand a syntactic domain \( S \) is either:

1. to "get used to" \( S \), or else

2. to understand \( S \) in terms of a semantic domain \( T \).

The latter is semantic understanding in Morris's sense: understanding one thing in terms of something else. The former is what I have called "syntactic understanding": 21 understanding something in terms of itself. And in the case of semantic understanding, how do you understand the semantic domain \( T \)? Normally, \( T \) is assumed to be antecedently understood. But that has to mean that it is understood syntactically—you have gotten used to it. If \( T \) is not antecedently understood, then it has to be considered as a syntactic domain in its own right and understood in terms of yet another semantic domain \( T' \).

And so on. Ultimately, I claim, all understanding is syntactic understanding (the base case of the recursion). 22

But "syntactic understanding"—the sort of thing that you come to have by getting used to the syntactic domain—does not seem, on the surface, to be any kind of "real" understanding. This is the intuition underlying Searle's Chinese Room Argument and its earlier incarnation in the guise of Leibniz's mill. 23 Where is the meaning or understanding (or "intentionality" or "consciousness") in this kind of "meaningless" (yet rule-based, or regulated) mark manipulation? As I read him, Jacquette suggests that it can generate understanding, 24 in turn suggesting that what we have here is a clash of fundamental intuitions: Some (e.g., Searle) say that such mark systems and mark manipulation cannot suffice for understanding; others (perhaps Jacquette, and certainly I) say that it can.

In any case, you could just try to get used to \( L' \) by doing mark manipulation, and I believe that you would thereby come to understand it. But I won't be that mean. First, we need to move away from pure syntax and find out what semantics consists of.

2.3 A SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF \( L \)

Given some syntactic domain—some (formal) mark system—one can ask two sorts of questions about it. The first sort is exemplified by those we asked above: What are the members of \( K \)? Of \( R \)? These are purely "internal," syntactic, questions. The second sort is, in short: What's the meaning of all this? What do the marks mean (if anything)? What, for example, is so special about the members of \( K \) or the marks of the form \( IR(\alpha; \beta) \)? To answer this sort of question, we must go outside the syntactic domain: We must provide "external" entities that the marks mean (that they can be understood in terms of), and we must show the mappings—the associations, the correspondences—between the two domains.

But, as I have said elsewhere,

Now a curious thing happens: I need to show you the semantic domain. If I'm very lucky, I can just point it out to you—we can look at it together, and I can describe the correspondences ("The symbol \( A_1 \) means that red thing over there"). But, more often, I have to describe the semantic domain to you in . . . symbols [i.e., marks], and hope that the meaning of those symbols will be obvious to you. 25

So, let's provide a semantic interpretation of our first formal mark system, \( L \). Since \( L \) had individual terms, function marks, and predicate marks—which could be combined in various (but not arbitrary) ways—I need to provide meanings for each such mark as well as for their legal combinations. So, we'll need a non-empty set \( D \) of things that the terms will mean—a Domain of interpretation (sometimes called a Domain, or universe, of discourse)—and sets \( F \) and \( R \) of things that the function and relation symbols will mean, respectively. These three sets can be collectively called \( M \) (for Model). What's in \( D \)? Well, anything you want to talk or think about. What are in \( F \) and \( R \)? Functions and relations on \( D \) of various arities—i.e., anything you want to be able to say about the things in \( D \). That's our ontology, what there is.

Let's pause a moment here for an important point: \( D \) has members; the members of \( D \) have properties; and the members of \( D \) stand in various relations to each other. The study of such objects, their properties, and the relations among them is ontology. But I have defined the study of objects, their properties, and the relations among them to be syntax. Thus, ontology is simply the syntax of the semantic domain.

Now for the correspondences. To say what a mark of \( L \) means in \( M \) (what the meaning, located in \( M \), of a mark of \( L \) is), we can define an interpretation function \( I: L \rightarrow M \) that will assign to each mark of \( L \) something in \( M \) (or it might be an interpretation relation if we wish to allow for ambiguity), as follows:

1. If \( \alpha \) is an individual term of \( L \), then \( I(\alpha) \in D \).

   *(Which element of \( D \)? Whichever you want, or, if we spell out \( L \) and \( D \) in more detail, I'll tell you; for example, perhaps \( I \) ("Barack Obama") = the 44th President of the U.S., if "Barack Obama" is an individual constant of \( L \), and \( D \) is the set of humans.)*

2. If \( f \) is a function symbol of \( L \), then \( I(f) \in F \).
3. If \( f(t_1, \ldots, t_n) \) is a (molecular) term of \( L \), then 
\[ I(f(t_1, \ldots, t_n)) = I(f)(I(t_1), \ldots, I(t_n)) \in D. \]

(i.e., the interpretation of \( f(t_1, \ldots, t_n) \) will be the result of applying \( a \) the function that is the interpretation of \( f \) to \( b \) the elements of \( D \) that are the interpretations of the \( t_i \); and the result will be an element of \( D \).)

4. If \( P \) is a predicate symbol of \( L \), then 
\[ I(P) \in R. \]

So far, so good. Now, what do wffs mean? Those philosophers and logicians who take \( n \)-place functions and relations to be ordered \( n \)-tuples—functions and relations "in extension"—tend to talk about "truth values" of wffs rather than "meanings." Others, who take functions and relations "in intension" can talk about the meanings of wffs (and a different \( M \) could be used instead of \( L \); in that case, \( I \) would be a partial function. Such is the case when \( L \) is English and \( M \) is the world ("unicorn" is an English word, but unicorns don't exist), though if we "enlarge" or "extend" \( M \) in some way—e.g., if we take \( M \) to be Meinong's Aussersein instead of the actual world—then we can make \( I \) total.

In another less ideal circumstance, "Hamlet's Law" might hold: There are more things in \( L \) than in \( L' \); i.e., there are elements of \( M \) not expressible in \( L \): \( I \) is not onto. And, as noted earlier, \( I \) might be a relation, not a function, so \( L \) would be ambiguous. There is another, more global, sense in which \( L \) could be ambiguous: By choosing a different \( M \) (and a different \( I \)), we could give the marks of \( L \) entirely distinct meanings. Worse, the two \( M \)s need not be isomorphic. (This can happen in at least two ways. First, the cardinalities of the two \( D \)s could differ. Second, suppose \( L \) is a language for expressing mathematical group theory. Then \( M_2 \) could be an infinite cyclic group (e.g., the integers under addition), and \( M_1 \) could be \( M_2 \times M_2 \), which, unlike \( M_1 \), has two disjoint subgroups—except for the identity.)

2.4 A SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF \( L' \)

Let's consider an example in detail; I'll tell you what the marks of \( L' \) mean. First, I need to show you \( M \). To do that, I need to show you \( D \); \( D \) will include the marks: \( \phi, \psi, \ldots \) (so, I'm explaining one set of marks in terms of another set of marks; be patient). \( D \) will also include these marks: \( \neg, \lor, \land, \rightarrow \). Now I can tell you about \( K \) (in what follows, let \( A \) be the \( i \)th atomic marks of \( K \), let \( \phi \) be the \( i \)th atomic marks of \( D \), and let \( A, B \in K \)):

\[
\begin{align*}
I(A) &= \phi, \\
I(A_1) &= \neg, \\
I(A_2) &= \lor, \\
I(A_3) &= \land, \\
I(A_4) &= \rightarrow.
\end{align*}
\]

I assume, of course, that you know what "\( \neg \)", \( (I(A) \rightarrow I(B)) \), etc., are (namely, the negation sign, a material conditional wff, etc.). So, the elements of \( K \) are just wffs of propositional logic (as if you didn't know!)

What about \( \mathcal{R} \)? Well: \( \mathcal{R} \models \vdash \) (where \( \vdash \in R \) and where \( \mathcal{R} \), of course, is part of \( M \)); i.e., \( R \) means the deducibility relation on wffs of propositional logic. So, the elements of \( \mathcal{R} \) are rules of inference:
\[ I(\{R(A; F_1(A, B))\}) = A \vdash (A \lor B) \] (i.e., \(\lor\)-introduction)

\[ I(\{R(B; F_1(A, B))\}) = B \vdash (A \lor B) \] (i.e., \(\lor\)-introduction)

\[ I(\{R(F_1(A, B), F_2(A); B)\}) = (A \lor B), \vdash A \] (i.e., \(\lor\)-elimination)

\[ I(\{R(F_1(A, B), F_2(A); A)\}) = (A \lor B), \vdash A \] (i.e., \(\lor\)-elimination)

\[ I(\{R(F_2(A, B); A)\}) = (A \land B), \vdash B \] (i.e., \(\land\)-elimination)

\[ I(\{R(F_2(A, B); B)\}) = (A \land B), \vdash B \] (i.e., \(\land\)-elimination)

\[ I(\{R(F_3(A, B), A; B)\}) = (A \lor B), \vdash (A \land B) \] (i.e., \(\land\)-introduction)

\[ I(\{R(F(A, B), A, B)\}) = (A \lor B), \vdash A \lor B \] (i.e., \(\lor\)-elimination, or Modus Ponens)

Before we can finish interpreting \(R\), I need to tell you what an \((H, A)\)-sequence means. It is a proof of \(I(A)\) from hypotheses \(i(H)\) (where, to be absolutely precise, I should specify that, where \(H = \{A, B, \ldots\} \subseteq K, I(H) = \{i(A), i(B), \ldots\}\). So:

\[ I(R9) \text{ is:} \]

if there is a proof of \(I(B) \in D\) from a set of hypotheses \(I(H)\) whose first line is \(I(A)\), then \(\vdash (I(A) \rightarrow I(B))\) (i.e., \(\rightarrow\)-introduction, or Conditional Proof)

\[ I(R10) \text{ is:} \]

if there is a proof of \(\{I(B) \land \neg I(B)\}\) from a set of hypotheses \(I(H)\) whose first line is \(I(A)\), then \(\vdash \neg I(A)\) (i.e., \(\neg\)-introduction)

\[ I(R11) \text{ is:} \]

if there is a proof of \(\{I(B) \land \neg I(B)\}\) from a set of hypotheses \(I(H)\) whose first line is \(I(A)\), then \(\vdash I(A)\) (i.e., \(\neg\)-elimination)

So, now you know: \(L^\prime\) is just ordinary propositional logic in a weird notation. Of course, I could have told you what the marks of \(L^\prime\) mean in terms of a different model \(M^\prime\), where \(D^\prime\) consists of states of affairs and Boolean operations on them. In that case, \(L^\prime\) just is ordinary propositional logic. That is, \(M\) is itself a syntactic formal mark system (namely, \(L\)) whose meaning can be given in terms of \(M^\prime\), but \(L^\prime\)’s meaning can be given either in terms of \(M\) or in terms of \(M^\prime\).

There are several lessons to be learned from this. First, \(L^\prime\) is not a very “natural” mark system. Usually, when one presents the syntax of a formal mark system, one already has a semantic interpretation in mind, and one designs the syntax to “capture” that semantics: The syntax is a model—an implementation—of the semantics.32

Second, it is possible and occasionally even useful to allow one formal syntactic system to be the semantic interpretation of another syntactic system. Of course, this is only useful if the interpreting syntactic system is antecedently understood. How? In terms of another domain with which we are antecedently familiar! So, in our example, the unfamiliar \(L^\prime\) was interpreted in terms of the more familiar \(M\) (i.e., \(L\)), which, in turn, was interpreted in terms of \(M^\prime\). And how is it that we understand what states of affairs in the world are? Well . . . we’ve just gotten used to them. (We’ll come back to this in §4.)

Finally, note that \(M\) in our example is a sort of “swing” domain: It serves as the semantic domain relative to \(L\) and as the syntactic domain relative to \(M^\prime\). We can have a “chain” of domains, each of which except the first is a semantic domain for the one before it, and each of which except for the last is a syntactic domain for the one following it. To understand any domain in the chain, we must be able to understand the “next” one. How do we understand the last one? Syntactically.33

3 SYNTAX SUFFICES FOR SEMANTICS

3.1 SYNTACTIC UNDERSTANDING

Let’s take stock. Given any (non-empty) set \(S\) of objects of any kind, the specification of the properties of \(S\)’s members and of the relations that they stand in to each other is the syntax of \(S\). These properties and relations may be of different kinds, so we might be able to identify a “grammatical” syntax of \(S\) as well as a “logical” or “proof-theoretic” syntax of \(S\). We can understand \(S\) in terms of its syntax by “getting used to” manipulating its members according to these properties and relations. This is syntactic understanding.34

Syntactic understanding is holistic in the following way: The syntax of \(S\) can be represented by a graph whose vertices are the members of \(S\) and whose edges represent its properties and relations. Such a graph is often called a “semantic network,” and such networks have rightly been criticized as really being “syntactic” networks. (The Semantic Web is really a syntactic web.35) In such a network, the “meaning” of any vertex is its location in the network—its relations to all other vertices in the network. This is conceptual-role semantics or semantic holism. Semantic holism is just more syntax.36

3.2 SEMANTIC UNDERSTANDING

But there is another kind of understanding: semantic understanding. Here, we need another set, \(T\), in terms of which we understand \(S\). When we ask what \(s \in S\) means, our answer is some \(t \in T\). But \(T\) will have its own syntax. As I noted earlier, I see no difference between the syntax of \(T\), thus understood, and the ontology of \(T\), though we tend to reserve the former term for languages and logics, and the latter term for the realms that those languages and logics describe or are “about.” Thus, if we are understanding \(S\) in terms of \(T\), we would speak of the syntax of \(S\) and the ontology of \(T\), but that is merely a manner of speaking.

Semantic understanding requires relations between \(S\) and \(T\): relations of meaning, reference, etc. But these relations are not among the (internal) relations of \(S\)’s syntax or \(T\’s\) ontology. They connect \(S\) and \(T\), but are external to both.

3.3 SYNTAX IS SEMANTICS

So, how can we talk about those semantic relations? We cannot use either \(S\) or \(T\) by themselves to talk about them,
because the semantic interpretation function is not part of S alone or of T alone. But we can talk about them by taking the union of S and T; call it U. (In earlier writings about computational theories of cognition, I have called this the “internalization” of the semantic domain into the syntactic domain.37 See §4.2, below.) What is the syntax of U? It consists, in part, of the inventory of properties of members of U. This includes all of the properties of members of S and all of the properties of the members of T. It also consists, in part, of the inventory of relations among the members of S and the relations among the members of T. But it also includes the semantic relations between the members of S and the members of T.

So, it is the syntax of U that enables us to talk about the semantics of S. Semantics is, thus, just more syntax—the syntax of the union of a syntactic domain and its semantic domain. QED

4 IMPLICATIONS
I will close with brief comments on two philosophical issues that can be illuminated by this theory.

4.1 TWIN EARTH
Hilary Putnam has argued that, not only can “two terms ... have the same extension and yet differ in intension,” but that “two terms can ... differ in extension and have the same intension.”38 The latter claim is intended to be surprising, because it is typically held that intensions determine extensions. Putnam offers his Twin Earth thought experiment as a counterexample.

I do not want to rehearse these arguments here, but merely point out some similar issues and see what my semantics-as-syntax theory might have to say.

First, note that the fact that the intensions of “water” (on Earth) and “water” (on Twin Earth) might be identical yet their extensions (H₂O and XYZ, respectively) be different parallels a situation with computer programs: By way of an “intuition pump,” recall that intensions (and Fregean senses) are sometimes modeled as (computable) functions or algorithms. Now, it can be the case that a single algorithm with a given input can have different outputs depending on the context in which those algorithms are executed. For one example from the literature, an algorithm (recipe) for producing hollandaise sauce when executed on Earth will likely produce something quite different when executed on the Moon.39 (Strictly speaking, perhaps, the context should be taken as part of the input, so the algorithms will, in fact, have the same outputs if given exactly the same inputs.)40

Second, the relation of a word to its intension is simply one kind of meaning. The relation of a word to its extension is another kind of meaning. (There is no such thing as “the” meaning of a word; to claim that “meanings ain’t in the head” is highly misleading, because some of them are!) What I want to point out is that the relation of an intension to an extension is yet another kind of meaning: All three of these relations are semantic in my sense, because they are relations between two domains.

4.2 COMPUTATIONAL COGNITION
If semantics is nothing but syntax (albeit syntax writ large), how do we understand language? How might a computer understand language? Searle says that it can’t, and I suggested the intuition behind this in §2.2. But I also mentioned a way out in §3: via “internalization.” I have cashed this out in the series of essays cited in note 4, but I will summarize my position here.

What seems to be missing in the Chinese Room is “real” semantics—links to the external-world referents of the words and sentences of language. How does Searle-in-the-room (actually, Searle-in-the-room together with the instruction book!) know that the word “hamburger” means “hamburger” (i.e., refers to hamburgers), or that a certain (Chinese) “squiggle” does?

According to the theory I presented above in §3, it would seem that an actual hamburger would somehow need to be “imported” into Searle-in-the-room’s instruction book (the computer program for natural-language understanding and generation). Instead, a representative of an actual hamburger is thus imported into Searle-in-the-room’s “mind” (or “semantic network”). The hamburger is “internalized.” In the case of a real human being, this representative is the end result of, say, the visual process of seeing a hamburger (or the olfactory process of smelling one, etc.), resulting in a “mental image” of a hamburger. (To speak with Kant, it is an “intuition” or concept of a hamburger, not the hamburger-in-itself.) More precisely, the biological neural network in the human’s brain has neurons whose firings represent the word “hamburger,” and it has neurons whose firings represent the actual hamburger. Both of these sets of neuron firings are in the same “language”—the same syntactic system. Call it “U.” As in §3.3, U = S ∪ T, where S is the neuron firings of language, and T is the neuron firings of perceptual images. U is the “language of thought.”41 Yes, T is just “more symbols” (as Searle has objected;42 more precisely, T is just more neuron firings—the “marks” of T as a syntactic system). But that’s how semantics works. The same thing happens (or can happen) for computers; though the language of thought won’t be a biological neural network (it might be a computational semantic network such as SNePS43 or an artificial neural network). Thus, a combination of the “robot reply” (for internalization) and the “systems reply” (because it is never Searle-in-the-room alone) show us how to escape the Chinese Room.44

NOTES


8. Ibid., 295; my italics.

9. I discuss these issues in the context of the relation of computer programs to the world in Rapaport, “On the Relation of Computing to the World.”


11. Carnap, The Logical Syntax of Language, 6; original italics, my boldface.


15. Much of what follows is a detailed elaboration of comments I made in Rapaport, “Understanding Understanding: Syntactic Semantics and Computational Cognition,” §2.2.

16. For typographical convenience, I use superscripted brackets in place of Quinean quasi-quotes.


18. Or “dog” (plural: “dogs”) and “(to) dog”: “Dogs dogs dog dog dogs” is syntactically correct and semantically meaningful (if not pragmatically acceptable) as a sentence of English, meaning “Dogs—whom other dogs follow—follow other dogs.” Or “buffalo” (plural: “buffalos”) (and “(to) buffalo” meaning “(to) intimidate”). “Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo” is likewise syntactically correct and semantically meaningful (but only pragmatically acceptable in Buffalo, NY); see http://www.cse.buffalo.edu/~rapaport/BuffaloBuffalo/buffalobuffalo.html.


23. “Imagine there were a machine whose structure produced thought, feeling, and perception; we can conceive of its being enlarged while maintaining the same relative proportions among its parts, so that we could walk into it as we can walk into a mill. Suppose we do walk into it; all we would find there are cogs and levers and so on pushing one another, and never anything to account for a perception.” Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy Known as Monadology,” §17.

24. “[A]s we move closer to an exact microlevel decentralized . . . input-output isomorphism with the neurological activity of natural intelligence, the intuition that we do not thereby also precisely duplicate the brain’s causal powers by which it produces intentionality begins to fade and lose its grip on our pre-theoretical beliefs. The imaginable causal efficacy of microlevel input-output functionalities raises difficulties about the adequacy of the Chinese Room example to support Searle’s thesis that a functioning program in which physical syntax tokens causally interact with themselves and a machine environment at the proper level of design could not produce intentionality just as effectively as the natural system it simulates.” Jacquette, “Fear and Loathing (and Other Intentional States) in Searle’s Chinese Room,” 293.


26. I.e., what are normally called “function symbols” and “predicate symbols.”

27. Wilkins, “Expanding the Traditional Category of Deictic Elements: Interjections as Deictics,” 381.


30. “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” Hamlet (1, 5, II. 167–68). This can also be interpreted as a summary of Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem (where “dreamt of” means “provable”).

31. I am grateful to Nicolas Goodman for this example.

32. On the nature of implementation, see Rapaport, “Implementation is Semantic Interpretation”; and Rapaport, “Implementation Is Semantic Interpretation: Further Thoughts.”

33. For more on these “chains” and their possible components, see Rapaport, “Understanding Understanding: Syntactic Semantics and Computational Cognition,” §§2.3ff.

34. I explore this, with an example from elementary algebra, in Rapaport, “Searle’s Experiments with Thought.”


36. I explore conceptual-role semantics and holism in more detail, and respond to Fodor and Lepore’s objections (Holism: A Shopper’s Guide) in Rapaport, “Holism, Conceptual-Role Semantics, and Syntactic Semantics.”


40. I discuss this in greater detail in Rapaport, “On the Relation of Computing to the World.”


42. Fodor, The Language of Thought.

43. Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs.” }
44. Again, see the essays in note 4, as well as Shapiro and Rapaport, "SNePS Considered as a Fully Intensional Propositional Semantic Network"; Shapiro and Rapaport, "The *SNePS Family."

45. More details can be found in Rapaport, 2 "How to Pass a Turing Test: Syntactic Semantics, Natural-Language Understanding, and First-Person Cognition"; and Rapaport, "How Helen Keller Used Syntactic Semantics to Escape from a Chinese Room."

REFERENCES


From Biological to Synthetic Neurorobotics Approaches to Understanding the Structure Essential to Consciousness (Part 3)

Jeff White
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Jun Tani
OKINAWA INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (OIST)
TANI1216JP@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT
This third paper locates the synthetic neurorobotics research reviewed in the second paper in terms of themes introduced in the first paper. It begins with biological non-reductionism as understood by Searle. It emphasizes the role of synthetic neurorobotics studies in accessing the dynamic structure essential to consciousness with a focus on system criticality and self. It develops a distinction between simulated and formal consciousness based on this emphasis, reviews Tani’s and colleagues’ work in light of this distinction, and ends by forecasting the increasing importance of synthetic neurorobotics studies for cognitive science and philosophy of mind going forward, finally in regards to most- and myth-consciousness.

1. KNOCKING ON THE DOOR OF THE CHINESE ROOM

Prediction is made possible by adaptive mechanisms that are supported by learning rules that either apply across generations (evolutionary adaptation) or within the lifetime of the organism. As a result, organisms can deal with a future occurrence of the same or similar situations more effectively. This is the fundamental organization principle of any adaptive system.

— Buszaki, Pyerache, and Kubic

This series began with Boltuc’s “Is anyone home?” question, responding with a sketch of an agent proactively invested in integrating past with present in order to achieve an optimal future. Contrary to Boltuc’s naturalistic nonreductionism recommending that a “projector” of consciousness be first resolved in order to engineer similar in an artificial agent, we rejected the notion that consciousness can be isolated to any loci of activity, arguing that formal articulation of essential dynamics in synthetic neurorobots opens a view on the problem of consciousness that is not available to biological inquiry, alone. That first paper concluded with an introduction to, and the second paper continued with a detailed review of, two decades of research by Jun Tani and colleagues accounting for self, free will and consciousness in neurorobots within the predictive coding framework and according with the free energy principle. Central to this review was the notion of system criticality, with which the continuous perceptual stream is segmented and episodes rendered objects for later recall and recomposition, and which remains central to the current paper, as well.
The present paper proposes the notion of “formal” consciousness to distinguish systems which aim to resolve the source of subjectivity in system criticality from work aiming for other ends, “simulations” and “reasonable approximations” of human consciousness for example intent on passing a Turing test without regard for first-person phenomena. This section briefly locates this position in the contemporary context. The following section reviews Tani and colleagues’ neurorobotics research aimed at understanding consciousness with a focus on the notion of criticality, and how incoherence and the breakdown of established and anticipated patterns opens a privileged view on the emergent self and consciousness thereof. The third section delineates formal consciousness in terms of three necessary factors present in Tani and colleagues’ work yet absent in others, and the fourth section forecasts that synthetic neurorobotics will play an increasingly central role in consciousness studies going forward.

At the turn of the last century, John Searle found the problem of consciousness the most pressing open to biological inquiry and explanation. He faulted assumptions that the rejection of either dualism or materialism compelled the adoption of the other, and championed biological naturalism as an alternative. He wrote:

- We know enough about how the world works to know that consciousness is a biological phenomenon caused by brain processes and realized in the structure of the brain. It is irreducible not because it is ineffable or mysterious, but because it has a first-person ontology and therefore cannot be reduced to phenomena with a third-person ontology.3

This distinction between first and third person ontologies helps to frame the hard problem of consciousness, which for students of artificial consciousness is perhaps most clear in Searle’s distinction between semantics and syntax. A machine performs syntactical operations while human beings (conscious) do something more, they understand, a point originally illustrated in Searle’s famous Chinese Room thought experiment.4

Searle’s Chinese room is an argument against reductive physicalism, and equally against the notion that consciousness is software running on hardware as in a modern digital computer. It illustrates that there is something missing in the mere exchange of symbols at which computers are so proficient, and casts doubt on how a “Turing test” might confirm consciousness. After all, the “imitation game” was not originally conceived of as a test for consciousness, but rather as a test for the ascription of intelligence. The question was “Can machines think?” and more importantly, can thinking machines be indiscernible from human beings in doing so?5

On Searle’s understanding, computational hardware pushes symbols according to a program.6 Computers do not evolve in material interaction with a pervasive natural world, as do human beings, and do not become conscious through this interaction. They are not autonomous; they are programmed. The best that such a machine can do is to simulate, or approximate, consciousness, and they do so by explicit design. Accordingly, simulated consciousness is not consciousness on Searle’s account, but he did not bar the door on artificial consciousness, either. Rather, he pointed to where the key to such may be found. He wrote that “understanding the nature of consciousness crucially requires understanding how brain processes cause and realize consciousness”7 and that conscious artifacts may be designed which “duplicate, and not merely simulate, the causal powers that [biological] brains have”8 once such an understanding is achieved.

As a positive research program, Searle recommended correlating neurobiological activity with conscious phenomena, checking for causal relationships, and developing laws formalizing these relationships.9 He identified two ways forward in this industry, the “building blocks”10 and “unified field”11 approaches, but dismissed the former because “The production of any state of consciousness at all by the brain is the production of a unified consciousness.”12 At that time, he pointed to Linas et al. and Tononi, Edelman, and Sporns as examples of unified field friendly approaches, involving the top-down integration of system wide information within the thalamocortical region.13

Since that time, Tononi and colleagues have developed the Integrated Information Theory (IIT). According to the IIT, consciousness does not require “contact with the external world” but rather “as long as a system has the right internal architecture and forms a complex capable of discriminating a large number of internal states, it would be highly conscious.”14 The “integration” of IIT implies that such a system be unified and seek to maintain this unity in the face of disintegrative change, with each part of the system able to be affected by any other part of the system as measured by the irreducibility of its intrinsic cause-effect structure. A biological brain exemplifies maximal intrinsic irreducibility as a cause-effect structure with definite borders and highly integrated information.15 Other systems are irreducible, for example two men in conversation, but are not maximally irreducible intrinsically as they are not fully integrated. So understood, “consciousness is not an all-or-none property,” but it is not open to piecemeal assembly either, rather increasing with “a system’s repertoire of discriminable states.”16 At the minimal level, a “minimally conscious system” distinguishes between just two “concepts”17 such that “even a binary photo-diode . . . enjoys exactly 1 bit of consciousness”18 and systems increase from there with their discriminable states.

In conjunction with quantity of consciousness, quality of consciousness derives from the structure affording it, and the IIT leaves it to engineers to delimit the contents of artificial consciousness by “appropriately structuring” an agent’s “effective information matrix.”19 As for determining which structures deliver which qualities, Tononi and colleagues also suggest that inquiry begin with biological models, with this understanding first tested against personal and then extended to all human experience before duplication in artificial systems. In the end, the “IIT predicts that whatever the neural correlate of consciousness (NCC) turns out to be” it will be the locus of
integration over discriminable states which "may expand, shrink and even move within a given brain depending on various conditions." Thus, the IIT continues in Searle's line of reasoning.

Contrast the view put forward by leading commercial roboticist Theodore Goertzel. Goertzel does not aim to duplicate but rather at a "reasonable approximation" of three persistent aspects of consciousness, "free will, reflective consciousness" and "phenomenal self." What is "important" for Goertzel is "to identify the patterns constituting a given phenomenon" and trace "the relationships between various qualities that these patterns are hypothesized to possess (experiential versus physical)," an approach reinforced by the observation that "from the point of view of studying brains, building AI systems or conducting our everyday lives, it is generally the patterns (and their subpatterns) that matter" with given phenomena "understood" as correlate activity patterns are identified.21

Goertzel's "patternism" is appealing. It is consistent with calls for the qualification of artificial systems by biological activity. Furthermore, the focal shift from neural loci to activity patterns coincides with advancing inquiry into biological substrates of consciousness, as current imaging technologies afford the establishment of functional correlations between networked neural dynamics in biological models and self-reports of various aspects of consciousness. In light of such advancing research for example, Searle's "already conscious" can be re-assessed in terms of the resting state "default" network based in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the posterior cingulate cortex. Heine et al. affirm the promise in interpreting the conditions of non-communicating subjects through the lens of such activity patterns, a lens that may be repurposed in the evaluation of artificial agents of appropriate architectures which also may not self-report and indeed may not interact with the external world as we know it. Such patterns can be then mapped onto Goertzel's freewill, reflective consciousness and phenomenal self, underscoring the potential of this approach in evaluating non-biological systems in similar terms.

However, there remain doubts that consciousness is realized in duplicate activity patterns, alone. For example, Oizumi et al. characterize patterns of activity internal to the cognitive agent in terms of "shapes" in "concept" and "phenomenal space" exported as graphical representations, at the same time warning that "one needs to investigate not just "what" functions are being performed by a system, but also "how" they are performed within the system." On the IIT, it is the integration over discernible system states that is essential to consciousness, with "strong" integrated systems autonomous as they act and react from internally composed states and goals. On this account, pattern matching alone does not achieve the strong integration that IIT demands. For one, patterns are not necessarily "strongly" integrated, i.e., fully embodied and constrained by the possible futures that this embodiment affords, i.e., maximally irreducible intrinsically. Furthermore, without such strong integration, there is no experience. Accordingly, overt focus on patterns—"what"—exclusive of how (and why) they arise opens the door to "true" zombies exhibiting "input output behavior" approximating biological activity patterns "while lacking subjective experience" at the same time.26

In summary, Goertzel's "reasonable approximation" might open the door to the Chinese room, but as zombie patterns should be indiscernible from non-zombie patterns, what greets us may be a zombie. For the patternist, this may not be a problem. Goertzel's goal is passing a Turing Test for which a reasonable approximation may suffice. But, when it comes to confirmation of consciousness in an artifact, it clearly does not, as captured in the concern that we may build a system "behaviourally indistinguishable from us, and certainly capable of passing the Turing test" that remains a "perfect" zombie at the same time.27

In 2009, Jun Tani noted a similar limitation in existing examples of machine intelligence such as behavior-based robotics articulating sensory-motor reflex behaviors. On his assay, systems aimed at passing the Turing test "turn out to be just machines having stochastic state transition tables" and after a while, we may begin to feel that the robots with reflex behaviors are simply like steel balls in pinball machines, repeatedly bouncing against the pins until they finally disappear down the holes.28

Further, Tani asks,

But what is wrong with these robots? Although they have neither complex skills for action nor complex concepts for conversation, such complexity issues may not be the main problem.29

Instead, Tani argues that "the problem originates from a fundamental lack of phenomenological constructs in those robotic agents" and that "[i]n particular, what is missing ... [is] ... the "subjectivity" that should direct their intentionality to project their own particular images on the outer objective world." He goes on to suggest that subjectivity develops gradually through sensorimotor experience of an agent's direct interaction with the world.30 As each robot is distinctly located in a shared space of action in terms of a shared objective world, each robot develops its own views as particular internal models that then enable it to anticipate and to interpret the outcomes of its actions, with moreover this shared metric space grounding a capacity to generalize these internal constructs in the communication with and interpretation of others similarly situated (see the second paper in this series for in-depth review).

Consider this issue in terms of identifying agency, as set out by Barandiaran, Di Paolo, and Rohde. They consider that a necessary condition for agency is a system capable of defining its own identity as an individual, thus distinguishing itself from its surroundings including other agents. Of particular interest here is their view that the boundary of an individual is self-defined through interaction with the environment. Tani argues that the same dynamic grounds the emergence of subjectivity in the following way.31

Top-down anticipation may not correlate with perceived reality in many situations. When environmental interactions
proceed exactly as expected, behaviors can be generated smoothly and automatically. However, anticipation can sometimes be wrong, and the conflict that arises in such cases can make generating successive acts difficult. When environmental interactions cause the agent to shift spontaneously between opposite poles, from automaticity to conflict necessitating autonomy, the boundary between the subjective mind and the objective world fluctuates, and so the boundaries of self are realized. Here, Tani argues that the essential characteristics of this phenomenon are best understood in terms of traditional phenomenology, since phenomenologists have already investigated the first-personal characteristics of autonomous and authentic selves. In the end, Tani expects that uncovering the mechanisms grounding autonomy will lead to understanding the dynamic structure essential to consciousness in terms consistent with those postulated by William James, in terms of momentary selves in the stream of consciousness. The next section reviews Tani and colleagues' work in clarifying these mechanisms and the dynamics essential to self and consciousness that they reveal.

2. ANSWERING THE DOOR OF THE CHINESE ROOM

Acts are owned as they adaptively assert the constitution of the agent. Thus, awareness for different aspects of agency experience, such as the initiation of action, the effort exerted in controlling it, or the achievement of the desired effect, can be accounted for by processes involved in maintaining the sensorimotor organization that enables these interactions with the world.

— Buhrmann and Di Paolo

How is consciousness to be assessed if not through a Turing test or via correlation with biological activity patterns? Paraphrasing Searle, approximations cannot be conscious. What about self-reports, then? "In neuroscience, the ability to report is usually considered as the gold standard for assessing the presence of consciousness." Reporting on internal processes is prima facie evidence for the feeling of undergoing them. But again, this is no more a guarantee of consciousness than a Turing test, at once neglecting those systems unable to so report.

In the first paper, we made the case that computational models open consciousness to inspection where study of biological models alone cannot. We characterized these systems and their transitions in terms of predictive coding which aims at minimizing error by optimizing internal models guiding action, in biological models understood in terms of the "predictive brain." In general terms, cognition manages transitions between situations by internalizing their dynamics, modeling their likelihoods, and preparing for them accordingly with the aim being the minimization of error in this process. Tani's thesis is that, where model and reality diverge and error is not minimal, consciousness arises in the effort of minimizing the difference by modifying the contextual state that the agent extends from the past in order to return to coherence with its situation. Before proceeding to show how Tani and colleagues are able to expose these dynamics and their relation to consciousness, a brief review of the free energy principle and its role in the emergence of the phenomenon of self is required. From this review, we will be in a position to better appreciate Tani's thesis on the emergence of self and consciousness, and its implication that the free energy principle, as with activity patterns and strong integration, cannot by themselves account for consciousness.

In the second paper, we reviewed Karl Friston's "free energy principle" by which an agent aims to minimize error (or "surprise") by maximizing the likelihood of its own predictive models. This approach extends natural processes and the energetics that characterize them into the sphere of cognitive systems consistent with other theses on the nature of cognition, from Helmholtz's unconscious inference to contemporary deep learning. Friston writes that "the time-average of free energy" is simply called "action" in physics and that "the free-energy principle is nothing more than principle of least action, applied to information theory." The free-energy principle simply gathers these ideas together and summarizes their imperative in terms of minimizing free energy (or surprise) while also bringing "something else to the table . . . that action should also minimize free energy" putting researchers "in a position to consider behavior and self-organization" on the same basis.

On this account familiar by now, agents reflect the environments in terms of which they are situated, with the dynamics of the world outside reflected in the structures inside of the input-output system at the center of which is the brain. Friston's thesis is that the brain works to maximize evidence for the model of the world which it embodies by acting on that evidence and testing it(self) against the perceptual reality. In minimizing surprise, the agent maximizes model likelihood to the point where endpoints of action are fully determined. This is to raise the question of why any agent would ever leave the safety of a fully determined situation at the risk of being surprised in the transition and suffering undue allostatic load, risking complete disintegration, a question addressed in terms of the "dark room problem." Briefly, given a sufficiently complex environment, the agent ventures forth because increasing information increases control in the long run such that opportunities to explore and to exploit new information add to the value of a given situation. So as to why an agent might take risks, even seek them, it does so to maintain system integrity, so that the system does not dissipate in the face of entropic forces, and seeking—even creating—situations which best deliver security in the face of uncertainty: "the whole point of the free-energy principle is to unify all adaptive autopoietic and self-organizing behavior under one simple imperative: avoid surprises and you will last longer." Consider the free-energy principle in the context of consciousness and minimal self. In a recent review of the field, Limanowski and Blankenburg trace the "minimal self" and its characteristic sense of mineness and ownership that we found at the heart of h-consciousness in our first paper through the early phenomenology of the twentieth century and in the form of a "self-model." On this view, "the agent
is the current embodied model of the world.” And as with Merleau-Ponty’s “body-schema,” minimal selfhood and the feeling that comes with it arises as a whole, with prediction of incoming sensory input and its influence on all levels of the self-model at once. The sense of mineness is thus “always implicit in the flow of information within the hierarchical generative self-model”—echoing Friston—“experienced for actions and perceptions in the same way.” Accordingly, self is “not a static representation” but “the result of an ongoing, dynamic process” with the mineness most characteristic of consciousness “situated in a spatiotemporal reference frame where prediction introduces the temporal component of “being already familiar” with the predicted input.”

Similarly, O’Regan develops the view that feelings derive from sensorimotor interaction with the environment. So long as there is interaction, there is something that it is like to be so interacting, with consciousness arising as an agent “with a self” has “conscious access to the ongoing sensorimotor interaction.” He distinguishes three levels of self in terms of which artificial agents may be evaluated. First, the agent “distinguishes itself from the outside world.” Second, “self-knowledge” expresses “purposeful behavior, planning and even a degree of reasoning.” And, the third level is “knowledge of self-knowledge”—i.e., Goertzel’s “reflective consciousness”—heretofore a “human capability, though some primates and possibly dogs, dolphins and elephants may have it to some extent.” O’Regan is optimistic that all three levels can be instantiated in AI. The question remains, how?

On O’Regan’s analysis, self is maintained under social forces which stabilize it as a construct, existing as a convenient figment like money. On his account, without the presumed value of money, the financial economy would fail and similar would hold for society in general should the value of “I” be doubted. People traffic in selves, in identities, because without it social order would disintegrate, i.e. surprise would not be minimized:

Like the cognitive aspect of the self, the sense of “I” is a kind of abstraction that we can envisage would emerge once an agent, biological or non-biological, has sufficient cognitive capacities and is immersed in a society where such a notion would be useful.

This “I” becomes useful when it relates personal experiences with others similarly situated, trading in information about what is worth having information about through the generalization of the self. This is a long way from pattern approximation, and farther away from identifying neural correlates with consciousness and self.

O’Regan’s “I” captures the ubiquity of the self-model, but it fails to deliver just how this self-model comes to be constructed. What is missing is access to the dynamics that drive the formation of the self-model from the subjective perspective. This is because the structure of consciousness appears as only emergent phenomena. The idea is that consciousness is not a stable construct (like an “I”) but appears during periods of relative instability through the circular causality developed among subjective mind, body, and environment. This circular causality cannot be captured in neural activity patterns alone, especially where these patterns are disrupted, and it cannot be expressed in terms of integration, as it is in disintegration and reintegration that consciousness emerges. Moreover, it cannot be captured in objective descriptions of “mineness” and of ownership of agency, as it is only for the agent itself that these descriptions are ultimately significant. Finally, as we shall argue in the next section, this is why synthetic neurorobotic experiments are necessary to access the essential structure of consciousness, as they offer a privileged perspective on the development of internal dynamics that ultimately ground the generalization and self-report of experience.

Tani summarizes the findings of three neurorobotic experiments in terms of three levels of self roughly coincident with O’Regan’s, namely “minimal self, social self, and self-referential self.” The first accounts for appearances of minimal selves in a simple robot navigation experiment, the second for appearances of social selves in an imitation learning experiment between robots and human subjects, and the third for appearances of self-referential selves in a more complex skill learning experiment. The following review of these results will put us in a position to appreciate Tani’s central thesis regarding the role of criticality in the emergence of self and consciousness, as well as the importance of formal consciousness as set out in the next section.

In Experiment 1, interaction between the bottom-up pathway of perception and the top-down pathway of its prediction was mediated by internal parameters which adapted by way of prediction error. System dynamics proceeded through the incremental learning process by intermittently shifting between coherent phases with high predictability and incoherent phases with poor predictability. Recalling Heidegger’s famous analysis of the hammer as its failure reveals its unconscious yet skilled employment, consciousness arises with the minimal self as the gap is generated between top-down anticipation and bottom-up perceived reality during incoherent periods.

Interestingly in this experiment, system dynamics proceeded toward a critical state characterized by a relatively high potential for a large range of fluctuations, and so to a relatively high potential for incoherency, analogous to the self-organized criticality (SOC) of Bak et al. Tani speculated that SOC emerges when circular causality develops among neural processes as body dynamics act on the environment and then the body receives the reaction from the environment, with system level-dynamics emerging from mutual interactions between multiple local processes and the external world. During the first experiment for example, changes in visual attention dynamics due to changes in environmental predictability caused drifts in the robot’s maneuvers. These drifts resulted in misrecognition of upcoming landmarks, which led to modification of the dynamic memory stored in the RNN, affecting later environmental predictability. Dynamic interactions took place as chain reactions with certain delays among the
processes of recognition, prediction, perception, learning, and acting, reflecting the circular causality between the subjective mind and the objective world. This circular causality provides for self-organized criticality. By developing this structure, breakdown to an incoherent phase proceeds only intermittently rather than all-or-nothing (similarly, the IIT). At the same time, Tani’s thesis is that the self appears as momentary in these periods. In this way, this experiment was uniquely able to access the structure of consciousness as it affords a privileged view on the transition through meta-stable and unstable states to relatively stable states in terms of which automatic, unconscious, though perhaps skilled agency is regained.

Experiment 2 extended this research, exploring characteristics of selves in a social context through an imitation game between a humanoid robot controlled by the RNNPB and human subjects. The RNNPB is characterized by its simultaneous processes of prediction and regression.

In the middle of the mutual imitation game, analogous to Experiment 1 above, the RNNPB spontaneously shifted between coherence and incoherence. Tani and colleagues surmised that such complexity may appear at a certain critical period in the course of developmental learning processes in human subjects, when an adequate balance between predictability and unpredictability is achieved. Contrary to the image of a pinball simply following the paths of natural (nonliving) systems, human subjects may perceive robots as autonomous selves when these robots participate in interactive dynamics with criticality, as they actively self-determine possible ends and then test themselves in embodied action toward or away from them, pushing at the boundaries of the known and unknown in ways that other machines do not.

Experiment 3 addressed the problem of self-referential selves, i.e., does the robot have a sense that things might have been otherwise? Here, the RNNPB model was extended with hierarchy and as a neurorobotic arm manipulated an object, the continuous sensorimotor flow was segmented into reusable behavior primitives by stepwise shifts in the PB vector due to prediction error. Then, the higher level RNN learned to predict the sequences of behavior primitives in terms of shifts in this vector. Tani and colleagues interpreted the development of these dynamics as the process of achieving self-reference, because the sensorimotor flow is objectified into reusable units which are then manipulated in the higher level. When the sensorimotor flow is recomposed of such segments, it becomes a series of consciously describable objects rather than merely transitions between system states, a dynamic that may begin to account for how self-referential selves are constituted, such as when one takes an objective view of one’s self as one “life story” among others.

That said, such constructs arising in this hierarchical RNNPB research cannot fully account for structures of self-referential selves. They are constituted in a static way, along a one-directional bottom-up path. Incidentally, experimental results using the same model regarding online plan modulation demonstrate how genuinely self-referential selves may be constituted. These suggest that the sequencing of primitives in the higher level can become susceptible to unexpected perturbations, such as when an object is suddenly moved. Such perturbations could initiate critical situations. Due to the online nature of behavior generation, if the top-down expectations of PB values conflict with those from bottom-up regression, the PB vector can become fragmented. Even during this fragmentation, the robot continues to generate behaviors, but in an abnormal manner due to the distortion of the vector. The regression of this sort of abnormal experience causes further modulation of the current PB vector in a recursive way. During this iteration within the causal loop, the entire system may face intrinsic criticality from which a diversity of behaviors originates. And ultimately, this supports the contention that genuine constructs of self-referential selves appear with criticality through conflictive interactions in the circular causality of the top-down subjective mind and the bottom-up perceptual reality.

In summary, the three types of selves articulated above differ from each other, but more importantly they also share a similar condition of self-organized criticality that emerges in dynamic interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes. This condition cannot be accounted for by merely monotonic processes of prediction error minimization or free-energy, because such processes simply converge into equilibrium states (again, the dark room problem). Consciousness, and with it autonomy and the self cannot be explained in terms of convergent dynamics, but by ongoing open dynamics characterized by circular causality involving top-down prediction and bottom-up error regression, body dynamics acting on the environment and the reaction dynamics from the environment. Finally, in distinction from other research programs, Tani and colleagues’ synthetic neurorobotics experiments are specifically designed to articulate these dynamics in a way that amounts to formal consciousness, as set out in the following section.

Recently, Tani examined free will arising from this open structure of consciousness by extending an MTRNN model to a scenario involving incremental interactive tutoring. When taught a set of movement sequences, the robot generated various images as well as actions by spontaneously combining these sequences. As the robot generated such actions, Tani occasionally interacted with the robot in order to modify its on-going movement by grasping its hands. During these interactions, the robot would spontaneously initiate an unexpected movement which Tani identified with an expression of free will. When Tani corrected the hand movement, the robot would respond by moving in yet a different way. Because the reaction forces generated between the robot’s hands and Tani’s hands were transformed into an error signal in the MTRNN, with its internal neural state modified through the resultant error regression, novel patterns were more likely to be generated when the robot was in conflict with the perceptual reality. The enactment of such novel intentions, experienced successively, induces further modification of the memory structure grounding further intention. Intentions for a variety of novel actions can thus be generated from such memory structures. And in this way, this experiment is able to isolate those dynamics grounding the emergence of free will in a synthetic neurorobotic agent.
In brief, the picture that emerges is that of a circular causality involving (1) spontaneous generation of intentions with various proactive actional images developed from the memory structure, (2) enactment of those actional images in reality, (3) conscious experience of the outcome of the interaction, (4) incremental learning of these new experiences and the resultant reconstruction in the memory structure.\(^7\) Diverse images, actions and thoughts are potentially generated as the agent spontaneously shifts between conscious (“incoherent”) and unconscious (“coherent”) states with repeated confrontation and reconciliation between the subjective mind and the objective world. And summarily, free will as evidenced in the spontaneous generation of novel intention potentially arises as an open dynamic structure emerges through circular causality.

With this we see that self-reflective consciousness corresponding with O’Regan’s third level may arise as an agent capable of revising intentions does so in order to meet a projected future situation according to self-determined plans to achieve it, in part by modulating its own agency by adopting predetermined or more reactive determined plans to achieve it, in part by modulating its objective world. And summarily, free will as evidenced in the spontaneous generation of novel intention potentially arises as an open dynamic structure emerges through circular causality.

Our position is that self-referential selves emerge through self-organizing mechanisms involving the assembly and disassembly of sensorimotor schemata of repeated experiences, resulting in the construction of “self-models” or “body schemes” through internal dynamics.\(^8\) The ultimate question about the origins of an autonomous self becomes how subjective experience of continuous sensorimotor flow can be transformed into manipulable objects, memories and possibilities in terms of which self is both experienced and characterized. As the pure sensorimotor flow is segmented into identifiable objects, the flow in its original form becomes manipulable, and in its objectification becomes also generalized into an “I” stabilized through discourse with others similarly situated. Thus, Tani and colleagues’ synthetic neurorobots experiments have been able to isolate essential dynamics indicating self-organization through criticality to be the key mechanism driving the constitution of self-referential selves.

The preceding discussion shows that consciousness can be accessed by open dynamics where integration and breakdown are repeated during the exercise of agency in a changing world. Once again, pattern matching cannot afford such an insight, and in contrast with the IIT, consciousness appears when integrative dynamics break down. The essential structure of consciousness is the structure of autonomous agency simply put, a result that prepares us to appreciate the advance that Tani and colleagues’ synthetic neurorobots represent in terms of formal consciousness in the following section.

3. INTRODUCTION TO FORMAL CONSCIOUSNESS

What the soul nourishes by is of two types—just as what we steer by is both the hand and the rudder: the first both initiates motion and undergoes it, and the second simply undergoes it.

– Aristotle\(^9\)

Where the IIT holds that integration is essential to consciousness, with the integrative structure determining the phenomenal content of consciousness, and with “strong” integrated systems autonomous as they act and react from internally composed states and goals, Tani and colleagues’ synthetic neurorobots experiments show us how these goals are composed and why autonomy is necessary, in transitioning through critical periods toward relatively stable interactive states. This is a long way from where we began, at the door of Searle’s Chinese room. And, it is in light of this advance that we wish to distinguish between “simulations” or “approximations” of consciousness and what we call “formal consciousness” instead, specifically in order to recognize Tani and colleagues’ neurorobots as examples of the latter.

In Searle’s Chinese room, there is an implicit interpretation of how AI works, what it does and how it does it, an interpretation that doesn’t capture the essence of the neurorobots reviewed in this series of papers. His distinction between syntax and semantics is perhaps best understood to researchers in AI in terms of Steven Harnad’s famous “symbol grounding problem,”\(^{10}\) with much work in the direction of solving it since.\(^{11}\) Let’s reassess Searle’s presumptions to better locate where we currently stand in the inquiry. Instead of merely matching incoming with outgoing symbols, the model agents reviewed in this series of papers anticipate input by forming appropriate output of its own prior experience, with the difference being used to refine that capacity going forward. This involves more than “input output behavior” as each input is transformed into something with strictly internal significance before output as something else with general significance. This is to say that the model develops its own private language, a phenomenon receiving recent popular attention in the context of Al\(^{12}\) but which has been a long-standing point of interest in human beings.\(^{13}\) This private language may be represented in terms of “patterns” and “shapes” but not directly, only after having been generalized and with the loss of the uniqueness that characterizes the deepest of human memories, so-called “flashbulb” memories for example. Still, a shared metric space mediated by common external objects grounds even these uniquely self-defining
memories in similar terms for those similarly situated, thus grounding generalization to common terms and facile communication of the significance of internal states so articulated.  

However, both private language and symbol grounding in a shared object environment neglect something fundamental to the phenomena of self, consciousness, and freewill, this being “how” this private language comes about as its limited grounds are exceeded and rediscovered through intermittent phases of incoherence. This dynamic has been emphasized in the preceding review of Tani and colleagues’ neurorobotics. Their research formalizes the internal dynamics which not only facilitate translation from one grounded symbol to another, but that for example leave a human being hanging on a next word in anticipation. It is difficult to see how Searle’s argument against first person ontology in an AI holds here. And, it is equally difficult to see how discovery of neural correlates of consciousness alone should reveal this fact. It may well be that conscious systems exhibit characteristic patterns in characteristic regions, but these may be duplicated without similar experience, “true zombies.”

The models reviewed in this series of papers do not aim to duplicate neural correlates. Neither do they aim to simulate consciousness or to pass a Turing test. Rather, this research aims to isolate the essential structural dynamics in the normal operations of which certain phenomena arise. We refer to this aim as “formal” consciousness in distinction from others which aim at “reasonable approximations” evidenced in convincing behavior, for example. Specifically, we hold that three things are necessary for formal consciousness. First and foremost, there is critical reconciliation of intention with perceived reality as a system moves between relatively stable and unstable states, as discussed above. This dynamic requires second that the system develop a private language which is then generalized into common terms through third a common grounding in a shared object environment. These three factors on the one hand account for unique subjectivity arising from otherwise common dynamic structures, while at the same time account for how this subjectivity and its uniqueness may be generalized in terms significant to other agents similarly situated. For human beings, this involves internalizing natural system energetics as a shared space of action, by way of which subjectivity can be “made sense of” by other human beings who are also grounded in this same object environment. Note that this requirement is embodied in human beings as a product of evolution, and is captured by the FEP in current formal models which—in formal consciousness—stands in for the material component of biological consciousness, in this way opening the door to “making sense of” the experience of synthetic neurorobots in similar terms.

Formal consciousness represents the structural dynamics essential to consciousness, while simulated consciousness and reasonable approximations of behavior in Turing test capable so-called “general” AI need not. Here again, we may stress the point made in the first paper—this is a level of resolution that is inaccessible through study of biological consciousness—with the further caveat that not all synthetic models afford such insight, either. Only those designed to do so are able, instances of formal consciousness rather than something bent to a different end.

4. MOST- AND MYTH-CONSCIOUSNESS
There is an originating and all-comprehending (principle) in my words, and an authoritative law for the things (which I enforce). It is because they do not know these, that men do not know me.

– Tao te Ching, chapter 70, passage 2

Finally, we conclude with a short note on most- and myth-consciousness. Space forbids full exploration of this distinction, and in order to emphasize the role of criticality and incoherence in revealing the essential structure of consciousness, the following focuses on the promise for the current approach to formalize even the highest levels of human consciousness by way of dynamics common to the most basic.

There is precedent for distinction between levels of consciousness. For example, Gallagher distinguishes between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness in terms of minimal and “narrative” self. Roughly in the first, an agent is aware of what it is undergoing, and in the second it recognizes such as episodic within the context of a “life story.” The first is immediate though with an implicit sense of ownership, the “mineness” of h-consciousness as discussed in our first paper. The second is temporally extended, with episodes composed into stories that human beings tell about themselves and that come to define the self as fundamentally narrative in the strongest theories of narrative self. These can be mapped onto most- and myth-consciousness, with differences serving to clarify the point of the present distinction.

Most-consciousness corresponds with what IIT describes as the integration across differentiable system states, as in before and after the lights are turned on in a room. The felt difference between the two situations reveals the room. In so far as action proceeds according to expectation, there may be little in the sense of most-consciousness as in Tani’s favorite example, making coffee without awareness of the process until after completion, when sitting with hot cup in hand reflecting on one’s own apparent zombie-like activity and perhaps without capacity to self-report on the series of movements in between beyond prior generalization. This position is in concert with the phenomenological grounds of Gallagher’s (2000) account of pre-reflective consciousness and its contrast with higher-order theories of consciousness on which consciousness arises with higher-order objectification of pre-reflective experience. In terms of the neurorobots discussed in this series of papers, most-consciousness presents in the incoherence between predicted and perceived reality, for example when spilling the milk or dropping the spoon along the way, and includes the objectification of the movement that led to the mistake.

Most consciousness accounts for much, but it is not complete. To completely describe the feeling of what it is to be a self in a maximal sense, rather than in a minimal sense, we must describe what it feels like to generalize.
the entire self, and not just one part and its possible actions. Gallagher attends to a similar phenomenon in the condition of “being a novelist” which on his essay involves “an enhanced ability for creating/entering into multiple realities and staying there longer and more consistently ... without intersubjective support ... short of dysfunction or delusion.” The novelist must create not only distinct narratives in the form of realistic life stories but also the coherent space of their interaction towards, ideally, some meaningful resolution. Myth-consciousness corresponds with this capacity, a sort of meta-narrative capacity that—on the present view—may be consequent on the experience of self-alienating criticality, an experience of a distance from one’s own self-situation affording the experience of one’s own entire self-situation as an object, and with this other self-situations as wholes similarly.

What may cause such deep criticality in a system that its subjective entirety may be taken as an object amongst others? We have introduced one possibility in the example of Aaron Applefield as discussed by Thomas Fuchs (2017) in the first paper. Trauma cementing memory “in the bones” in conflict with current perceptual reality may sustain the subject in the immersion in a perceptual reality that demands the “decoupling of conflict monitoring and executive control functions” which Gallagher proposes in novelists but that also confounds the “ability to re-connect and use executive control to come back to the default, everyday reality.” Such experience is also recognizable in the felt difference between one’s present situation and that in which there is no self so situated at all, angst, and which Victor Frankl (1985) understood contributes to the formation of purpose making the life of action as a whole meaningful. Myth-consciousness thus corresponds with what Gallagher discusses in terms of “delusion” and “dysfunction” understood as the normal function of a being aiming for coherence with an otherwise critically unstable situation, thereby discovering and indeed becoming the self-model of an underlying order that makes the transition to a relatively stable state, and the retention of personal integrity—even personal redemption—possible.

Our position is that the neurorobotic experiments reviewed in this series of papers formalize most-consciousness, and have not been designed for myth-consciousness, but are potentially myth-conscious. Currently, system criticality arises only at the moment of state instability and extends only to those local dimensions. However, myth-consciousness may be investigated through similar dynamics in an agent exposed to the necessary perceptual reality during sufficient personal development, e.g. human neoteny. Other approaches to artificial intelligence which focus on reproducing stable activity patterns for example cannot result in something like myth-consciousness, but it is a potential for synthetic neurorobotics as pursued by Tani and colleagues as an aspect of future research.

5. CONCLUSION

If you have your why? for life, then you can get along with almost any how?

— Nietzsche

This series of papers made the case for formal consciousness in a family of neurorobots isolating dynamics essential to consciousness independent of neural correlates. It began with naturalistic nonreductionism and with consciousness in biological agents, resolving consciousness at the level of situated system open to the complex world, centering on the thesis that consciousness is a consequence of agential systems situated at the cusp of criticality, arising not in routine execution but in surprising failure to continue in perfect coherence with the world and thereby finding themselves out of place within it.

Tani and colleagues’ synthetic neurorobots afford insight into the essence of consciousness where other systems cannot. They articulate the essence of free agency where other systems articulate something else to some other end. Finally, we may ask what it is that keeps us from understanding that consciousness inheres in such an artifact by design, even when confronted with products of consciousness at every turn? What is it that stops us from recognizing consciousness in an appropriately designed model intelligence, much as we recognize chairness in a chair, or computation in a computer? We answer that it is only our incapacity to recognize the origin of such phenomena in ourselves, in the reconciliation of the subjective with the objective world. As we reflexively aim for the restoration of stable coherency where otherwise there is only suffering, uncertainty, and the piercing awareness of it all, we retreat from conflict and away from the very object of our inquiry, away from consciousness itself. Without the courage to meet this struggle with a steady gaze, even with a machine articulating the truth of the matter, we fail to see it for what it is, formally conscious.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper, as the others before, has greatly benefited from Peter Boltuc’s generous and insightful editing, as well as from his patient assistance alongside that of the staff responsible for producing this newsletter. The authors are deeply grateful to these people for their hard work, as well as for the guidance offered by anonymous reviewers in developing this series of papers. Thank you, all.

NOTES

6. Exactly the sort of system that demands a Turing test.
8. Ibid., 577.
9. Ibid., 568–69.
10. Searle points to Crick and Koch (“Consciousness and Neuroscience”) and the notion that the neural correlates for all senses—the varied “building blocks of microconsciousness”—are integrated into “any conscious field” and that a science of consciousness starts by isolating these and working up (Searle, “Consciousness,” 570; see also Crick and Koch, “Constraints on Cortical and Thalamic Projections: The No-Strong-Loops Hypothesis”). Compare with Driver and Spence: “subjective experience within one modality can be dramatically affected by stimulation within another” relative to “the presence of feedback pathways from convergence zones” such that “brain areas.
traditionally considered as 'unimodal', may only be so in terms of their afferent projections" together producing a multimodally
determined percept which nevertheless has the unimodal qualia
associated with the activation of brain areas receiving afferent
input from only one primary modality" ("Multisensory Perception:
Beyond Modularity and Convergence," R734).

11. The notion of a unified field has deep roots in cognitive science.
Consider, for example, Kurt Lewin's topological psychology
(Principles of Topological Psychology), Heckhausen and
Heckhausen's (Motivation and Action) account of motivational
development, and Gallese's ("The Roots of Empathy: The Shared
Manifold Hypothesis and the Neural Basis of Intersubjectivity")
account of shared experience between similarly embodied
agents via mirror neural activity in terms of a "shared embodiment."

12. Searle "Consciousness?", 574.

13. Llinas et al. ("The Neuronal Basis for Consciousness") and Tononi,
Edelman, and Sporns ("Complexity and Coherence: Integrating
Information in the Brain"). See, for example, Oizumi et al., "From
the Phenomenology to the Mechanisms of Consciousness:
Integrative Information Theory 3.0," pp. 19–20, for a more recent
explication of this position.

14. Tononi, "Consciousness as Integrative Information: A Provisional
Manifesto," 239–40. There being no requirement for any
exchange with the external world, either. Compare Howry, The
Predictive Mind.

15. Tononi and Koch, "Consciousness: Here, There and Everywhere?"
13.


17. Oizumi et al., "From the Phenomenology to the Mechanisms of


19. Ibid.

20. Tononi and Koch, "Consciousness: Here, There and Everywhere?"

21. Goertzel, "Hyperset Models of Self, Will, and Reflective
Consciousness," 51.

22. Uddin et al., "Functional Connectivity of Default Mode Network
Components: Correlation, Anticorrelation, and Causality," for
review. The first paper in this series emphasized the specific
yet integral roles of various neural regions including the vmPFC in
establishing a sense of a future into which an agent is more
or less invested, and here we may emphasize also the role of
this node in cognizing the activity of others in prospection as
well as the internal simulation of experience, autobiographical
remembering, and theory-of-mind reasoning (cf. Spreng & Grady,
"Patterns of Brain Activity Supporting Autobiographical Memory,
Prospection, and Theory of Mind, and Their Relationship to the
Default Mode Network").

23. Heine et al., "Resting State Networks and Consciousness:
Alterations of Multiple Resting State Network Connectivity in
Physiological, Pharmacological, and Pathological Consciousness
States." 52

24. Oizumi et al., "From the Phenomenology to the Mechanisms of

25. Ibid., 22.

26. Ibid., 21.

27. Tononi and Koch, "Consciousness: Here, There and Everywhere?",
13.

28. Tani, "The Dynamical Systems Accounts for Phenomenology of
Immanent Time: An Interpretation by Revisiting a Robotics
Synthetic Study," 421.

29. Ibid., 421.

30. Ibid.

31. As does O'Regan, "How to Build a Robot that Is Conscious and
Feels"; see the next section of this paper for discussion.

32. Barandiaran, Di Paolo, and Rohde, "Defining Agency, Individuality,
Normativity, Asymmetry, and Spatio-Temporality in Action."

58. Murata et al., "Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others: A Neuro-Robotics Experiment."


60. Harnad, "The Symbol Grounding Problem"; see also Harnad, "Can a Machine Be Conscious? How?"

61. For example, Dennett, "Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds." See also Stuart, 2010, for review.


63. Kultgen, "Can There Be a Public Language?"

64. On the current view, the function of the brain is as an extension of embodied cognitive agency, itself a special instance of physical systems. There is a syntax to the universe that prefigures human evaluation and ultimately grounds human semantics. Symbols are grounded more deeply than in an agent's object level interactions with the world. They are grounded in the way that these objects and the world itself works. Human semantics derive from this natural syntax, as agents internalize external dynamics in order to become the self-model that most assuredly retains integrity in the face of dissipative forces. In the models reviewed in this series of papers, this material ground is articulated in the free energy principle. In human beings, it is a matter of material embodiment.


66. It is interesting to note the use of physical language to describe internal states, for example, in Lee and Schnall, "The Influence of Social Power on Weight Perception."


68. Gallagher, "Phenomenological Approaches to Consciousness," 693.

69. Gallagher, "Why We Are Not All Novelist," 141, discussion beginning page 139.

70. Ibid., 139.


72. Nietzsche and Large, Twilight of the Idols, 6.

REFERENCES


**INTERVIEW**

**Cognitive Engines Contemplating Themselves: A Conversation with S. L. Thaler**

**Stephen L. Thaler**  
**IMAGINATION ENGINES INC., ST. LOUIS**

**Kristen Zbikowski**  
**HIBBING COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**BACKGROUND**

For the past thirty years, Stephen Thaler’s work has been in the development of artificial neural networks (ANN). A major focus of his work has been to find a way to develop creativity within computers in a way that was more organic than the human-coded algorithms and rule sets used with sequential processing systems.

Thaler works with both less complex ANNs and the more sophisticated “Creativity Machines” (CM). ANNs are typically “single shot” in that a pattern propagates from inputs to outputs somewhat like a spinal cord reflex. They crudely model perception. Made recurrent they may serve as associative memories. In contrast, CMs are composed of multiple ANNs, contemplatively banging around potential ideas until an appropriate one is found.

**Creativity Machines** function via a process involving the interaction between two different types of neural networks, imagitrons and perceptrons. The imagitrons consist of internally perturbed ANNs that harness disturbances to their neurons and connections to create variations on stored memory patterns, generating potential solutions to posed problems. Once detected by unperturbed ANNs, the perceptrons, these solutions are reinforced as memories that can later be elicited by exciting or “perturbing” the imagitron at moderate levels.

The result of this process is that the imagitrons within CMs generate a succession of ideas making them functionally contemplative rather than reflexive. A self-monitoring aspect then comes from perceptrons “watching” this succession and selecting the most appropriate of these ideas. There are many internal processes involved, including the selective reinforcement of those notions having novelty, utility, or value.

The level of perturbation-induced stress to the system affects the type of “recall” the system produces. The more intense these disturbances within the system, the greater the error in reconstructing its stored memories, leading to false memories or confabulations. Too much stress causes the ANNs to produce too great a variation on reality and an eventual cessation of turnover of such candidate ideas. However, Thaler could adjust the stress level within the system to generate confabulations that were sufficiently novel and plausible enough to qualify as viable ideas. Even better, he could let other neural nets determine the novelty,
utility, and/or value of these ideas, using that information in
turn to meter overall perturbation level in the imagitrons to
generate novel yet plausible concepts, without any human
intervention.

There are clear parallels to biological problem-solving in
Thaler’s work. We are not always driven to find creative
solutions to problems unless there is some environmental
or personal stress that drives us. Solutions are only useful if
they fall within the realm of the practical and are plausible
variants of our current reality. However, there also seems
to be an upper limit to the amount of stress under which
biological organisms can function well, too much of it and
the individual becomes overwhelmed and non-functional.

Thaler’s work suggests that there are many functional
parallels between the processes and results of artificial
neural architectures and biological systems, and we may
better understand the phenomena of consciousness,
mental illness, and creativity by examining their behaviors.
We may also find insights which lead us into a different
understanding of cognitive processes, their origins and
limits.

As I read through several of Stephen Thaler’s articles on
contemplative artificial neural networks, I struggled to
understand some of the technical details of Thaler’s work,
and therefore missed the implications entailed. Happily, I
had the opportunity to correspond with Steve, and ask him
some questions about his work and the conclusions he has
reached about it. This paper is a summary of some of the
more interesting points of discussion.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THALER’S WORK
IN ARTIFICIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The functioning of Thaler’s Creativity Machines involves an
ongoing two stage process in which the imagitron networks
first generate outputs that the perceptron networks then
evaluate. This type of self-monitoring is analogous to that
found in human cognition. We have experiences and
thoughts that are both internally generated and evaluated.
Can the problem of consciousness perhaps be resolved
using this model? I asked Steve for his thoughts on this.

KRISTEN: Is the main argument in your 2012 paper, The
Creativity Machine Paradigm: Withstanding the Argument
from Consciousness, that because of the similarities
in functioning between your patented artificial neural
systems, and human brains, you have been able to come
to a new theory of what h-consciousness is, and how it is
generated?

STEVE: My 2012 APA paper was in defense of Turing’s
thesis that machines could be humanly intelligent. It
concentrated on perceptron-imagitron pairs (i.e., Creativity
Machines) to provide models for how both creativity and
consciousness could be implemented on computers. The issue of h-consciousness arose in this context, in
describing how artificial neural systems could develop a
subjective, individualized feel about what its imagitrons
were thinking.

In that paper, I reiterated what I have written for decades,
that the subjective feel of consciousness results from
the associative chaining of relevant intact and degraded
memories. As these associative gestalt chains form, an
attentional spotlight sequentially examines them in the
same way our brains relive past, related experience. In
the brain, if such attention falls on ideas or ideational
sequences having threatening existential significance,
sundry associative chains encoding fear and dread (e.g.,
homelessness, illness, and death) will form in response.
Specialized colonies of neurons within these emotional
chains may, for instance, release the neurotransmitters
and neuro-hormones associated with fight-or-flight
response, either heightening cognitive turnover to produce
alternative ideas, or freezing neural turnover to allow the
episodic reinforcement of the precipitating ideational
chain along with the accompanying emotions. Similarly, if
the ideas expressed in these associative chains potentially
mitigate a challenge dealt by the environment, other
neurotransmitters neutralize those associated with stress,
thus tranquilizing the neural system so that it may reinforce
such ideas and emotions into memories.

In Creativity Machines, the same effect may be
achieved by flooding their artificial neural nets with
mathematical disturbances that are diffusing like
stress-related neurotransmitter molecules. Such stress
may be counteracted with the equivalent of reward
neurotransmitters that trigger even more associative
gestalts encoding a feeling of success (e.g., memories of
rainbows, Christmas presents, and sunny days).

KRISTEN: What you’re saying here is that machines are
much farther along the road to human-like cognition
and experiences than most people would suspect? If
machines can perceive, remember, recall memories,
monitor their recall and internal processes, and have
subjective experience, then what about the “hard problem
of consciousness” or “h-consciousness?”

STEVE: In a sense, I think you’ve answered your own
question, Kristen. Subjective experience stems from
associative chaining of memories among sundry neural
modules that then lead to the wholesale secretion of
neurotransmitters to produce gut-level feelings and
associated somatic effects. So, artificial neural systems
may have an emotional response not only to things in the
external world, but to internally generated ideas.

Although we may come to a generalized model of
h-consciousness, it does not describe in idiosyncratic
detail the processes within any given brain. In a general sense,
though, memories and confabulations chain to express
both concepts and the affective responses to them, with
communication between the networks highly encrypted.
That’s why we cannot eavesdrop on this dialog, because
the “public decryption key,” if you will, is based upon
decades of mutual interaction and learning between neural
nets, making the first-person experience unknowable to
an outsider. Even the introduction of a synaptic bridge
between two brains would be futile in allowing either to
appreciate the other’s first-person perspective because: (1)
They would interpret each other’s thoughts based upon their
own idiosyncratic experience; and (2) They would perturb the very neurobiology they were monitoring in a manner reminiscent of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle.

KIRSTEN: This would explain the process that results in a privileged access of machine consciousness paralleling that of human or animal cognition and experience.

STEVE: Yes. You and I represent two neural systems communicating via some relatively small number of channels (i.e., sight and sound). If we knew each other on a day-to-day basis, we could look at the same objects and scenarios and learn to intuitively anticipate one another’s thoughts. That would be our own mutual, albeit limited, privileged access.

The same process occurs between different portions of the brain, with oh so many more communication channels.

KIRSTEN: This adds in the subjectivity of biologically produced thought as well. In some ways, the world is always “the world as I see it, or the world as I believe it to be.” How strange to think that this same subjectivity would apply to artificial intelligence as well.

STEVE: Actually, I don’t think it that strange. In the brain, the utility or value of anything cannot be calculated by objective numerical values. That would take far more than the 100 billion or so neurons of the brain and require prohibitively long periods of training. So, instead, human neurobiology computes a subjective response by imagining how the world could unfold as the result of any perceived event or internally generated idea, essentially a chain of true and false memories that are unique to the individual. Some of the neural nets containing the more existentially important of these memories serve as triggers for generalized neurotransmitter release (e.g., adrenaline or dopamine surges) that in turn produce other feelings that cannot be expressed via natural language.

In machine intelligence, we inevitably face the same limitations, especially regarding the total number of processors and connections. Note however that machines will not have the same subjective experience as humans, since their experiences with the world are very different.

KIRSTEN: Does any psychological research support your idea that it is when a biological creature is stressed that it is most capable of creative thought? (Is this trait the result of evolution?)

STEVE: Probably the best evidence has come from my own cognitive research in which I present human volunteers with cognitive tasks of varying difficulty. As would be expected, the more challenging creative tasks result in a slower and more sporadic delivery of ideas. Of course, common sense and high-level psychology would dictate that such a tentative ideational rhythm stems from the inherent difficulty of a cognitive task. In contrast, my CM-based models demonstrate that up to a limit, novelty of thought increases with global neurotransmitter levels. Generated by the formation of positive or negative associative gestalts, such excess neurotransmitters are the manifestations of stress within the brain, originating from scenarios ranging from existential threats to minor challenges to pride.

Beyond my own investigations, I vaguely remember reading research in the popular press in the mid 70s, claiming that so-called “risk exercise” (e.g., contact sports, skydiving, horseback riding, etc.) seemed to stimulate creativity. Whereas the ability to take risks is attributed to more creative individuals, I see the dousing of cortex by molecular species like adrenaline as a major cause of original thought. Since the 70s, I’ve seen ample literature that advocates regular exercise to stimulate creativity, fitting in beautifully with my theory, since one’s vigorous exertions would produce associative chains that include thoughts of aggression, as in the context of mortal battle or contact sports, or standing one’s ground and/or fleeing danger. I don’t care where these chains start, but they do inevitably contain the neural “trip points” that trigger a deluge of stress-related neurotransmitters within cortical networks.

And yes, this trait is the result of evolution. Problem solving needs to take place when the organism is challenged or stressed, otherwise it ultimately receives the “Darwin Award.”

KIRSTEN: But environmental stress wouldn’t be the only trigger of creativity would it? Couldn’t the process be internally triggered by emotional stress, or hormonal changes, or some kind of cognitive process?

STEVE: You’re correct, and I suspect that such stress can be subdivided into “stimulated” and “spontaneous” categories. The emotional stress can be externally generated by events in the external environment such as work pressures (i.e., stimulated) or driven by internally generated scenarios such as nightmares (i.e., spontaneous) resulting from pattern completion upon synaptic noise. Hormonal changes would fall into the latter spontaneous category.

Note that in my model of mind, the stress amounts to an excess of excitatory or inhibitory neurotransmitters and/or neuro-hormones. So, I’m talking strictly about the physical and chemical events that may or may not have an environmental cause.

KIRSTEN: Some of your work suggests that consciousness may not be limited to biological beings, but rather exist in ways and places that might surprise us. Could you tell me more about this and how it could be possible?

STEVE: Without launching into a long dissertation, Creativity Machines consist of energetically stimulated neural nets that generate streams of activation patterns consisting of both true and false memories, as other neural nets seize upon those activation patterns and sequences having novelty, utility, or value. Note that in the physical, non-biological universe, many things act like neurons, switching between states due to inputs from other such switching elements. Connections are implemented via physical forces.

So, consider two regions of space (or even space-time) consisting of such switching elements, exchanging patterns between one another and nudging each other via energetic
fluctuations. In my mind, these strictly inorganic systems are thinking and developing the equivalent of a first-person perspective of themselves. Yes, most would belittle the mere activation patterns being exchanged between regions of space-time, as just mathematically expressed patterns, but to me they are ideas. Thinking otherwise, at least to me, is a form of prejudice against what is the most plausible form of spirituality one can imagine, cosmic consciousness, the very template from which biological consciousness may have arisen."

KRISTEN: This view of consciousness is radically different from the ordinary view that consciousness is mysterious, bound up with “personhood” and strictly limited to certain types of intelligent biological organisms. It seems, though, that if we can think of consciousness as a process, or in terms of functions, then once one recognizes those patterns in one type of non-biological entity, it is not such a leap to consider that consciousness might not only be a biological phenomenon.

One other thing that stuck me, as I read your work was the individual and subjective perspective in workings of the brain or ANN. This subjectivity seems to crystallize in the statement: "That radical view stemmed from my own epistemology that doesn’t recognize truth or definition.”

Does this mean that you focus on “what works consistently” and “what doesn’t work consistently” rather than “what is true or false”? Or is it more of an acknowledgment of the subjectivity of understanding?

STEVE: In my model of mind, there are only associative chains that typically close on themselves to form the equivalent of circular definitions. So, we never know what something is, only what it’s like. Over time, what we call “truth” consists of the more reinforced or habituated of these gestalt chains. So, rather than express an absolute reality, these sequences of tokenized reality capture only snippets of the world that either have pragmatic relevance to the host organism, or are the most repetitive. Furthermore, such consequence chains are finite in extent, so whatever “truth” has heretofore nucleated within the brain, the full range of its repercussions, including its potential negation, have yet to activate.

As a scientist, I only acknowledge self-consistency and speak tongue-in-cheek of “truth.” My hero in this regard was Feyerbend who spoke of scientific theories as useful myths that have proven predictive value. So, I’m agreeing with Feyerabend from the perspective of neurophilosophy.

KRISTEN: I see a little Bergson here, too.

STEVE: . . . and maybe not. I’m not glorifying subjectivity. Instead I’m showing the limitations of the human mind, which on rare occasions generates highly novel and accurate predictive models of the world (e.g., Einstein).

CREATIVITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS
In Thaler’s artificial neural architectures, creative confabulations arise primarily when these systems are stressed via mathematical disturbances selectively applied to just the connections and processing elements of imagitrons, and not those of the perceptrons. In the brain, however, there are no barriers between generative and evaluating neural nets, so disturbances are indiscriminately applied to both types of nets. The problem is that generative nets perform well when internally perturbed, but the critic nets malfunction under these conditions, producing incorrect assessments of the generated ideas. On the other hand, in the absence of perturbation, the critics are more accurate, but the generative nets produce unoriginal ideas. So, the brain must toggle between these two noise extremes, with imagitrons incubating ideas during heightened perturbation, and their evaluation performed by perceptrons during calmer phases.

But the interesting part of this cycling process is that the stress the brain is under affects it globally rather than locally. This may lead to sweeping conceptual changes within it that alter underlying assumptions and beliefs.

KRISTEN: Could you explain how the creative cycles you observe within your ANN may translate to biological brains and behavior—and what we might label “mental illness?”

STEVE: I probably need a good twenty pages to respond to this question, but here’s a summary. Ideas form as well-habituated primitive concepts stored within neural nets chain together via synaptic connections and then blend. Likewise, the predicted consequences and emotional response take the form of associative chains linked by synaptic connections. Too few synaptic perturbations (i.e., neurotransmitters) and there is little turnover of ideational chains and the system is cognitively dysfunctional. Too many synaptic perturbations and the turnover of response chains is significantly slowed or stalled, leading to a similar cognitive paralysis. The implication is that there is a “Goldilocks zone” in synaptic perturbation wherein ideas are just “twisted” and plentiful enough to produce plausible ideas and the response chains, or perceptions of such candidate ideas are still accurate enough to accurately predict the consequences of said ideational chains. It is within this narrow window of synaptic perturbation that subliminally formed ideas are recognized for their merit by an intact perceptual system.

You ask what is “mental illness?” At first, I am inundated with my own associative gestalts, images of people in straightjackets, padded cells, imaginary six-foot-tall rabbits, and electro-convulsive therapy. I think that similar associative gestalts have become the definition through cultural repetition.

Then, as has become the norm, a more comprehensive fiction emerges, typically mathematical in nature, namely that our brains naturally oscillate between function and dysfunction due to tidal variations in volume neurotransmitter level. Between these extremes, the brain selects from ideas born cumulatively over multiple cycles of this kind.

In the end, it is the less creative among us who bureaucratically define insanity and reinforce that definition by fiat. In effect those among us who attempt to “fly” are typically fingered by the pedestrians among us.
KRISTEN: Are you saying, then, that the boundaries between “normal” and “mentally ill” are more a matter of social convention than scientific designation?

STEVE: We are at the mercy of society when it comes to a definition of mental illness, and you know by now what I think of definitions. From a pragmatic perspective, I see value in making the dysfunctional functional, but then we face the dilemma of encouraging and enabling disruptive individuals and ideologies that make the rest of us crazy, leading me to conclude that it’s all a zero-sum game.

By extension, we need to ask whether societies can themselves become mentally ill. After all, we are immersed in a swarm of neural network-based brains joined by chaotic connections. In the end, we collectively invent mental status to individuals in the same way the brain invents significance to the sum of its internal physical and chemical events (i.e., consciousness). Oftentimes, I believe, that such collective consciousness, does immense harm to individuals, often leading to the misdiagnosis of creative genius as insanity or even criminality. In the most extreme of these cases, there is a persecution of the creative by what I would call the rigid, anal types that live their lives on the straight and narrow course, never achieving anything more than reproductive success.

So, boiling down your question to the very faulty natural language, yes, it’s largely social convention behind the classification of “normal” and “mentally ill,” bolstered by what many in my field of artificial neural nets call “folk psychology.”

KRISTEN: I remember reading in one of your articles, or perhaps it was in an earlier conversation, the idea that some mental deterioration or a perspective shift away from “normal” might be the result of the global effects of cycles of stress on the brain. Would you mind clarifying that please?

STEVE: In a nutshell, we all live in a competitive and stressful environment, with the primary stressors being caused by other competing individuals. Thus, we are always creatively scheming to achieve success, and according to the neurobiological model embodied in the Creativity Machine paradigm, excess neurotransmitters such as adrenaline and noradrenaline must be secreted within the brain to warp existing memories into new ideas. In so doing, the perceptual components of the brain become incapacitated. As this mind-warping occurs, the ideational component becomes attention deficit and subject to hallucination.

The perceptual component becomes stuck in an incorrect interpretation of these ideations, preventing the brain from performing the needed hypothesis testing to separate fact from fantasy. In effect, it’s the perfect neurobiological storm wherein we give ourselves a “mental hernia” (a.k.a., mental illness).

So, in answer to your question, over successive cycles of associative chaining, twisted ideations or perceptions can strengthen and habituate to cause lasting dysfunctionality.

KRISTEN: This answer brings to mind post-traumatic stress syndrome and the more intractable complex PTSD which the American Psychological Association’s redesignated from “anxiety disorders” into a new category of “trauma and stress disorders” in the DSM V. Exposure to both acute stress, or certain types of chronic stressors can cause individuals to experience a wide range of harmful physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms, which in turn greatly affect quality of life, interpersonal relationships, as well as learning and attention.

Your explanation of the global effects of repeated cycles of excess neurotransmitters on the brain seems to predict or parallel PTSD. Are there any clues in your Creativity Machine paradigm for how such changes might be reversed?

STEVE: In the model I have offered, PTSD is more a manifestation of the associative gestalt chains that have cumulatively formed within cortex, either due to one or more traumatic episodes, or stressors applied over long periods. All I can say here is that the best perturbative regimes for altering such chains are either during synaptic calm, during which the brain may cumulatively rewire itself, or during intense adrenaline surges when new episodic learning may create selective amnesia of older trauma experiences, replacing them with new sensations and feelings.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

KRISTEN: After the research and discussion of Steve’s work, I am left with a different set of questions and possibilities in my personal theory of mind than I started with. The parallels between the functioning of Creativity Machines and biological brains are clear. The CMs have the elements of cognition that biological brains do, perception, memory, awareness, recall, self-monitoring of recall and internal process, and most importantly, creativity. It appears that two very important qualities of biological consciousness—subjectivity, and privileged access, may likewise be emulated through this same paradigm, leaving us to ponder the “hard problem of consciousness” through this same theoretical framework.

NOTES

1. This dialogue began through a course on “Philosophy and Computers” and continued beyond the classroom. Thank you to Peter Boltuc and Stephen Thaler for all their help and assistance with this project. Thank you as well to Mark Jordan, Adrienne Bowen, Jessica Downs, and Yuji Kosugi for your help in understanding this material.


is it rather hot!
can I open the window?

Are you crazy?
it is ghastly cold here!

It is fine!

What is temperature?
Is it mental?
or physical?

Can we set aside the contrast between subjective and objective?
I know, I know, since Descartes we are used to think that there are objective physical properties and subjective mental ones!

Two is better!

Oh please Rene!!!

Yet, are they really so special or are they just one option among many others?

After all, this is just a handy causal relation!

In this spirit, as of XVII century, savants have singled out so called objective physical properties!

I built the first thermometer!

Oh please Rene!!!

So we got used to think that what we perceive is subjective

Alleged objective absolute property

HOT!

Cold!

Fine!

74!

In fact, the so-called objective properties have been selected only because the tool to pick them up can be easily replicated in a standardized way. I can easily duplicate a mercury thermometer and each replica will single out the same property!

Am I a thermometer?

Hei! Wait a minute! Is there really difference a mercury and, say, organism, after all, another system?

I built the first thermometer!

Ole Christensen Romer, 1701

COLD!

Fine!

74!

Same relative property!
OTHER SYSTEMS ARE NOT DIFFERENT FROM THE TERMOMETER, ONLY THEY ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO REPLICATE!

STANDARD TEMPERATURE IS NOT MORE OBJECTIVE, IS JUST EASIER TO OBTAIN

Each system picks up its own preferred temperature

TChube Trick Teve Tom T1 T2

Standard temperature is not more objective, is just easier to obtain.

Each system singles out its own relative physical properties. There are no more subjective mental properties. Everything is external!

Subjective and objective properties are just relative properties that were erroneously taken to be separate.

We can finally unmask the subjective and the objective as nothing but relative properties of different practical use.

We can thus pull back from the mind all subjective properties and place them back in the world! in the physical world!
NOPE! AS EVERY SCHOOLBOY KNOWS, VELOCITY IS ALWAYS RELATIVE! IN THIS CASE, IT IS RELATIVE TO THE GROUND!

WAIT A SEC! ISN’T THE WORLD MADE OF ABSOLUTE PROPERTIES THAT DO NOT DEPEND ON THE OBSERVER? FOR INSTANCE, AM I NOT MOVING AT FANTASTIC SPEED RIGHT NOW?

THE FACT IS WELL KNOWN BUT IT IS ALWAYS AMAZING. THE SAME OBJECT, THIS CANNONBALL, HAS MULTIPLE VELOCITIES AT THE SAME TIME!

EACH VELOCITY IS RELATIVE TO ANOTHER OBJECT AND EACH VELOCITY IS AS PHYSICAL AS EVERYTHING ELSE! ALL PHYSICAL PROPERTIES ARE LIKE TEMPERATURE AND VELOCITY! RELATIVE AND PHYSICAL!
What about size? Surely size is not relative! Isn’t it?

Size does matter!

Are you sure?

Size too is relative! It depends on the distance of the observer!

You are bigger from here!

Relative to the fly’s position, I am not that big!

Strange as it seems, faraway objects are smaller relative to a given object!

They look smaller because they are (relatively) smaller! Just like speed!

Alleged absolute size is nothing but relative size, relative to an object at zero distance, as when you can touch something.

Am I not bigger?

Ahem... from here yes!

Position too is relative! I am upright!

I am upright too!
Color too is relative! Depending on one’s receptors, distance, visual acuity!

The board is neither checkered nor colored. The board is whatever the board do relative to another system.

Each organism, which is a different body, singles out different relative properties. Such properties are neither mental nor subjective, they are physical and external as everything else! There is no objective color!

It happens with time too! Imagine two lights switching on and off alternatively. Depending on where one is located in space, the lights will either flash together or not!

This is not idealism! Everything is physical. Existence is not relative to a subject!

Existence is relative to the subject’s body, which is a physical entity! This is object relativism!

Temporal sequence at zero distance

Relative patterns in different positions

Objects too are relative! A wonderful yet familiar example is the rainbow! There is not one rainbow! There are as many rainbows as there are observers! No matter of what kind!
existence is relative and relation is causation among the gazillions of relative properties, scientists selected a few of them because they were easier to pick out! not because they were objective!

historically, the human body has been the implicit reference frame for an alleged absolute physical world.

we mistook the world that is relative to average human bodies and their preferred tools for the real world.

this is not the case!

yes! i said something similar in 360 bc!

a relative and causal notion of existence is not completely original, i must admit!

the unnamed stranger from elea!

"A thing genuinely is if it has some capacity either to act on another thing or to be acted on. What marks off the things that are as being is nothing other than capacity."

7

among the gazillions of relative properties, scientists selected a few of them because they were easier to pick out! not because they were objective!

the standard physical world is only a subset of a broader collection of relative properties. everything is relative.

on the contrary, such a world is just a subset of a wider world of relative properties that we reach in our everyday life due to the unique differences among bodies.

yet, everything is physical!

existence is utterly relative!
reality exists only relative to something else. In our case, it exists relative to our body. For instance, when I turn around my body changes and it brings into existence a different reality.

What about the traditional question: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? The sound too is a relative object and thus, to take place, requires a hearing system. Not a mind, but a proper additional object!

Any sound?

The bottom line is that everything exists relative to other things. In this way, idealism is dodged and we have a completely relational account of reality. Reality is no longer split in a subjective and objective side. The physical is relative ... and relative here means causally active. A relation is nothing but a causal process.

We can also overcome the traditional naive materialism that has conceived physical entities as though they were absolute and autonomous.

Reality is relative! But physical nonetheless.
FROM THE EDITORS
Stephen C. Ferguson II  
NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY
Dwayne Tunstall  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

We would like to begin this issue of the newsletter with a statement of support for Tommy J. Curry, professor of Philosophy and Africana Studies at Texas A&M University. In an American Conservative column published online on May 8, 2017, entitled “When Is It OK to Kill White?,” Rob Dreher misinterpreted some of the remarks Curry made on the podcast of a segment he did on the Redding News Review radio show nearly five years ago. Rather than report that Curry’s discussion of the film Django Unchained was a segue into his criticisms of (1) how many Black scholars have avoided and continue to avoid studying the role that Black people using violence to defend themselves against white supremacists played in Black freedom movements and (2) how Black self-defense against white supremacists can be tolerated in mainstream American society only if it is depicted in the form of cathartic entertainment, Dreher reported that Curry endorsed the idea that Black people ought to be allowed to kill white people. Dreher’s column went viral in the conservative and right-wing echo chamber and led to many people calling for Texas A&M to fire Curry. It also led Texas A&M’s President Michael K. Young to distance himself and his institution from Curry’s remarks while still distancing himself from Curry. Although President Young did not mention Curry by name in his campus-wide letter released on May 10, 2017, even though he noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in his particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Unfortunately, the Curry incident is only one episode in a larger white ethno-nationalist movement on the ascent in the United States during the Trump presidency. We could have just as easily begun this newsletter with a statement of support for Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, assistant professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. Professor Taylor has been the target of intimidation, death threats, and racist, sexist, and homophobic comments for her opening remarks about President Trump being “a racist and sexist megalomaniac” delivered in her May 20, 2017, commencement address at Hampshire College. Critics ignore her call for activism, struggle for social justice, solidarity, and hope in the face of what she considers to be dark political times.

Both Curry’s and Taylor’s recent experiences of being attacked publicly and privately by white ethno-nationalists and others who are uncomfortable with Black scholars stating inconvenient truths about the historical reality for Black people in the United States shows the need for venues willing to publish this kind of work. We hope that this newsletter can be a place where these inconvenient truths can be published. Of course, we welcome submissions of a less political nature as well, just as long as they are about the Black experience broadly defined.

Curry deserved for his university’s president to support his academic freedom to speak in a public forum about a subject matter related to his scholarly expertise—in this case, critical race theory. Thankfully, Curry’s colleagues in Philosophy and Africana Studies at Texas A&M issued statements supporting his academic freedom to speak on controversial issues. We are also heartened that a group of concerned Texas A&M students wrote a petition in support of Curry, which has been signed not only by current and former Texas A&M students, but also by his Texas A&M colleagues and colleagues not affiliated with Texas A&M who want to support him.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.

Curry has joined the ranks of Black philosophers and Black intellectuals whose livelihoods and very lives have been threatened for questioning the anti-Black racist status quo in academia and in the public square. At least two of these Black philosophers (Leonard Harris and George Yancy) are former editors of this newsletter. We are glad that the APA Board recently issued a statement on harassment, bullying, and intimidation of philosophers and noted that there are risks to philosophers who take up controversial social issues in their work and make controversial statements in public forums. We are especially glad that the statement noted that these risks “are intensified when the philosopher occupies a minority social identity, untenured position, or other vulnerable status.” Yet we feel the need to support Curry in this particular venue for at least two reasons. First, this newsletter is the official organ of the APA Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers, and it is part of the committee’s charge to support Black philosophers like Curry. Second, we are obligated to support the academic freedom of philosophers in general and of Black philosophers in particular to write and speak about controversial issues within their scholarly expertise.
We are happy to have contributions from Stephen C. Ferguson II, Myron Moses Jackson, and John H. McClendon III. McClendon’s essay, “2016 Presidential Election: The Capitalist State and the Political Economy of Democracy,” is a revised transcript of his keynote address at the eleventh African American Intellectual Thought Symposium at Fresno State University, April 20, 2017. In his address, McClendon performs a Marxist ideological critique of the U.S. political and economic system to disclose the actual (material) structure of that system. This kind of critique discloses how the U.S. is not actually a genuine democracy, but rather is a racist and capitalist system in which large segments of the U.S. population have been (and currently are) politically oppressed and economically disempowered. McClendon also explains how the election of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election is not an aberration, but fits within the racist and capitalist history of the United States. Ferguson provides us with a review of Justin E. H. Smith’s book, Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy. Lastly, Jackson provides us with a review of Tommy J. Curry’s edition of the book, The Philosophical Treatise of William H. Ferris: Selected Readings from The African Abroad or, His Evolution in Western Civilization.

As we stated in the previous issue, we strongly encourage potential authors and book reviewers to submit their work for possible publication. We also encourage any suggestions that you think might help make the newsletter more philosophically rigorous and engaging. For submissions to the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience, articles and book reviews should be emailed to either Stephen C. Ferguson or Dwayne Tunstall at apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions for the spring 2018 issue is December 1, 2017.

NOTES


SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

The APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience is published by the committee on the status of Black philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between 10 and 20 pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between 5 and 7 pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and The Chicago Manual of Style formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com.
I want to begin by sharing a recent observation. I was reading the other day about a teacher who was concerned with introducing the significance of this historic moment—the presidential election—with his middle school students. The widespread aftermath of intense debates, with respect to the election, provided an excellent occasion for learning about history and politics. In the discussion with his students, this teacher talked about the notion of “A House Divided.” He asked his students how the notion of “A House Divided” relates to the recent presidential election. His students responded that they had never heard of this concept, “A House Divided.” So therefore, he decided to make this topic the homework assignment for that day.

Those of us that are teachers know it is very important we not only tell students what they need to know, but we must also train students on how to find the answers to their questions. Consequently, we must direct them on researching about those issues, which they vitally need to know for their growth and development.

In fact, it has been my experience that when students dig for the information—discover the knowledge for themselves—they retain the information better than if you resort to just telling them the answers. So, therefore, the young middle school students went out and did their research. Now, we live in a particular age where many young people understand research in terms of surveying the internet. Therefore, they investigated via the internet how this notion, “A House Divided,” related to the 2016 presidential election.

The teacher gave them a clue. He said there are two key concepts the students should investigate in their research. One is the concept “divided.” The other is the concept “united.” Therefore, when the students came back after doing their research, the teacher asked, “Can anyone talk about the notion ‘A House Divided?’ ‘What is the importance of ‘divided’ and ‘united,’ and how it is related to the events following the presidential election?”

One student raised his hand and responded, “A house divided will not stand. From what I understand from this is that a divided house will collapse. In other words, when a group of people have fundamental disagreements, they cannot work together.” And the teacher responded, “Very good!”

There was another student who raised her hand and was very excited. The teacher said, “What did you find?” The student responded, “I looked at this very carefully, and it seems to me that when you talk about ‘United’ not only will you fall but also someone will pull you down the aisle of an airplane, and at the same time, they will beat you. This beating will lead to a broken nose; then after breaking your nose, you’ll be arrested. That’s what I understand about the idea of ‘United.’”

This is a very important illustration about the context of a text. When we talk about “A House Divided Will Not Stand,” we have to understand that when we talk about the concept of being “united” we have to put that into some kind of context. This is very important, especially for young people that heavily depend on the internet as their source of reference.

I want to share with you another story. This is a story about a discovery that a certain group of anthropologists made a number of years ago. The anthropologists came upon a group of people with its own (distinctive) form of village community. One feature of this community stood out among all others. This village community engaged in an annual ritual of rain dancing, which served as the very heart and soul of their community. Every year, all the people in...
the community would gather for the rain dance. Initially, the rain dance was for a selective few—the most prominent people in the community. The early participants in the rain dance tended to be older males in the community. Over time other people in the village began to challenge the idea that only a select few could participate in the rain dance. Consequently, women were later incorporated into the rain dance. And, in due course, young adults were finally brought into the ritual.

The anthropologists found that the rain dance was deeply important, not merely because it was an agricultural community—which needed rain as the necessary means of producing crops for collective survival—but it was also essential to the cultural identity of the community. The rain dance became the substance and symbol of group solidarity and social cohesion. In fact, it was so important to this community they developed a very extensive mythology around rain dancing.

In turn, the rain dance served as the basis for the collective (in-group) notion, “We.” I must point out, the idea of “we” and “they” is universally important for all social and cultural groups respecting collective identity. Subsequently, the villagers believed that any other community that did not engage in the rain dance was a community infected with demons. Groups considered as “They”—the outsiders—were essentially a different people; so, we observe, the rain dance ritual became the decisive factor outlining the character of one’s social identity.

Hence, this prevailing idea evolved into the rain dance becoming the center of the villagers’ worldview. Furthermore, they thought, the rain dance was not just something one’s own community should do, but the whole world should be engaged in each year. In concurrence, the rain dances even had an ethical significance and, accordingly, the sense of moral obligation for each person of responsibility within the community.

Consequently, the villagers were leery of all outsiders. When anyone came from the outside and entered into their community, the villagers were very reluctant to receive them as members within the village community, particularly if outsiders did not have a prior history of engaging in rain dances. Rain dancing, in many ways, resulted in closed society among the villagers.

As the anthropologists began to investigate this very important cultural tradition of rain dancing, they discovered something that was crucially affixed to this viewpoint, which explicitly detailed why the villagers firmly held this belief about rain dancing. The anthropologists uncovered that this ritual happened to coincide with climatic fluctuations and seasonal changes. What happened is that the villagers did the rain dance just before the rainy season. The mystical rain dance just happens to overlap with natural climatic transformations. In effect, the rain dance was not the cause for the rains, which inundated the village each year.

Can you visualize their response? How they reacted to the anthropologists? It must have been a tremendous shock to hear this message. This ritual of such importance—lasting over generations—was in reality an action of no consequence. Quite naturally, the villagers thought that the anthropologists were imbued with demons since no one in their right mind would take this key ritual—the rain dance—away from their community. In effect, the anthropologists had shattered the villagers’ worldview.

We begin to see a very important lesson here. When we think in terms of our view on the world, we may have to seriously think about the nature of different perspectives on the world. Thus, the significance of an alternative worldview—that is, if we are going to understand the problems of any given society. We could argue these people lived in a simple society, and, moreover, we live in a more complex society. Surely, we are not caught in the grips of mythology. Certainly, we are not caught in the grips of dogma. Indeed, we are not closed-minded with respect to how we see others and ourselves in the world. Yet, we really need to ask the question: Are we really free of such mythologies? How do various kinds of mythology play a role in our lives?

Today, we hear quite a bit about the notion “alternative facts” and how these “alternative facts” subsequently explain the nature of our reality. However, facts are those factors that point to what are the actual (objective) state of affairs—the given empirical conditions, which are open to observation, description, verification, and public scrutiny. The suggestion that there are “alternative facts” is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms which hides more than it discloses.

What I want to suggest, fellow students, is that we need not be concerned with this confused idea of “alternative facts.” Rather, our attention should be focused on developing an alternative “worldview.” With an alternative worldview, perhaps we can more clearly understand the effect and significance of the recent presidential election. A wise man once stated, the ruling ideas—dominant worldview—always belong to the ruling class. Under capitalism, the capitalists are the ruling class.

This idea of the capitalist state is very important to keep in mind. This is because the concept of democracy is linked to our viewpoint about the state and its political function. Some people think the idea of democracy stands outside of any specific context. Accordingly, we must ask questions of such people: How can we determine if this country is a democratic society? In what context should we understand the notion of democracy? How does the matter of political-economic context shape the definition of democracy? In other words, why should we talk in terms of democracy when making references to the capitalist state? I want to suggest that political philosophy—political philosophy, which is critical of capitalist assumptions—is one approach toward the correct approach.

Subsequently, I am going to talk in terms of critique—particularly the concept of ideological critique. Why ideological critique? Ideology addresses the question
of worldview. An ideology frames how we see ourselves as individuals, groups, communities, and societies. And, hence, we begin to comprehend our place in the world. It follows that we value who we are in the world based on our worldview. In part, this requires that we look at our basic presuppositions and assumptions. So, therefore, how do we go about doing ideological critique?

First, we have to recognize that there are three levels of critique: empirical, conceptual, and ideological. They are not mutually exclusive. In other words, while you can do one and not the other; nevertheless, they can also be linked together. What is empirical critique? An empirical critique is concerned with the current state of affairs—in other words, the facts that surround any particular phenomenon.

An example of empirical critique would be the following: if someone were to say to you that in 1890 the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, you would know that empirically (factually) this statement was wrong. If someone wrote, “With the ending of slavery in the United States in 1890...,” then, right away, we could offer an empirical critique with the adjoining explanation, “this statement is not factual.” Most of you know it was the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery. Furthermore, 1865 was the year in which the Thirteenth Amendment was passed. Clearly, 1890 was not the year this event actually happened. This counter-statement—concerning the year of the Thirteenth Amendment—would signify an empirical critique.

With empirical critique, we are looking at the facts surrounding the case. Subsequently, when you hear talk about “alternative facts,” be aware of the need for bringing critical tools of analysis into the discussion. We should inquire about the facts of the case. It is not enough to juggle our conception about facts—adopt so-called alternative facts—without looking at the actual state of affairs. The factual context during a specific moment in time does not demand an alternative viewpoint. Instead, we seek to uncover and verify the facts of the matter. Now let us proceed to conceptual criticism.

What is conceptual critique? A conceptual critique is broader than an empirical critique. A conceptual critique is concerned with the conceptual schemes and theoretical frameworks which we employ in our analysis. This is important because we always operate with our conceptual schemes and theoretical frameworks, especially when making an examination of any important issue or significant problem. Conceptual schemes and theoretical frameworks allow us to move from the description of facts to the definition of things. This is why we usually have an operative conceptual scheme respecting politics. We also have our theoretical frameworks regarding the law. The same principle—about conceptual schemes—applies as well to the interpretation of history.

All of these factors come into play when we seriously consider politics, law, and history, not to mention the very nature of reality. Since we often not only differ with respect to our descriptions concerning reality but also the very definition of reality, it follows that these latter disagreements are often based upon how we employ our respective conceptual schemes and theoretical frameworks.

For example, some people argue that the event that took place in 1776, which led to the formation of the United States, was a revolution. How many people have heard that? You can have a conceptual framework that frames the interpretation of history in such a fashion. With respect to African Americans, if that was a revolution—a democratic revolution—then this notion becomes a very difficult conceptualization. The conceptual difficulty resides in explaining the institution of slavery where African people remained chattel, brutally and violently forced to labor under the lash.

How could there have been a “democratic” revolution if millions of Black people were held in slavery? Why describe such important periods in history as Jeffersonian democracy or Jacksonian democracy, particularly since we know that both Jefferson and Jackson were slaveholders? Furthermore, they were not only slaveholders but also served as presidents of the United States. Additionally, Andrew Jackson was involved in so-called Indian Removal.

Based on our conceptual critique, how do we call Jackson a democrat? It is a fact; Jackson had a white popular following, indeed, racist popular support, many of whom advocated slavery and the removal of indigenous people from their land. Although we may call Jackson a white populist, we can’t conceive of calling him a democrat. Conceptual critique requires uprooting conventional ideas. It is important to realize that “democracy” and “populism” are not identical concepts. Over the course of history, we discover that Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, and Franco in Spain were all populist as well as fascist. It follows that Jackson’s populism does not of necessity point to democracy. We have to carefully inspect the functioning conceptual scheme and theoretical framework.

It should come as no surprise that Donald Trump finds in Andrew Jackson the best model for his presidency. As with Jackson, while Trump is a populist, he is yet far from advocating the form of democracy which would include you and me. This is why we must re-conceptualize the historical basis for notion of Jacksonian Democracy.

Trump very well realizes the historical grounds on which he stands when he turns to Andrew Jackson’s historical legacy. The past presidential election and Trump’s populism is rooted in a specific viewpoint on history. Accordingly, we have to reassess our own conceptual schemes and theoretical frameworks for the very interpretation of history. We must do so explicitly, if we intend to shed light on the lessons of history that are affixed to the recent presidential election.

Now, with ideological critique, we can employ both empirical and conceptual criticism for amplifying why the ruling ideology—worldview—emerges as misplaced, wrong, or incorrect for us and our interests. Quite evident from our prior discussion on the young student and the confusion about “united,” engaging in ideological critique is not simply going on, on the internet.
The idea of ideological critique strikes at the foundations of one’s worldview. Consequently, we are required to dig deeply into our own basic presuppositions and assumptions. Our basic presuppositions and assumptions inform who we are, where we are, and how we must chart the future. Ideological critique demands we raise questions about our basic social identity. In turn, what is the meaning of “We”? For instance, how should we understand the phrase “We the People?” Especially in light of slavery, segregation, and institutionalized racism, this question becomes very important.

How do we understand “We the People” in light of settler colonialism, which was a violent advancement—terrorism—against the indigenous people who occupied this land? How do we explain this as a democratic process and not declare it as institutionalized genocide? How do we explain the very borders that form part of what we know today hold between Mexico and the United States? All of these historical developments are part and parcel of imperialism and settler colonialism.

If we don’t reconceptualize, have a new conceptual scheme, then how must we consider the attendant questions about these pressing issues of imperialism and settler colonialism? Without ideological critique, we can become confused about history and our present identity and status in this country. It is not enough that we rely on the “Alamo” story and mentality. The “Alamo” story and mentality are expressions of the particular ideology that supports building a wall between Mexico and the United States.

Our ideological critique raises a whole set of questions for consideration. For instance, how did Texas become part of the United States and subsequently emerge a slave state when, previously, as Mexican territory, there was no slavery? How do you explain this historical reality while subsequently stating it is necessary to build a wall against the people of Mexico, blocking “them” from entering what is the United States? What does it mean to talk about “We” and “They,” given this racist and imperialist background? Whose interests are being served by such policies?

So, therefore, an ideological critique takes more than just exploring information on the internet. It takes the concerted effort and the awesome responsibility of taking up the tools of analysis for restructuring our worldviews. Without the intellectual tools of analysis, we are stuck at point A, lost and confused, talking about “them” as “illegal aliens,” invading “our” country.

You ask, therefore, what are the tools that we need? Now I want to talk about three important tools: historical, philosophical, and political economic theories. With respect to the presidential election of 2016, if we want to think about this historically, we have to go back to the Constitutional Convention. The Constitutional Convention fundamentally shapes the contemporary discourse about “democracy.”

We have to critically examine the developments surrounding the Constitutional Convention. We have to offer a conceptual critique of the Constitutional Convention. What happens when we examine it closely in its historical details? Before the Constitutional Convention, before the U.S. Constitution was written, there was a group of people that came together to envision how that process would take place.

What developed was something called The Federalist Papers. If you look very closely at The Federalist Papers, one of the chief concerns was how do you restrict the masses of people from taking political power? So, the Constitutional Convention was not about guaranteeing that power went to “We the People at the bottom” but to safeguard “We the People at the top.” The chief priority transpires with maintaining political power.

This is evident with how the Constitution was framed, for example, when we study deliberations on the question of slavery. At this period, most of the world had begun to move in the direction of abolishing the institution of slavery. England had already begun the process of abolishing slavery. The framers of the Constitution argued that slavery would be an essential part of the political-economic (capitalist) structure of this country. Yet, what happened in the newly formed United States? This political structure—Constitution—would sanction the institution of slavery. First, there was the extension of the slave trade— for another twenty years—until 1808.

Furthermore, the Constitution had provisions such that if a slave ran away from the slave-holder, it was the function and duty of the federal government to return the slave to his or her slave-master. That’s why, during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln—on more than one occasion—made Union Generals return slaves back to Confederate slave-masters. Lincoln said the Civil War was not over slavery; the war was to save the Union. He announced he would do whatever he had to do to save the Union. Chiefly because the Union, the United States was founded on slavery. This fact is important for our reflection. Now we have to reconceptualize this so-called Revolution of 1776. And what set the stage for the framing of the Constitution.

A recent work by Dr. Gerald Horne—a very prolific scholar at the University of Houston—called The Counter-Revolution of 1776 re-examines the issue as to why the developments surrounding 1776 were not revolutionary at all. Indeed, we observe that Horne points to The Counter-Revolution of 1776. Here, we have a fine example of ideological critique—a completely different conception of the realities surrounding the events of 1776.

Let’s go back and look at the circumstances that led up to 1776. Slaves were rebelling. Slaves were resisting the institution of slavery. It became problematic for the continuance of slavery in light of slave resistance. There had to be a way of stopping that process. And one of the ways that became prominent among European colonial settlers was the establishment of a separate country. European colonial settlers—now called the United States—knew the institution of slavery was vital, crucial, and pivotal to their very existence.

They wanted to ensure that slavery would be primary and foundational. When we look at this counter-revolution
of 1776, one of the key debates centers on the British official, Lord Dunmore. Dunmore declared that if African slaves joined the British forces against the colonialists, he would grant Africans their freedom. And what did George Washington say? If you join us, you will retain your position as a slave. This counter-revolution was very important, you see, for maintaining the institution of slavery. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson were all slaveholders. They had personal as well as political interests in maintaining the institution of slavery. Their conception of democracy did not include Black people; indeed, their idea of democracy itself was founded on the enslavement of Black people. It should be clear now that history is a crucial tool in our ideological critique.

So, therefore, how do we understand the relationship of history to philosophy? Now, we often think of philosophy as merely speculation and contemplation about ideas, which have no relationship to our day-to-day existence. We think of philosophers as people who walk around in the clouds and are kind of cloudy in their makeup. They don’t seem to know what’s going on from day to day. We have the story about the Greek philosopher, Thales. It is said Thales was so busy speculating about the nature of reality that he failed to pay attention to where he was walking and fell in a ditch. However, philosophy can be very helpful to us, specifically if we have the right kind of philosophy. There is the wrong kind of philosophy—what we call philosophical idealism.

Philosophical idealism plays a key role in the makeup of the worldview that governs this country. Philosophical idealism is very important to the ruling class. This is because the ruling class seeks to perfect the illusion such that the masses do not resist but cooperate in their exploitation and oppression. Hence, rather than conflicting with—struggling against—their oppressors and exploiters, philosophical idealism tricks the masses into cooperating in their own oppression and exploitation.

The philosophical idealist viewpoint says that given the ideals embedded in the Constitution, we can conclude this is a great country. All we need to do is move toward those ideals. However, without examining the material conditions and material context which gave rise to the Constitution, philosophical idealism would like us to pull the Constitution outside of its context. Thus, with this ideal document, we can embrace it and proclaim it has some important truth embodied in it. There is something we can shoot for in this ideal document, something we can aim for. All we have to do is remove it—pull it out—from its historical context. And that’s what we mean by philosophical idealism. Nevertheless, we have a viable option to philosophical idealism, namely, philosophical materialism.

If we adopt philosophical materialism, then we have to view things in their material conditions. We have to make a concrete analysis of concrete conditions. And in making a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, we don’t just look at how things immediately appear. Therefore, the concrete and what is immediate are not the same thing. Many times, we observe that people say: “I’m a person that is more concrete. You have to give me something I can feel or touch.”

However, that’s not concreteness. That’s empiricism—what I call vulgar empiricism. Because things may appear to be one way when, in fact, in essence they are another. And that’s why ideology becomes so important; because it facilitates perfecting the illusion that everything is working fine. It fosters the illusion (the appearance) that all we need is the rain dance—every four years—and everything will work out.

Yet, when we go back and engage in the materialist philosophical examination of the U.S. Constitution, we find that the Constitution—besides preserving slavery—makes a very important point about how one can obtain a position on the Supreme Court. How many of you were involved in the last election for the Supreme Court Justice? You didn’t do the rain dance, that is, vote for the Supreme Court justice. Can there be a recall if he or she didn’t do their job well? Can we stand up and say we expect something better?

We can’t recall this guy, Neil Gorsuch? How long can he stay? For life. You have to study your Constitution. The reason he can stay for life, as well as all the other Supreme Court justices including Uncle (Clarence) Thomas, is because the Constitution allows for that reality. This aspect of the Constitution was part of the material reality, the concrete conditions, which pertains to its ideological function. So, therefore, we can’t do anything about the Supreme Court. The notion of some form of democratic intervention is effectively removed as an option.

Where else can we go? Let’s look at the U.S. Congress. This is very interesting. You may not know the Senate was not open to popular elections when it was initially formed. How many know this fact about the Constitution? It took an amendment—the Seventeenth Amendment—to the Constitution to allow people to vote for the Senate. It happened in 1911, during the twentieth century, so that wasn’t the original intent or plan. The original intent was for the Senate, just like the Supreme Court, not to be in the hands of the masses of people.

The third branch of government—the executive body—is the presidency. Notice what happens with the presidency. There is a popular vote for the presidency every four years. However, the framers of the Constitution came up with something that was so slick. It was a move that most people never think about because they are busy doing “the rain dance” every four years. Many people do not realize that after all the rain dances—every four years—there is something called the Electoral College. And what does the Electoral College provide? This is an instance where after the great majority express who they want, the Electoral College actually determines who becomes the president of the United States.

Now let’s go back. What happened in the most recent presidential election? Is the popular vote the reason the current president became president of the United States? No. Think about that for a moment. Much of the discussion about the presidential election focuses on the character of the candidates that engaged in the election, namely, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump—discussion about what
they did or failed to do. Yet, I see very little discussion about the real “Trump card,” the Electoral College. I see very little discussion about the institutional and structural relationships that, in fact, ensure that the ruling class gets their particular person (in place) to run the (capitalist) system on their behalf.

When did another president obtain the office resulting from the Electoral College? Was it a long time ago? No. George W. Bush. Follow me closely now. Before we do an ideological critique, you have to look at the worldview, the basic presuppositions and assumptions that guide how we see the world, ourselves, and our place in it. When we begin to do that, we see immediately that the problem is structural. It’s institutional. And there is also a third concept, system. We have to understand the process systematically, not individually. Why is that important? Because some people argue that methodological individualism best explains this system and how it works.

Let me explain the concept of methodological individualism. Methodological individualism is the view that individuals are at the core of society; thus, society is an aggregate of individuals. It follows, when each of us go out and vote, this is an expression of democracy. And, therefore, we are all “free citizens,” since we have this right to vote on an individual basis. I must point out that methodological individualism masks what pertain to structural restraints, which limit individuals regarding their class position.

Given the nature of capitalist class relationships, each person accordingly does not have the same power—the same power within the real (existing) material relations of production. Subsequently, we have to move to our third tool—political economic theory. Political economic theory, hence, facilitates our critical understanding. Thus, we comprehend how capitalism—as a system—operates in the United States. This is a vital part of our critical examination of capitalism, our ideological critique at the foundational level of real (material) conditions of exploitation and oppression.

In critically understanding capitalism, what we find is that the notion of democracy has to be qualified by bourgeois democracy. That simply means capitalist democracy. This is why the title of my talk, “The Capitalist State,” accentuates how “democracy” signifies class interests. Hence, the notion of bourgeois democracy emerges as significant. And why is it important?

Precisely due to the fact that we can observe how the system may appear as democratic, yet remain inconsistent with our real (material) interests. Remember, how we define the system—capitalist state—demands more than merely offering a description. For example, the conventional description—everyone can vote after the age of 18—apparently demonstrates everyone can join the rain dance as adults. However, this description of voting as an expression of democracy does not deal with the essential reality, namely, the grave circumstances of material inequality and the powerlessness experienced by those that are poor and oppressed. Although this capitalist state allows for adult participation in voting, you cannot vote away the persistent reality of 47 million people living in poverty. Additionally, elections do not transfer power from the wealthy to those that struggle for material existence and survival.

Let’s say you are unemployed, underemployed, or in poverty. Even when you work very hard each day to make a living, you find yourself falling short in meeting the basic needs of life. Are you then—because you can vote—in the same boat with Donald Trump? Can you say that since Trump was able to sit outside the political establishment and win the presidency that I too can become president of the United States?

We heard a lot of people give expression to such ideas when Barack Obama was president. A lot of people of color said there’s hope that one day I too can become president, because Barack Obama—a Black person—became president. We need to grasp that the notion of juridical equality—people are equal under the law—does not transfer in terms of shared material conditions. Indeed, the gap between the very wealthy and the poor is rapidly growing every day. This formal equality—supposedly under the law—is not an equality of material substance, not an equality of socio-economic content. It takes more than the declaration, “we put on our clothes the same way, so therefore we’re equal,” [for everyone to be really equal].

If you think that you are really equal, go tell the person that you work for what you really think about your working conditions and wages. If you do not have solidarity with your fellow workers on these issues, what do you think will happen? Actually, the next day you will get a pink slip! This is why I say that juridical equality masks the reality—perfects the illusion—that the oppressed and exploited, the poor and impoverished actually are powerless. Merely voting is only the semblance of power. This is why when somebody argues that you failed in your responsibility by not voting or that people died for the right to vote, let them know it’s all about the rain dance. When anyone proclaims you are not a good citizen because you didn’t vote, just say, “I have a worldview, one different than the rain dance worldview.”

Not long ago, with Obama’s election, many thought a fundamental change occurred within the political system, within the capitalist state. And in eight years, what happens? Donald Trump! Now, we have to understand this past election in political-economic terms. What Donald Trump declared: I’m not happy with the people we put in place. The people that run the capitalist State. Those administrators of the state must act in our behalf—the ruling class. Clearly, Trump represents a significant segment, especially those on the right-wing of the ruling class.

Trump’s view is that he would rather run the capitalist state, do it himself, not have others making political decisions and public policies for him and the like. How is he going to be able to do it himself? He has to manipulate the class contradictions that persist by utilizing the ideology of racism, the ideology of nationalism, the ideology of xenophobia, in order to develop a consciousness of “we” against “them.” How can we make this country white again? “We” as white, we as “American,” and “we” as “Christians”
effectively blurred the capitalist class contradictions for a considerable segment of white workers.

Now, this is important to appreciate; when you look at the presidential election, you have to go back to the primaries. The Democratic Party had an opportunity to win over the white working class. And they had a strong candidate who spoke to the white working class. But he spoke to the white working class, from the left of center—on the political spectrum. What’s that guy’s name from Vermont? Bernie Sanders. A lot of white working-class people thought Sanders was making some sense. However, Hillary Clinton and company, along with the Democratic Party National Committee, began to manipulate the debates. They maneuvered so that Bernie would not become the Democratic Party presidential nominee. The two-party system in the United States is a critical component of the rain dance. Bernie Sanders offered a different alternative, in terms of the rain dance, and they—the Democratic Party leaders—d didn’t like his class approach.

When Sanders was out of the picture, it opened the door for Trump to appeal to white workers. This political vacuum allowed Donald Trump to make his (right-wing) appeal to poor white people. Trump pronounced, “I speak for you. I’m a populist.” However, I earlier stated, let’s not confuse the term “populism” with “democracy.” Consistently, fascism depends on populism to shore up its ideology. Study, very carefully, Mussolini. Study, very carefully. Hitler. Study, very carefully, Franco in Spain. What you will find is a fascist masquerading as a populist, one which depends upon nationalism, racism, and xenophobia. This is not new in history. But it is new if your world outlook, if your ideology, does not permit you to see beyond the framework of the rain dance.

When scrutinizing the character of the capitalist state, we have to understand that the state’s involvement in the political economy is not intended to serve the interest of the masses. The only way the state will relinquish to mass interest is through the power of counter-struggle. When did that take place? Primarily during the Great Depression when Black people, working people, poor people, and groups like the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) fought. There wasn’t any Social Security. Many of the social welfare programs that emerged as state programs were the result of intense class conflict. This conflict, this struggle, transformed how bourgeois society would operate in the future.

Additionally, the state was also attempting to find a solution to the economic crisis brought about by the Great Depression. Despite President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, what actually saved the country was World War II. You must read the British economist, John Maynard Keynes. Keynes states the old theories of political economy don’t work and failed to explain capitalist crisis. Keynes was critical of Say’s Law. Say’s Law—the economic theory on the balance between supply and demand—Keynes held, does not work. The economic crisis demonstrated that the self-regulating markets required state intervention. We cannot neglect this important reality of capitalism; for the system to work, then the state needs to intervene. All you have to do is construct a pie diagram. And as much as capitalists talk about privatization and on the significance of privatization, look very carefully who gets the biggest piece of the pie, regarding government expenditure.

Why is military spending the biggest part of the pie? Closely observe the Trump administration’s proposed budget. The ruling class gains—profits—from military spending. Whether they drop a super bomb or not, many corporate powers gain from government contracts. Why all the talk about privatization? They simply want to cut out what working people had gained. The benefits attached to the so-called welfare state. The most appropriate concept should not be the welfare state? Rather, it is, more precisely, state monopoly capitalism. State monopoly capitalism provides us with an alternative ideological perspective on the character of the state.

So therefore, what we are examining—fellow students—are the institutions, structures and systems, the historical base and political economic foundation. The political economic foundation of capitalism, which is not in the interest of working people—no matter their race, nationality, or religious beliefs. Believe me, if you are going to make Islam the primary danger to this society, then you might as well tell everyone in the rain dance community, “if you don’t dance, then it’s going to dry up.” Terrorism is not new to the United States. It didn’t begin with Islam.

We cannot neglect the terrorism and bombing in Oklahoma (1923); it is not something new in the United States when Black Wall Street was bombed. Terrorism is not new; we only need to recount the history of lynching in the United States. That’s terrorism. Terrorism set into place the possibilities for what we know today as Plessy v. Ferguson. In a twenty-year period from 1876 to 1896, there was a period of intense terrorism, which violently overturned the political gains that Black people forged during Reconstruction. It wasn’t about another rain dance; they did not resort to voting in their seizure of political power. It was white racist terrorism—politics by others means—which led to Black oppression under segregation.

This historical reality, this political reality, we cannot forget and ignore. When Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) became the law of the land, it was only the aftermath, the justification of the existing order. Whenever you hear talk about law and order, be aware! Recognize, first, we have the (socioeconomic) order, and then there is the law. Our talk about juridical equality—equality under the law—is not without its corresponding unequal (social) order, exploitive (economic) order, oppressive (racist/imperialist) order. If we steadfastly work on developing our alternative worldview, then, fellow students, we will discover that we will need to do more than just participate in the rain dance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay is a revised transcription of my Keynote Address at the 11th African American Intellectual Thought Symposium, Fresno State University, April 20, 2017. The symposium theme was “2016 Presidential Election: Make American White Again.” The symposium is an integral part of the Martin Luther King/Gunner Myrdal Lecture Series under the sponsorship of Africana Studies at Fresno State University. I must first offer my sincerest thanks to Dr. De Anna Reese, coordinator of Africana
Studies, and Dr. Malik Simba, the founder and organizer of the African American Intellectual Thought Symposium, for their kind invitation. Also, thanks to my fellow symposium participants, Drs. Jeff Cummings and Lisa Bryant of the CSU–Fresno Political Science Department. UCLA Assistant Vice Chancellor of Government and Community Relations Mr. Keith S. Parker served as commentator, and I greatly appreciate his insightful remarks. Last, however, not least, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Stephen C. Ferguson II. He not only suggested that I submit this address to the newsletter but also assumed the arduous task of transcribing the audio format of my Keynote Address. Despite the generous assistance and cooperation from all the above parties, I am solely responsible for the viewpoints expressed in this essay.

BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Stephen C. Ferguson II
NORTHERN CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

With Anthony Appiah’s seminal 1986 essay, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” and its companion piece, “Racisms” (published four years later), the philosophy of race was born. Appiah set the world on flame with his declaration: “The truth is that there are no races.” With his analytical lens and veiled positivist assumptions, Appiah set the philosophy of race on its present course. In contrast to the idealism of Appiah, it is important to recognize that race is a social category that emerges from historically determinate social relations, and, therefore, it is an object of social scientific investigation. This does not mean that race is a social construction.

In rejecting Appiah’s “Argument from Illusion,” the contemporary philosopher of race tends to make several problematic moves. First of all, the social ontology of race has been conveniently abstracted away from class, capitalist exploitation, and bourgeois social relations. Few contemporary philosophers talk seriously about how racial inequalities in capitalist societies are rooted in the dominant social relations and power structures. Second, there has been a conspicuous tendency to endow race with “causal powers,” which explains everything and nothing. And, lastly, the philosophy of race has operated on idealist premises—believing that we should focus on the problem of whiteness (e.g., the “whiteness of philosophy” and “philosophy’s white gaze”) rather than on racial inequalities. Unfortunately, there are some philosophers of race who believe that with the elimination of racial discourse, the social reality of racism will magically disappear into thin air.

Given this background, Justin Smith’s book Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy is an important contribution to the philosophy of race, particularly that “curious kink” of the human mind—our understanding of human differences and human nature. In fascinating detail, Smith weaves his way through scientific and philosophical debates (from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, from Christopher Columbus to Immanuel Kant) to reveal the gradual emergence of the race concept, specifically, how race came to be identified with “nature.” Smith “aims to show all kinds of things, the kinds of people, that appeared to be carved out in nature itself in fact come into being in the course of human history as a result of changes in the ways human beings conceptualize the world around them” (3).

To his credit, Smith has no problem acknowledging racist ideology as an a posteriori rationalization of capitalist slavery. As historian Eric Williams writes in his 1944 classic Capitalism and Slavery, “Slavery was not born of racism; rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.” Smith notes, “it is hard not to see [Francisco] Bernier’s proposal not as pure disinterested theorizing, but rather as a distillation of the emerging political preoccupation of his time and place: to provide an articulation in words that could impose some sense and legitimacy on an increasingly harsh and unequal system of labor extraction” (5). Bernier’s 1684 publication Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races qui l’habitent (A New Division of the Earth) is considered the first published modern classification of humans into distinct races using physical characteristics.

Smith summarizes his main argument as follow: “a crucial feature of the emergence of modern race concept was the collapse of a certain universalism about human nature, which had been sustained by a belief in a transcendent essence of the human soul, and this belief’s gradual but steady replacement over the course of the early modern period by conception of human beings as natural beings, and thus as no less susceptible to classification in terms of a naturalistic taxonomy than any other natural being, plant or animal or mineral” (8). In other words, Smith argues that the social myth of racial inequality resulted from an overextension of the project of biological classification to human beings as part of nature (10).

Smith does not present a monolithic view of the “European mind” on race, human (ethnic) differences, and human nature. He seeks to offer a complex—if not contradictory—intellectual history. Smith’s discussion of René Descartes and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz offers an insightful chapter in the history of philosophy and its connection with the development of racist ideology. In Chapter 7, “Leibniz on Human Equality and Human Domination,” Smith argues that, for Leibniz, there is no “Great Chain of Being.” Leibniz rejects the idea that there are essential differences between groups. Leibniz’s position, Smith reasons, grows out of his philosophical system and his commitment to the ontological principle that the world consists in unity within diversity. Consequently, for Leibniz, unity in diversity extends from his metaphysics to his philosophical anthropology.

A particular strength of the book as a whole is the ease with which Smith draws on philosophical, scientific, and historical scholarship to provide what he terms a “historical ontology” of the period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and the evolution of ideas about human difference. Smith’s approach brings together the history
of philosophy and the history of science. His approach provides a historically informed and dialectical account of a period covering two centuries.

Some of the themes and debates covered by Smith will be relatively familiar to scholars who have worked in the philosophy of race. Yet, for the uninformed reader, Smith’s first chapter provides a useful and accessible guide through current philosophical debates on race, with particular attention on social constructionism and cognitivist approaches. I must admit that Smith adds to the depth of contemporary debates, in addition to our overall knowledge, about the messy transition from ethnic differences to absolute racial differences and cultural inferiority within European intellectual culture.

I found much delight in reading chapter 8, “Anton Wilhelm Amo.” Here, Smith engages in a philosophical debate about whether the Afro-German philosopher Anton Amo was a materialist or a dualist. Smith makes an interesting argument in contrast to Kwame Nkrumah, William E. Abraham, and John McClendon, who argue that Amo was a materialist. Smith’s position is close to Kwasi Wiredu and Charles Leander Hill, who argue that Amo was a dualist. For Smith, Amo offers what he characterizes as a “radicalized version” of Cartesian dualism. Amo’s commitment to Cartesian dualism, Smith argues, “provides the resources for a properly egalitarian and antiracist philosophical anthropology” (221). According to Smith, “Amo . . . inserted his own views within a broadly Leibnizian theory according to which mind and body harmoniously run on two distinct tracks, so to speak, while all of the states of the body unfold from entirely mechanical causes” (221). While Smith provides a well-reasoned position, I tend to agree with Nkrumah, Paul Hountondji, and McClendon that Amo is offering an internal criticism of vitalism and, more generally, Cartesian idealism.

Beyond the field of early modern philosophy as such, this book is useful for interdisciplinary approaches to the philosophy of race. Similar to Ian Hacking, Smith makes the history of science and scientific knowledge accessible to both specialists and general readers alike. When compared to the mumbo jumbo that makes up the cottage industry of the philosophy of race, this is a particular strength of the volume as a whole. I would recommend this book for both specialists and general readers alike. When compared to the mumbo jumbo that makes up the cottage industry of the philosophy of race, this is a particular strength of the volume as a whole. I would recommend this book for both specialists and general readers alike.

The Philosophical Treatise of William H. Ferris: Selected Readings from The African Abroad or, His Evolution in Western Civilization


Reviewed by Myron Moses Jackson
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

It has only recently become a worthy subject of interest in academic philosophy to take the scholarship of modern Black cultural anthropology, Black identity, and Black experience seriously. Therefore, Tommy Curry’s selected edition of William H. Ferris’s The African Abroad (1913) could not be timelier! A true intellectual and scholar in the classical sense, Ferris presents arguments seeking to interweave the future progress of Western civilization with the social and cultural uplift of Black men and women. He bases these arguments on the idea that literacy, political and economic capital, and devotion to the Christian faith are the ways by which Black people may stand to prosper. Ferris is less concerned with pointing the finger and finding fault with one’s enemies and is more motivated to cultivate means and ways of Black self-improvement. Philosophical ideas are not detached from cultural conditions and historical predicaments. That is why Ferris is concerned with the relationship of social developments that nurture human agency, particularly Black agency, in the unfolding of human history.

While W. E. B. DuBois’s Suppression of the Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870 (1896) and George Washington William’s History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 (1882) were considered masterpieces in the study of Black people in the early twentieth century, Ferris still saw the need for constructing a more thorough Black historiography. He believed that “no discriminating accounts of colored history-makers have been written yet. All of the books eulogizing the great Negroes lack the historian’s perspective” (198). The African Abroad is
Ferris’s response to that need for a more thorough Black historiography, exploring the meaningful contributions of African peoples to the triumphs and tribulations of Western civilization. For Ferris, it is through a “native poetic imagination” that the Negro race bestows the gift of being “vivid word painters,” or what Ferris calls the “gift of gab” (162-63). There is also a peculiar adaptability and perseverance revealed in the sufferings of uprootedness that Black people have endured. Ferris contends that plasticity is what psychologically differentiates the Negro from other races. “The Negro has a remarkable ability in adjusting himself to a varied and changing environment. That is why he thrives under changed surroundings, where other races perish” (175). But it is not enough to address the economic and environmental conditions of the Negro when writing a history of the contributions that African peoples have made to Western civilization. One also needs to study the “precious traits” of the race. This leads Ferris to posit his concept of the Negrosaxon.

Ferris argues that the term “Negrosaxon” better characterizes the mixed descent of African Americans than does the derogatory term “Negro.” Ferris readily admits the term “Negrosaxon” has a certain queerness to it, but its positive potential cannot be understated. Its positive potential is the realization that one cannot understand what it means to an American without recognizing this unsettling paradox: Anglo-Saxons and Negrosaxons must cooperate despite their lingering differences because they both are necessary components of being American. In fact, the Negrosaxon could not exist without African peoples first being integrated into Anglo-Saxon civilization, but without completely becoming Anglo-Saxons themselves. Readers should keep in mind that Ferris’s notion of Anglo-Saxon civilization is quasi-global, almost cosmopolitan, constituted by an array of heritages. It is a “stream that is fed by currents from Hebrew, Greek, Roman and German thought. It is a thread into which are woven strands of Hebrew monotheism, Greek art and philosophy, Roman law, German mysticism and philosophy and Anglo-Saxon aggressiveness and reverence for women” (209).

By re-envisioning the eminent value of individual freedom as achievable only by means of Anglo-Saxons and Negrosaxons co-existing, Ferris paves the road for an ethno-pluralism in which pride of people and place can be managed without succumbing to a vulgar tribalism. The Negrosaxon serves as a reminder that most colored Americans are mixed people and that American culture is the result of intermixing between peoples. Such an orientation of intermixing speaks to the intensely blended American character better than any of the popular grand narratives about America being a “melting pot” or that Americans being “the Chosen Nation.”

Yet, readers may be shocked by Ferris’s unapologetic praises of the white man like this one: “If the Negrosaxon expects to share in the political inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon, he must be made over in the likeness of the Anglo-Saxon. He cannot bleach out his complexion, or straighten his hair, or sharpen his nose, thin his lips. But in mind and character and disposition he must become a black white man. After the Negrosaxon has been made over into the likeness of the white man he can hope to be made over into the image of God” (205). Or this one: “There is DuBois—what, is there Negro about him, except that he is one fourth Negro by blood and descent? While he has the poetical nature and tropical imagination and gift of language of a Negro, in intelligence, pride and sensitiveness, he is an Anglo-Saxon of the bluest blood” (205-206). Such esteem for white civilization cannot be misconstrued as a false sense of superiority or be read absent his scathing critique of the systematic dehumanizing, ill-treatment of the Black race. Ferris argues that Negrosaxons can exemplify the values of freedom so dear to white civilization better than white Anglo-Saxons can themselves. This means that Negrosaxons can be better stewards of white civilization than white ethnic groups.

Negrosaxons have a knack for re-inventing themselves, and isn’t that the essence of the American dream? It should come as no surprise, then, that those nine traits Ferris portrays in the Negro (taken in Ferris’s derogatory sense) have been amplified with the explosion of American entertainment and social media in the form of sports, movies, and music. Qualities once deemed as “Negro” vices—immoral, to have a happy-go-lucky disposition, to be jealous of his fellows, to be deceitful, to be imaginative, oratorical, musical, emotionally religious, and imitative”—have become American virtues. In other words, Anglo-Saxon privilege is not exclusively for white folks. The things that Anglo-Saxons desire to attain are not different from those things desired by Negrosaxons. With its emphasis on individual freedom, the American way of life promotes personal success and equality of opportunity. That way of life is not the exclusive possession of a preordained group or race. In fact, Ferris believes this way of life is the destiny of divine providence, working toward the realization of individual freedom for all. American ideals and symbols of freedom are to be exported around the world through the Negrosaxon as an expression of hope and opportunity. Ferris’s philosophy should be of interest to contemporary readers since it challenges us to re-think and question what it means to be white or Black in fresh ways.

There is great potential in Ferris’s The African Abroad, but there is much work that still needs to be done. Ferris captures the urgency of the inquiry without succumbing to the tidiness of dialectical sublations and metanarratives of history notorious in the tradition of high German Idealism. The conflicts between individuals and groups are resolved in God’s evolutionary processes as they unfold in human history, without the individuality of individual persons being swallowed up by the Absolute. At the heart of Ferris’s philosophical orientation, readers will find a high regard for the development of genuine individuality, which is the telos of human history.

It would be shortsighted to view Ferris’s philosophy as simply an updated version of his teachers’ work at Harvard and Yale (e.g., William James, Josiah Royce, and George T. Ladd) and his colleagues in the American Negro Academy (e.g., Du Bois). Following the spirit of John Edward Bruce’s 1917 essay, “The Importance of Thinking Black,” Curry shows how Ferris the Black thinker ought to be respected on his own terms. In Curry’s reading of The African
Abroad, Ferris’s philosophy of history serves to offer “a metaphysical account of why Black American identity is exceptional, why Black Americans have been placed in the belly of empire, so to speak [and] provides a lens to think about the racial identity of Black citizens beyond the dichotomies of separation and integration” (47). It also provides an important alternative to popular narratives and genres in the study of race, class, and sex by a Black thinker studying Black people. These two things are Ferris’s unique contribution to Black thought and, by extension, to the cosmopolitan realization of human freedom.

NOTES

CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen C. Ferguson II is an associate professor at North Carolina State University. He is author of Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness (Palgrave, 2015).

Myron Moses Jackson is visiting assistant professor of philosophy at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI. He earned his doctorate from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 2013, specializing in medieval, continental, and process philosophy. Recent publications include his “Cornel West” entry in Bloomsbury Dictionary of Philosophers in America (2016); “Personhood in the Boardroom: A Schellingian Critique of Corporate and Organizational Deviance” in In the Sphere of the Personal (Vernon Press, 2016); “The Eros and Tragedy of Peace in Whitehead’s Philosophy of Culture” in Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism 23, no. 1 (2015); and “Luther Kings kamp for økonomisk retfærdighed lever videre” [Am I My Brother’s Keeper? King’s Shift to a Philosophy of Economic Justice] in Det relationelle menneske, Personalisme I perspektiv (Boedal Publishing: Denmark, 2015). Jackson also blogs for the online magazine Radically Empirical and The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series blog, AndPhilosophy.com.

Dr. John H. McClendon III is a professor in the Department of Philosophy at Michigan State University. He is the author of the following books: Philosophy of Religion and the African American Experience: Conversations with My Christian Friends (Brill/Rodopi, 2017), C. L. R. James’s Notes on Dialectics: Left-Hegelianism or Marxism-Leninism (Lexington Books, 2005), and Beyond the White Shadow: Philosophy, Sports, and the African American Experience, which he co-authored with Dr. Stephen C. Ferguson II (Kendall Hunt, 2012). He is a former co-editor of the American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy of the Black Experience. He is presently co-editor of the African American Philosophy Series for Brill Publishers, consulting editor of the Journal of the American Philosophical Association, advisory board member of Blackpast.org, member of the editorial advisory board of the journal Cultural Logic, and serves on the editorial board of the Journal on African Philosophy.
FROM THE EDITOR

Thomas Urban

RETIRED PROFESSOR, HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

When this newsletter was introduced in fall 2016, I stressed that we would not adhere to any single theme or topic. The current issue continues to affirm that composition, generally. The current issue includes two articles that deal with the character of many contemporary college students, from their presenting as “wild blueberries” to simply being “students who don’t give a damn!” Another suggests an alternative grading technique, designed to encourage greater student engagement in the learning process, particularly as it involves the study of philosophy. Our fourth article that follows introduces an idea for the establishment of a summer institute for two-year and community college philosophy teachers. The author, Richard Legum, is chair of the APA Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges Committee, and member of the philosophy faculty of Kingsborough College (CUNY), Brooklyn, NY. While other philosophy-specific summer programs exist for faculty development, none bring focus to the challenges of teaching philosophy in the two-year or community college setting. Unfortunately, faculty development at most community colleges is limited to learning the latest innovations in technology and teaching methods.

Lastly, I would like to encourage all to review our CFP that appears at the end of this newsletter, and to give serious thought to writing something you believe will be helpful to colleagues in carrying out their responsibilities. Keep in mind too that we are philosophy’s strongest advocates at a time when all disciplines in the arts and humanities are threatened. Articles that highlight how best to advance that advocacy in the community college environment are especially welcome.

ARTICLES

Blueberry Madness

Kristen Zbikowski

HIBBING COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MINNESOTA

How is a college student like a blueberry? The provost at Hibbing Community College compared college students and blueberries during a beginning-of-the-year address to staff and faculty two years ago. That comparison stayed with me because I am subject to yearly bouts of “blueberry madness.”

This year the symptoms set in a little early. Usually, I do not have the compulsion to scout for blueberries, monitor their development, and then, finally, pick until I have two gallons or am worn out, until July. But this year, after what seemed a very long winter, I found myself out in the woods in early May checking for bushes and blooms.

Picking the wild blueberries of Northern Minnesota can be quite a task. Unless it is a very good year, one may have to cover quite a lot of ground to get a full bucket. The berries are often small, and the bushes are usually low to the ground. There are always mosquitoes, ticks, heat and humidity, and the occasional bear or skunk to contend with.

Friends point out that all this effort and suffering is unnecessary. One could go to a blueberry farm and pick lovely, nickel-sized berries from shoulder height bushes. They are well watered and tended, so are generally sweet and uniform. They also don’t take as much time and preparation to make into pies, jam, or bread. Why do it?

This is where the comparison to college students comes in. There have been times when well-meaning colleagues have asked me when I am going to apply for a “real” teaching job at a university. They tell me that the student quality is better because the admission requirements are higher. The students are more prepared and understand the academic processes. University positions are also more prestigious.

Like wild blueberries, the community college student population is very diverse. While wild blueberries may be small, spicy, silvery, tart or very sweet, single-os, or packed closely on the vine, the diversity of community college students is even greater. There are the canny students, right out of high school, who are looking to save money by finishing their first two years at a community college. There are “seniors” who are auditing courses to expand their horizons. There are new students who have been in the workforce for twenty years and are now in need of re-education. There are many students from other countries who have come to the United States for a U.S. education. There are veterans, fresh from military service, making the sometimes difficult transition back to civilian life.

Many students do not yet know what they want, only that they want a better life. Some students struggle with poverty, mental illness, family responsibilities, and the burden
of working one or two jobs while taking classes. It is not unknown for my students to battle with cancer, increase their families, struggle in the criminal justice system, or be confronted with hunger during their college career.

This vast student diversity gives teaching an extra challenge. One never knows what the overall class readiness level will be, and teaching to all requires much effort and attention. One cannot take student technical skills or even internet access for granted. One must be alert for the extra opportunities to help clear non-academic obstacles from the students’ path.

Why spend all the extra time and effort? Like the wild blueberries, it’s all about the final jam. When I add all the varieties and flavors of the wild blueberries together, the result is worth the effort. The jam or pies from these varied berries has a wonderful, complex, and ever new flavor. The aftertaste lingers pleasantly.

Once my classes of students are comfortable with each other, their wide diversity begins to pay off. As we work through material, we benefit from the different perspectives and life experiences that each student brings to the class. The discussions take on surprising and interesting turns. Philosophy leaps off the page and becomes personal. The final “jam” is rich, nuanced, and memorable.

NOTES
1. Thanks to Michal Raich for the metaphor of community college students and blueberries that sparked this essay.

Students Who Don’t Give a Damn
Marc Bobro
SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE

How does your ego handle the fact that some people really don’t give a damn about your lifetime academic pursuit?

When I was a graduate student in philosophy at King’s College London in 1990, some undergraduate students complained to me in confidence that if their philosophy professors discovered that they weren’t interested in becoming professional philosophers—these students were, in fact, interested only in obtaining a B.A., in whatever discipline—then they would be promptly failed. They claimed that a student had already been failed for this very reason. Hailing from the U.S., where many students go to college simply to get a bachelor’s, and American professors generally don’t fail them for this reason, I was a bit shocked. One explanation is straightforward: the percentage of British students who attend college is much lower than in the U.S., so those who go to college are expected to take their chosen program of study very seriously. Another explanation is that if an American professor did such a thing, she or he would be fired. At any rate, the result is that I, as a professor in the U.S., and at a two-year college no less, get many students who are really not interested in my chosen discipline. Moreover, I can’t just fail the apathetic ones.

Some students, however, just don’t “give a damn” at all about philosophy. When I encounter such a student, I typically react in one of three very different ways: (a) with sadness, (b) with indifference, or (c) with frustration. Which reaction I have depends largely on why the student doesn’t give a damn. Let’s address reaction (a) first: sadness. Philosophy, at least initially, makes many students uncomfortable, especially students who have never questioned, or were not allowed to question, authority figures, such as parents and elders, about reality, religion, ethics, free will, and the like. At a Catholic college where I used to teach, I asked several classes about whether their parents or elders allowed them to question them on such matters. Very few students said yes. I believe that in one particular class only one student said yes, and to this day I remember his full name. (For what it’s worth, he’s now a Catholic priest.) The response at this college was particularly extreme, but on my understanding of and my experience in American education, generally, students are molded to question their teachers as little as possible, to listen and take good notes instead of engaging with teachers and peers, and, of course, to do well on standardized tests. Very little philosophy is offered, and very little philosophizing goes on, especially before college. One college roommate I had thought Plato was still alive. American education, by and large, is a system of inculcation rather than a pathway to satisfy a student’s curiosity and interests. As a result, American students have little understanding of what philosophers do. So the fact that almost all students at this college were raised Catholic is at best a partial explanation of the response I received. At any rate, it’s difficult to begin to philosophize if you’ve never experienced it, much less done it. And because such students don’t have a clue about philosophy, it’s not surprising that they also don’t give a damn about my discipline.

In cases where a student has no clue about what I do, my reaction is usually one of sadness. For this cluelessness means that the student has lived seventeen years or more of their life with no real exposure to philosophy, all the while going to school. Education is mandatory in the U.S.; if someone aged five to seventeen is not going to a public or a private school, she or he had better be homeschooled. By the time they reach college, students are exposed to mathematics, literature, history, politics, religion, geography, biology, physics, chemistry, sociology, theater, art, and music. Given our obsession with earthquakes in California, students here also learn about geology. But for the most part students have never heard of Descartes. Descartes is a national hero in France; all children know of him. Who in the U.S. knows of our own philosophers, such as William James or John Rawls? For the purposes of clarification, I am not insisting that philosophy be compulsory. Rather, I am lamenting the fact that while so many other subjects are required, philosophy isn’t included on that list.

Let’s now look at (b): indifference. As a student, isn’t it great to have a teacher who is passionate about her or his chosen discipline? I’m passionate about mine. But it is a different matter entirely when a teacher desires every student in her or his class to share in this passion. “Isn’t math the greatest?!” Perhaps it is, but let’s be honest. Math isn’t for
everyone. Nor is philosophy. One’s lifetime pursuit is not for everyone, nor should it be. To put this point another way, there’s some truth to Plato’s “noble lie” or “magnificent myth” of the metals. Socrates says, “All of you in the city are certainly brothers,” we shall say to them in telling the tale [of the metals], “but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; iron in the farmers and bronze in the other craftsmen.”

Believing in this myth, Socrates predicts, “would have a good effect, making people more inclined to care for the State and one another.” Plato himself may or may not have taken this “magnificent myth” as truth; nonetheless, the good or harmony of his Republic depends on its citizens engaging in different roles. In other words, the ideal State is a socially stratified one, and most certainly not one where everyone is engaged in philosophy.

So when a student understands the discipline of philosophy in a basic way, and has perhaps even taken prior classes in philosophy, but finds little that is galvanizing about it or personally useful, I tend to shrug my shoulders and think, “whatever.” In this case, my reaction, or lack thereof, is one of apathy. Again, my lifetime pursuit is not for everyone. Who’s going to fix my broken leg? The only exception is when it’s clear to me that a student has a particular penchant and/or affinity for philosophizing and has not yet recognized it as such. Some students believe mistakenly that philosophy is not their passion.

Finally, let’s consider reaction (c): frustration. Some students don’t give a damn about philosophy because they have been exposed to philosophy, or what they take to be philosophy, and have concluded that philosophy isn’t worth giving a damn about. There are a number of reasons why students join my class with such a view. Sometimes philosophy is required. For instance, all students at many Catholic colleges have to take three philosophy classes. Sometimes, albeit rarely, students take a class in order to challenge the professor. This isn’t so much a problem in philosophy because not many students know about philosophy prior to college. But in some departments, such as political science, this is a serious problem. Conservative students will, on occasion, take a course from a known liberal professor in order to challenge her or his political views. Now, students who already think that philosophy is a waste of time, or some such, come in two groups—the quiet and the loud: those who keep their misgivings and cynicism about philosophy to themselves and silently simmer away in class, and those who are outspoken and want the whole class to know that they have problems with the discipline of philosophy. Regarding the former group—the quiet—I just do what I normally do, with the hope that my passion somehow rubs off on them and that my teaching “works its magic.” I know that this is pretty much a pipe dream, but sometimes it actually works. During the semester or at the end, or even a year later, I’ve had students tell me that I changed their prejudices about philosophy. Regarding the latter group—the loud—well, let’s just say that I relish a challenge. So when an outspoken naysayer, a critic of philosophy, takes my class, I will defend my chosen discipline. Politely, of course.

One way I do this is by preparing specially for the kinds of criticisms that I know I will receive. I come into class with a “game face,” similar to the kind of approach I took to refereeing soccer matches. I knew that opposing coaches, parents, and sometimes even players would challenge me. I was ready for them. Unbeknownst to them, I would actually look forward to matches. Bring it on.

Ultimately, there are at least three different reasons for why some students don’t give a damn about my “lifetime pursuit.” Depending on the reason, I react differently: sometimes with sadness, other times with indifference, and, at others, frustration. I do have hope that such students will change their minds, but I have no false hope about this. Some students will not change their minds, and that’s perfectly fine.

**Specifications Grading: A Useful Two-Year College Alternative**

William Behun

MCHENY COUNTY COLLEGE, ILLINOIS

Cluster grading, or Specifications (“Spec”) Grading is a terminology used to describe a loosely connected set of grading approaches that can serve as an alternative to traditional grading schemes, and which can be particularly useful for typical philosophy students in two-year colleges. These students tend not to be philosophy majors, but rather students seeking to fulfill distribution requirements, or non-traditional students. The terminology of Specifications Grading is closely associated with the work of Linda Nilson from the University of Pittsburgh, but it first came to my attention as the result of a union newsletter that outlined some basic principles of Clustering or Specifications Grading.

In short, Spec Grading bases student evaluation simply on completion of sets, or clusters, of assignments rather than evaluating individual assignments on the basis of specific quality standards and applying point or percentage grades for each assignment. For philosophy majors, it is, perhaps, important to ensure that students’ assignments are reflective of a high degree of philosophical rigor, including tight argumentation, attention to logical structures, and close reading of primary texts. On the other hand, it is perhaps more important for students in two-year colleges to achieve a more general familiarity with basic principles of philosophical enquiry and clear argumentation. Rather than requiring extended writing assignments, Spec Grading, as I have applied it, on the community college level involves shorter assignments with more conservative goals of understanding key concepts, principles, and texts.

The grading system consists of different kinds of assignments, for example, short analytical essays, vocabulary assignments, quizzes, etc. and the student’s grade is dependent on satisfactory completion of these clusters of assignments. As an illustration, from my
introduction to philosophy class, students must complete a cluster of 350- to 500-word analytics papers in order to merely pass. In order to get a C, they must also complete a cluster of vocabulary assignments, and to get a B they must also satisfactorily complete a series of objective quizzes. Finally, to get an A in the class they must complete all of these and also a longer, more in-depth final paper. All of these assignments are assessed on a complete/incomplete basis, which allows the instructor (in this case, me) to return student work much more quickly, and provide sufficient feedback without overwhelming the student. In addition, this system encourages hard work and completion as opposed to traditional point-based or percentage-based grading schemes, which run the risk of students paying more attention to trying to maximize point values rather than concerning themselves with, as it were, the big picture. In general, I have found that students who do not do well in my classes fail, not because they turn in bad work, but because they don’t turn in work. Cluster Grading, therefore, allows me to rigorously evaluate students without getting bogged down in point value details by addressing precisely this tendency.

Generally, my experience has been that grade distributions and grade point averages remain consistent whether I am using a point system or a Specifications Grading system. This indicates to me that there is no real discrepancy in terms of the relationship between the grade received and the effort put forward. Ultimately, I believe that Specifications Grading does a better job of rewarding that effort, which, ultimately, I believe is most important in the context of the two-year college experience. In the future, I hope to more fully explore this approach in further articles here in the newsletter, particularly Specifications Grading’s usefulness for philosophy instruction at the two-year college level.

Academic freedom to conduct classes as we see fit has some significant downsides for the students. It is a virtue to be able to be creative in our course design. This, unfortunately, forces many of us to improve our teaching methods by experimenting in our courses. My years outside of the academic world in business lead me to believe that this is not the best way to meet our goal of educating students. This violates the adage attributed to the philosopher George Santayana, “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” It would be far better if we could leverage the lessons learned by our predecessors, rather than having our students suffer as we “reinvent the wheel.” Our goal should not be to conduct experiments in our classrooms. The goal is to employ the best methods for achieving the appropriate teaching objectives and student learning outcomes. Military training, on which lives depend, is, therefore, not built on the individual instructor’s discovering the optimal training method by experiment. Unfortunately, this “Wisdom of Crowds” is not regularly leveraged in academic philosophy.

As the chair of the APA Committee on Philosophy in Two Year Colleges, I have begun working on an initiative to help close some of these gaps. The initiative would establish (and find funding for) a summer institute focused on teaching philosophy at community colleges. In concept, it would be similar to the summer institutes funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities for college professors. This institute would be held when most community colleges are not in session, e.g., during the month of August. The institute would be guided by philosophers with substantial success in teaching lower-level philosophy courses, who have directed and contributed to successful pedagogical training programs for graduate students in philosophy, and who are thought leaders in philosophy pedagogy. Sessions would include presentations and “hands on” workshops on topics such as the following:

- a comparison of approaches to teaching philosophy (e.g., Historical Approach Learning Classic Philosophical Works vs. Problems Approach looking at Philosophical Problems and Arguments)
- student learning outcomes for philosophy courses
- course offerings
- course design
- classroom and teaching techniques
- online and hybrid courses vs. face-to-face
- philosophy course syllabi
- philosophy exams/paper assignments
- assessment techniques
- choosing textbooks – commercial and open educational resources

---

**A Summer Institute for Community College Philosophy Professors**

Richard Legum  
**KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE–CUNY**

I returned to teaching philosophy at Kingsborough Community College six years ago. After twenty-eight years in business, I was convinced that studying philosophy for community college students uniquely develops practical skills—i.e., skills sought out by employers. These are skills that enabled me to smoothly transition from academia to the business world. However, the right teaching methods must be employed and the appropriate educational objectives must be set. When I returned to teaching philosophy, I was concerned that my lack of any formal training in pedagogy might limit my success in conveying these skills to my students. To fill this gap, I attended (and continue to attend) pedagogy-focused faculty interest group sessions organized by the Kingsborough Center for Teaching and Learning. While I learned a great deal from these activities, information specifically tailored for teaching philosophy at community colleges was missing.
• philosophy of education, epistemology, and teaching philosophy

The summer institute would include presentations, “hands-on” workshops, and presentations, as well as opportunities to work on research in philosophy pedagogy and related topics in philosophy, e.g., philosophy of education, cognitive science.

I hope to get this summer institute off the ground in the summer of 2018. I have had some preliminary discussion with philosophers who ran and participated in the Philosophy Department’s graduate student pedagogy program at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center. I invite anyone interested in this initiative to reach out to me with suggestions at rich.legum@gmail.com.

NOTES
1. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/georgesant101521.html

CALL FOR PAPERS

The APA Committee for Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges invites papers for inclusion in the spring 2018 issue of the APA Newsletter on Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges.

Papers should be devoted to topics of particular interest to two-year and community college faculty, and graduate students who are considering a two-year or community college career path. These include but should not be construed as limited to the following: lower division teaching pedagogy; text and textbook selections including the use of open-access resources; cross-disciplinary initiatives; student demographics and advising; student learning evaluation; program evaluation and program growth initiatives; faculty credentialing and hiring, including concerns for women and minorities, status of adjunct faculty, workload and related issues; faculty scholarship opportunities, research, and writing; and issues dealing with program administration. Co-authored papers are welcome.

All paper submissions should adhere to the following guidelines:

• Deadline: Friday, January 5, 2018

• Papers must be in 12 pt. Times-New Roman font, double-spaced, and should be in the range of 3,000 to 5,000 words, including endnotes. Exceptional papers that fall outside this range may be considered, though this is not guaranteed. Authors are advised to read APA publishing guidelines available on the APA website.

• Pay close attention to all APA formatting restrictions. Submissions that do not conform will be returned to their author(s). Endnotes should follow the Word default using roman numerals to number the notes.

• Papers should be sent to the editor electronically and should contain nothing that identifies either the author(s) or her/his/their institution, including any such references in the endnotes. A separate page with the authors name, title, and full mailing address should also be submitted.

Submissions should be sent to the Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges Committee chair and newsletter editor, Thomas Urban, at TwoYearEditor@gmail.com, by January 5, 2018.

The editor, serving in the capacity of a disinterested coordinator, will distribute all papers to an editorial committee of current and past Two-Year College Committee members for anonymous review and evaluation. This committee will report its findings to members of the newsletter editorial board. The editorial board will make all publishing decisions based on those anonymously refereed results, and conduct any further anonymous review(s) deemed necessary. The editorial board includes Kristen L. Zbikowski, Hibbing Community College (kristenzbikowski@hibbing.edu); Anthony Kreider, Miami-Dade Community College (akreider@mdc.edu); Bill Hartmann, St. Louis Community College (bhartmann@stlcc.edu); and Rick Repetti, Kingsborough Community College–CUNY (Rick.Repetti@kbcc.cuny.edu).
FROM THE EDITORS

Tziporah Kasachkoff
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY, TKASACHKOFF@YAHOO.COM

Eugene Kelly
NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, EKELLY@NYIT.EDU

We welcome our readers to the fall 2017 edition of the APA Newsletter on Teaching. We offer this month five articles and a list of books for possible review.

In our first paper, Professor Andy German of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev reflects upon how a conception of philosophical history may inform the teaching of philosophy. He begins with a familiar challenge to philosophy professors by their students: When do we pass from the study of historical figures in philosophy to the practice of philosophy itself? German pursues this question throughout his paper. Without wishing to anticipate the conclusions that he reaches after his six pedagogical reflections, he notes that students who raise this challenge may unwittingly stand in the way of a positive response to it. Most of them—and many of the rest of us—are used to thinking of the past as essentially overcome and reduced to irrelevance by the present, much as pocket computers have made adding machines and telephone books obsolete. But the nature of philosophy itself presents an obstacle to a transition from its own history to the philosophical process itself by being both historical and ahistorical. It is rooted in a tradition, but it always has the ambition to overcome its own tradition and to return radically to the roots of things. In his thoughtful reflections, German shows us how such a conception of philosophy may be put to use in the classroom.

Our second paper, “Philosophy That Is Ancient: Teaching Ancient Philosophy in Context,” Nickolas Pappas of City College and the Graduate Center, CUNY, concerns himself with the question of how a teacher of ancient philosophy can take advantage of students’ natural curiosity about the daily lives of the persons we encounter in the ancient world, especially those in Plato’s Dialogues. A student’s innocent question about the account in Phaedo of Socrates’ last words, “We owe a cock to Asclepius”: “So they had chickens?” inspired Professor Pappas to do quite a bit of research on life in ancient Greece, and he gives us a list of what he considers to be the best sources of such information. He discusses how he puts to pedagogical use such matters as the games and attire of wealthy boys, as the life and social and psychological role of domestic slaves, and as Socrates’ famous comparisons between the knowledge and art of shoemakers or physicians and the knowledge and art of the just person. (What did doctors and shoemakers know, and what was their skill?) The understanding of such everyday matters by Plato’s audience would surely have informed their response to Socrates’ homely comparisons and the questions they raise. Examples of how Greek practices in some area conflict with our own can also be thought-provoking, for such oppositions suggest deeper differences in the emotional or intellectual orientation of members of the two cultures. In conclusion, Professor Pappas suggests three ways in which historical background can be brought into philosophy classrooms.

Steven M. Cahn’s brief essay, “Teaching about the Existence of God,” takes off from the author’s recent book, Religion within Reason. He claims that in introductory courses in philosophy where the existence of God figures as a topic, instructors may mislead students by assuming a set of untrue or highly questionable principles. These include the beliefs that if the existence of God is disproved, religion is unreasonable, that if the Abrahamic God exists, then the secular is the profane, that theism implies some specific religious commitment, and that the only correct form of supernaturalism involves a belief in God. He concludes, “A successful defense of traditional theism requires not only that it be more plausible than atheism or agnosticism, but that it be more plausible than all other supernatural alternatives.”

The fourth paper, “Considering the Classroom as a Safe Space,” by David Sackris of Princeton University, is in part a response to an article in the APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy by Lauren Freeman, which argues for the creation of safe spaces on campuses and in classrooms where women and minority students may feel free of Stereotype Threat and Implicit Bias. The purpose of such practices is to decreaseattrition and encourage more women and minorities to pursue philosophy as a career. Professor Sackris approves of Professor Freeman’s intentions but believes that it is sufficient to those purposes to create safe spaces of various kinds on campus, and that to do so in the classroom threatens to vitiate academic content and standards. In his discussion, Professor Sackris seems to shift from safe spaces to decrease bias and stereotypes to safe spaces to decrease discomfort with the material they are being asked to master such as units on abortion, race, feminism, or religion. Free self-expression about such topics by one group might well make another group feel threatened in some way. Yet denying students such an atmosphere of conflict may deny them valuable academic experiences. Surely Freeman would agree with that. Sackris further argues that we ought to stop talk of
“safety” or “comfort,” and instead pursue the goals of decreasing stereotypes and bias without injuring the concept of academic freedom and the intellectual conflicts it necessarily fosters. He offers specific suggestions as to how these ends can be met.

The reply to a review, “On Happiness and Goodness,” by Christine Vitrano of Brooklyn College, CUNY, concerns what she takes to be a misunderstanding by Matthew Pinalto in his review of a book that she published recently with Steven M. Cahn, Happiness and Goodness: Philosophical Reflections on Living Well. The crux of the misunderstanding concerns a hypothetical thought-question about the abstractly conceived “lives” of two persons. Pinalto holds that the authors’ claim that there is no compelling reason to rate one of the two lives as better than the other neglects recent writers on ethics who give us theoretical reasons for holding that one or the other life is, in fact, better. But Vitrano notes that her book contains an argument that such theories are to be rejected. Pinalto accuses Vitrano and Cahn of uncritically assuming that there are no moral or eudemonistic reasons for preferring one life to another, whereas in fact the book argues that there are no such persuasive reasons. Indeed, against Pinalto, they claim that no other theory than theirs could reach the conclusion that both lives are equally worthy.

We always encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other material (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use. Though the names of books and other materials that we have recently received from publishers for possible review are listed in our Books Received section in each edition of the newsletter, reviewers are welcome to suggest material for review that they have used in the classroom and found useful. However, please remember that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues. This should be borne in mind not only when writing articles for our publication but also when reviewing material for our publication.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

As always, we encourage our readers to write to us about their experiences as teachers. We also welcome articles that respond, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.

The following guidelines for submissions should be followed:

All papers should be sent to the editors electronically. The author’s name, the title of the paper and full mailing address should appear on a separate page. Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear within the body or within the footnotes/endnotes of the paper. The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself.

Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA. For example, in writing your paper to disk, please do not use your word processor’s footnote or endnote function; all notes must be added manually at the end of the paper. This rule is extremely important, for it makes formatting the papers for publication much easier.

All articles submitted to the newsletter are blind-reviewed by the members of the editorial committee:

Tziporah Kasachkoff, The Graduate Center, CUNY (tkasachkoff@yahoo.com), co-editor

Eugene Kelly, New York Institute of Technology (ekelly@nyit.edu), co-editor

Robert Talisse, Vanderbilt University (robert.talisse@vanderbilt.edu)

Andrew Wengraf (andrew@welch-wengraf.fsnet.uk)

ARTICLES

Philosophy and Its History: Six Pedagogical Reflections

Andy German

BEN GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV

What makes teaching the history of philosophy a philosophical, rather than merely doxographical, enterprise? That is the guiding question of these reflections. It arises from a conviction—born of experience—that part of teaching the history of philosophy involves exposing oneself to the possibility that such teaching stands in need of justification.

I. Prima facie, it is unclear why the guiding question should even be a question. What could be more obvious than the fact that Western philosophy, at least, has canonical texts and canonical problems arising from them, and that primarily and for the most part, we philosophize through these texts, which tradition has bequeathed to us. It seems equally unproblematic that being a historian of philosophy simply means having a professional competence in that tradition.
What is more, it is arguably impossible even to conceive how we could begin philosophizing except as part of such a tradition. No one, after all, springs full-grown from the womb declaring that “Being is said in many ways.” One learns to identify what philosophical questions are and how to approach them mostly through participating in the institutional life of philosophy. Contemporary academic philosophy is only the latest incarnation of this life, which has its roots in Plato’s Academy, if not earlier. As this institutional life changes so too do the questions and answers that are treated as philosophical going concerns.

This last fact is important, though easily forgotten. In fact, a solid grounding in the history of philosophy may be the only way to prevent such forgetfulness. Take, for example, the “mind-body problem”—that old war-horse which, by now, has been ridden into the ground many times over. Schematically stated, the problem is as follows: Our bodies are entirely subordinated to unbounding natural laws (laws formulated today in the language of mathematical physics). These laws describe a world in which the only things having verifiable existence are mass-points moving in, and influenced by, fields of force. In addition, there is a rather disparate collection of phenomena which, since at least Descartes, have been grouped together under the term “mind” or “the mental.” This collection includes all those events that occupy no readily identifiable position in space and are accompanied by a sense of interiority and immediacy we express with the first person singular. The relationship between these two realms (even the question of whether they are actually separate realms at all) has begotten whole libraries. It is a quaestio vexata so relentlessly familiar, so intractable, that it can seem to be coterminous with philosophy itself, simply part of the “frame of this world,” as it were. Of course, it is nothing of the kind.

The problem in its current form was unknown to the Greeks, who did not have a word exactly corresponding to our “mind.” This was not because they were too naïve to be acquainted with the various phenomena we group under that word; everyone is acquainted with these phenomena. It was rather that the Greek concept of psychē, and its relationship to body (sōma), was understood differently. Aristotle, for example, would likely have judged the early modern concepts “matter” and “body” infected with such incoherence as to be beyond all repair, and the same would then follow for the supposed problem of how “mind” relates to this body.

The mind-body problem, then—like the problem of free will and determinism and some others—is neither necessary nor universal. It arises at a particular time, in a specific philosophical tradition with its specific historical trajectory. In order to know that this is so, one must know the history. A small adjustment of the Latin phrase thus seems to yield an unanswerable justification for the history of philosophy—primum legere, deinde philosophari; first read, then philosophize.

II.

Unfortunately, matters are not so simple. To read the texts of past philosophers is not necessarily to philosophize; neither is teaching them. These could just as well be a flight from philosophical thinking into the minutiae of textual exegesis. Of course, the primary task of the teacher of past philosophical texts is to make reading into philosophizing. The question is how one succeeds in doing this and here we encounter two main difficulties, both of them concerned with time or the relationship philosophy has to time.

The first difficulty is raised by our students, whether explicitly or not. Most students (and not only Americans, as one quickly discovers by teaching in Israel) derive their conception of time from their experience of technological change. As Heidegger observed, technology has long since ceased to be merely another, more intricate and powerful, kind of tool. For most students, it is the great fact of their lives, an all-encompassing medium through which they relate to the world. The picture of time operative in this medium is of an ever-accelerating progress in which the present does not merely come after the past, but replaces it. This is so either because the present does better what the past aimed to do, thus obviating that past as thoroughly as the steam engine obviates the stagecoach, or because the present opens new vistas of need or desire (and the technical apparatus for fulfillment of these) of which the past lacked all conception. The future, by extension, promises more of the same—ever stronger, faster, better. Like the proverbial fish that is always the last to discover water, those who live in this technological medium are unaware that their conception of time is only one among others, and a questionable one at that. In teaching past thinkers, of course, we must impress upon students why this kind of temporal experience cannot apply to philosophy, why philosophical understanding does not progress in this linear fashion, and why the transition from one thinker or philosophical epoch to another is neither accumulation nor replacement simpliciter. In thinking about how to do this, we quickly run up against the second difficulty: How, and in what sense, does philosophy even have a history anyway? Our first difficulty, then, arises from the contemporary context in which philosophical pedagogy takes place, by which I mean the place from which we must begin because that is where our students are. The second, as we will now see, arises from the nature of philosophy itself.

III.

If philosophy is an intrinsically historical, i.e., temporal, phenomenon it would seem that it ought to have a beginning in time. Our ability to identify philosophy depends on our ability to identify when it became something distinguishable from other expressions of man’s spiritual life. When and where was this beginning? The standard introductory answer is at least as old as Aristotle. Thales, Aristotle reports, was the founder of that type of philosophical thinking which sought first principles. For Thales, this principle was material—water. Customarily, I then tell students that while Thales may very well have had predecessors and while he probably drew on common Near Eastern cosmological motifs, he was nevertheless the first clearly attested thinker to abandon the mythological explanations of Greek and other traditions in favor of the use of the unaided powers of human observation and reasoning about those observations. And so, I conclude
with a flourish, philosophy originated in a transformation of traditional mystical thought.

Now, all this is serviceable as far as it goes, except that it does not go very far beyond the most rudimentary scene setting. On closer examination, in fact, it becomes confused. In order for someone to initiate a conceptual revolution from within an existing intellectual framework (within traditional cosmological myths, say) that person must already intuit that this framework has limits. He must be in a position to see, for example, that it rests on faulty or nonsensical assumptions, that the cosmological myths in question are opaque or self-contradictory or point beyond themselves. To begin to reach beyond traditional cosmological myths, one must already be agitated by a dissatisfaction with partial and limited explanations, and this entails that one has at least a preliminary conception of what comprehensively true explanation would look like. In other words, in order to begin to separate from an intellectual framework one must, in a crucial sense, already be outside it. Philosophy is not the result of a gradual distancing from myth. The gradual distancing from myth is the result of philosophizing. Thales’ fragments, then, are not the “beginning” of philosophy but an extremely antique trace of the philosophical impetus at work. Indeed, so long as there are rational beings, philosophy cannot have its own, absolute, beginning in time. We encounter it as something that has always already begun.

Aristotle’s Metaphysics opens with the assertion, “All human beings desire by nature to know.” But if this is true and we say— as I believe we would be correct to say—that the philosophical impulse inheres in the very structure of human rationality, it is legitimate to ask why philosophy’s past should be in any way dispositive for its present activity. If, for example, we are investigating the nature of moral obligation, it is certainly worthwhile to know what our predecessors had to say about it. This will help in formulating questions more incisively and will save us from making laughable claims about our originality. But these, after all, are instrumental reasons. If we wish to profit from thinking along with Kant, Bishop Butler, or Mill, the reading can only be ministerial to other, unfinished business. We must aim for a maximally accurate phenomenological description of practical life and then extract from it a definition of morally relevant action (as opposed to instinctual reactions, say). We must map and analyze our basic moral concepts and the intuitions they express, seeking to establish their normative valence and testing them to separate the wheat from the chaff. We must try to formulate general rules for moral behavior and defend these from possible refutation. Description, definition, analysis, examination, discernment, argument, refutation—all of these are expressions of rational work that can take place for us only here and now. We may, for example, become convinced that Kant’s categorical imperative really is the formal structure of any possible moral obligation, but this conviction is a philosophical act that takes place in the present, even when directed toward past thinkers.

In this respect, philosophy is analogous to sight. Seeing is complete at every moment it occurs. There are, no doubt, physiological processes of development and maturation that are conditions for an organism having a functioning eye, and we can describe these processes. We can also give a chronological account of the various neural events that accompany seeing. None of these is a description of sight, however. There is neither development, maturation nor, really, process of any kind in the act of seeing. Whenever we see, sight is fully present as itself. The same is true of philosophical reason. If it represents a universal and always available human possibility, it is not a cumulative product of a historical process. Sensu stricto, its past is irrelevant to its essence.

I am not surprised, then, when some of my brighter students (as well as some academic colleagues) wonder aloud when they can finally have done with interpreting past philosophers and move on to “actual philosophizing.” Why, in other words, not face the philosophical problems directly (something we eventually must do, in any case)? Is there not reasonable cause to suspect that the heavy drapery of old books in which we wrap ourselves is a refuge from thinking for ourselves? For those, like me, whose philosophical sensibility inclines toward the past, this charge is not lightly dismissed. The students who voice it are merely restating the central paradox that we have been considering. Philosophy appears in the various great works preserved for us from history. Yet, it is a fundamentally a-historical activity. How exactly is it, then, that philosophy both appears in history and yet is not a historical phenomenon in any simple sense? And this returns us to our opening question: Is the teaching of past thinkers a philosophical activity proper or only an encounter with the residue of philosophical activity?

IV.

Pālin ex archēs, Plato’s Socrates would say. Let us return to those supposedly obvious first principles from which we begin with our own students. Philosophy, we assert, is the love of wisdom. Now, wisdom involves knowledge or a kind of knowledge. Certainly, this knowledge has been defined differently throughout the history of Western philosophy: as a grasp of the Idea of the Good, or a beatific vision of the ens perfectissimum, or knowledge of the workings of the transcendental Ego, or of the Absolute. Nevertheless, it was never merely one more kind of knowledge alongside others. The wisdom sought by philosophy, including even Kant’s critical philosophy in which reason is supposed to uncover its own limits, is not a “body of knowledge,” or a “regional” science. Every field of human endeavor requires some kind of knowledge: medical, architectural, political, etc. In order to apply such knowledge effectively in its proper domain we may need to learn and relearn many things, but in order to be competent architects or even statesmen we do not need to constantly revisit questions like “What is knowledge?” or “What explains why the world is knowable at all?” This is not true for philosophy, which cannot even strive toward its goal (to say nothing of achieving it) without seeking a full grounding and justification of itself. Hence, philosophy, by its very nature, cannot but raise the most comprehensive and radical questions—radical in the original meaning of going to the radix, the root. We may characterize philosophy, then, as comprehensive radicalism (or radical comprehensiveness). This characterization is hardly simple or unproblematic, but
I find it broadly accurate as a description of the Western philosophical tradition.

However, if philosophy is the exercise of reason in its most comprehensively radical form, philosophers are human beings, necessarily limited and finite. A philosopher is a part of the whole, which raises the question of whether a part can ever encompass the whole in knowledge. A philosopher, moreover, has finite time, in which a definitive grounding of reason may prove unattainable. It is from these “obvious” reflections that we can begin explaining the oddity of philosophy’s relation to its history and draw some pedagogical consequences. Namely, so long as the love of wisdom has not become wisdom simpliciter, all philosophers and all philosophical teachings, including those that have undoubtedly expanded the horizons of our understanding, are doomed to fall short in some way. The fate of all philosophical teachings is refutation. Refutation, however, is nothing other than a reaffirmation of the comprehensive radicalism of philosophy.

And here we come to the crux. The competence of the scholar is the rigorous explication of philosophical texts and doctrines in their specificity and difference from one another. This remains true even where the scholar intends to show how certain texts are intimately related, or how one philosopher refines or can only be understood from the vantage point of another. Over and above the differences between philosophers, however, is the comprehensive radicalism that is the same in all of them. Now, in the nature of the case, the differences are more apparent than the sameness, and it is on these that we focus in our teaching. This is why the history of philosophy can sometimes seem like a march of intellectual follies, substantiating Cicero’s complaint that “there is nothing so absurd that some philosopher has not said it.” One key to transforming this march of follies into reason’s effort at self-understanding lies in bringing students to a fuller appreciation of what refutation actually is. In the next section, I argue that, up to a point, there are practical methods for achieving this in the classroom; but only up to a point. In the final analysis, the philosophical historian qua teacher requires something that is irreducible to professional competence or methodology.

V.

In the classroom, a student will most often encounter refutation as the main engine for philosophical transformation. A classic example is the role of thought experiments. I articulate what appears to me to be an airtight rule for moral judgment applicable in certain circumstances. If my interlocutor demolishes the appearance of universality or necessary entailment by constructing a sufficiently devastating counterexample, I am duty-bound to dispense with that rule or argument. When one expedient fails, I try another. If the damage is more general, I may be compelled to abandon wider philosophical commitments.

The same will hold for a historical class. If I am to teach Aristotle or Hegel, for example, I must articulate, in the most accurate and forceful terms possible, why each thinker believed himself to have superseded his great predecessor, to have refuted the sufficiency or finality of this or that teaching of Plato or Kant, respectively. Usually, then, refutation marks a kind of hiatus or caesura between one philosophical claim or doctrine, now defunct, and another, which takes its place. But this would only serve to confirm students in their technological conception of change as mere replacement. How do we make them see the peculiar character of philosophy that allows it to appear variously throughout the flow of history without being subsumed in that flow?

The key lies in leading students toward a deeper, more reflective level at which refutation, and disagreement more generally, are a mark of identity or continuity, i.e., of the enduring characteristics of a philosophical milieu, and ultimately of philosophical reason itself. That is to say, they must learn to see refutations as conceivable at all only thanks to shared assumptions about the nature of intelligibility, on the one hand, and the nature of philosophy, on the other. Interlocutors must share these precisely in order to be able to disagree. In a genuinely philosophical argument (which, for all we know, may be exceedingly rare), my triumphantly pointing out to my interlocutor that his game is up is actually my appeal to a shared standard, one which I know he accepts. This might be a common doctrinal assumption or a rule of formal logic or the overarching philosophical commitment to follow logos wherever it leads. Ultimately, though, the “shared standard” is the basic philosophical insight that the world is (at least partly) intelligible and that we are striving to articulate this intelligibility. This is what the disagreement is actually “about.” To appeal to another image, philosophical conversation is warfare, but of an utterly unique kind. The “combatants” want to conquer, of course. But to the extent that they are genuine philosophers, they are altogether more eager to be struck down themselves, by the truth. The pedagogical task is to make the relation between past thinkers into such a philosophical conversation, one in which the student is trained not only in articulating competing positions, and taking sides between them, but in seeing the conversation in its underlying, integral wholeness.

I will take Plato and Aristotle as an example. Plato argues that form (eidos) is the primary cause of the determinacy and intelligibility of beings. The form is the essence of its instantiation (i.e., the form Justice enables us to identify particular just acts) but form is nevertheless somehow separate from its instances. It does not come into being and pass away like them. Rather, the instances “imitate” or “participate” in their paradigmatic form.

The fulcrum of Aristotle’s critique is this separation (chórismos in Greek). Aristotle argues that it is senseless to claim that the essential being of something is separate from that thing of which it is the essence. Once this gap is opened up, all attempts to traverse it are futile. To call the relationship between form and instance “imitation” or “participation” is to play with names while explaining nothing at all.

The degree to which Aristotle has done justice to Plato’s teaching, and hence the degree to which his critique is actually decisive, have been the subjects of a truly ancient debate. Let us leave this debate to one side and grant, for
the sake of argument, that the critique is convincing and that Aristotle's form/matter distinction and his concepts of *energeia* and *dynamis* succeed where Plato fails. Has Plato's account been replaced or discarded? In one respect it has, and this would normally be the pedagogical focus. That is, I will point out to students the dilemmas raised by Plato's account of the basic structure of intelligibility. We will then discuss why Aristotle thinks he moves our understanding forward or why we can at least claim that he prepares the way for later advances, by having the good sense to see that essence must be discoverable in the world and so on.

Just like the standard chronology that begins with Thales, this account is sufficient to the moment for an introductory class, but it skates over the deeper dynamic at play. In an advanced class, with a smaller number of students and thus room for a more expansive discussion, the focus can and should be elsewhere. Both thinkers, after all, agree about the causal primacy of form in explaining what it means to be something determinate (i.e., their disagreement is not about the existence and causal importance of form, but about its mode of being). More importantly, Aristotle also shares Plato's conviction that the world is intelligible and his view of the types of questions that this intelligibility imposes on us. In fact, it is only because of this shared basis, which is altogether more fundamental than their differences, that Aristotle could set out to refute his teacher in the first place.

For this reason there can be no doubt that he is doing justice to the deeper impulse behind the Platonic position as he refutes, or perhaps even misinterprets, it. That position and its Aristotelian negation manifest how philosophy remains identical to itself throughout the variegated history of its doctrinal appearances. The student should come to see how, through refutation, philosophical thinking constantly crucifies and resurrects itself in one and the same act.

Now, the teacher must, of course, present all the doctrinal details of the Platonic hypothesis or of Aristotle's critique and test students' grasp of these details. But, at some point, the student must undergo the experience of discovering and articulating the continuity of philosophical commitments and intentions beneath the multiplicity of details. In advanced seminars, this is an excellent assignment for an oral presentation following on the study of the relevant passages from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. It has also served me well as a question prompt for an unorthodox writing assignment: “What assumptions about the nature of being and the nature of thinking must Plato and Aristotle share in order for it to be possible for them to disagree about the nature of form?”

Another example: In an upper-level undergraduate seminar on Hegel, the mid-semester paper asked students to explain how (i) Kant's conception of moral law and (ii) Hegel's strictures, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, against the formalism of that conception, both expressed certain uniquely modern convictions about the status of self-consciousness. Having thought through this question, students then prepared oral arguments debating (at a much higher level than they otherwise could have achieved) whether Hegel or Kant succeeds better in substantiating their shared insight about normativity as the product of self-conscious legislation by rational actors.

Stated otherwise, effective teaching of historical figures in philosophy should require students to go beyond those figures, and here teaching the history of philosophy differs from teaching history. Certainly, in both cases, the first goal is to understand a historical figure and to enter into his thought in as objective a manner as possible: viz., to understand historical figures as they understood themselves. In teaching history, however, we must be on guard against judging an historical actor by standards entirely alien to the relevant historical context. This cannot be the case in quite the same way in philosophy. In focusing pedagogical attention on refutation as a sign of philosophical continuity, I also train the student to locate, in temporally and doctrinally diverse thinkers, evidence of a kind of philosophical impetus that does not belong exclusively to any thinker. The ultimate goal of this training is not for the student to be taught or told, but rather to experience what it means to measure particular philosophers against the standard of philosophy's comprehensive radicalness, a standard which cannot be identified with any historical epoch because it is common to all of them.

**VI.**

This, however, has far-reaching consequences for the efficacy of any pedagogical tool or method. To understand any thinker, or the relationship between two thinkers, a teacher requires the full complement of scholarly tools: mastery of language and historical context, argument analysis, logical acumen, etc. In order to expose students to the substantial unity underlying all philosophical activity, however, there are neither tools nor methods, while “competence,” if applicable at all, receives a completely transformed meaning. Philosophy is not a *technē*. Here it is primarily a matter of having philosophy's comprehensive desire for wisdom constantly in view.

Can pedagogical practices create an environment in which that desire can be ignited in the student? This is akin to asking whether one can motivate students to love philosophy. In *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, Aristotle seems to think that one can build a non-question-begging case for the superiority of the contemplative life by showing, in a dialectical manner, how that life takes up into itself, and perfects, those things that people *ordinarily* identify with goodness and happiness (power, pleasure, leisure, independence, freedom from the vicissitudes of fortune). In an analogous way, I believe, philosophical pedagogy must be a demonstration in *actu* of how philosophy is a more complete, more powerful, and more enduring form of the same pleasure with which students are already familiar through the ordinary, pre-philosophical exercise of their cognitive powers, the experience of “getting it right.”

And in fact, the teacher of the history of philosophy, specifically, is not lacking in opportunities for just such a demonstration, which can be effected by means of a controlled “chemical reaction” between philosophical texts and a certain prevalent belief system which most of our students take in *cum lute*. That system has several salient elements. First, there is the distinctive temporal phenomenology I discussed earlier. Related to this is a pious, if largely uninformed, faith in “science” (usually a somewhat hasty concoction of some physical materialism
sans any real awareness of the full consequences of quantum mechanics, a dash of evolutionary biology, and a staunch neurological focus on the mind as "what the brain does"). Lastly, there is an almost universal, and initially unconquerable, conviction that ethical judgments are, at bottom, strictly relative to an individual or a society. In trying to make students aware of this system of beliefs as only a system of beliefs, I have found certain (perhaps unexpected and often ignored) Greek texts to be highly effective agents of philosophical sedition.14

Of course, a teacher owes his students a philologically and historically sound account of philosophical texts and this means, at a bare minimum, avoiding crudely anachronistic readings which fish around in those texts to find an immediate, "contemporary relevance" which is often not there. Happily, though, in the case of historical examples of first-rate philosophical power, "contemporary relevance" is irrelevant. They can serve as a direct challenge to contemporary doxa precisely by virtue of their remoteness and foreignness. Herewith, some examples, all from an undergraduate, introductory context.

For Aristotle, “nature” (physís) is not simply everything that is. It is a term of distinction, arrived at by contrasting natural with artificial beings.15 In teaching these passages in the Physics, I ask students whether Aristotle would even agree that the contemporary physicist, who applies mathematical laws that are necessarily blind to the difference between natural and artificial beings, is actually studying nature at all. Invariably, this question leaves them flummoxed since they assume either (i) that Aristotle was simply staggering about in a pre-modern fog or (ii) that he was trying to do what our science does but at an amateur level dictated by his primitive mathematics and hopeless experimental machinery. That Aristotle might be in a position to mount a critique of the fundamental ontological and methodological assumptions of our standpoint is utterly perverse to them—exactly the reaction the teacher should want.

In introductory classes, I never fail to teach the passage in the Nicomachean Ethics that treats greatness of soul (megalopsychia), the odd virtue concerned with desiring honors. First-year students are baffled to learn that humility, for Aristotle, is not an ethical virtue—a perfect starting point for a discussion in which they are forced to justify why humility seems to them so obviously a positive trait. A similar dynamic can be extracted from Books II and III of the Republic in which Socrates undertakes his shockingly frank and ruthless purge of all poetry and music. Everyone is familiar with the pedagogic effect of Socrates’ declaration, in the Apology, that “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." Less familiar, but superbly effective, is the use of Socratic censorship in order to force students to justify their own assumptions about freedom of expression. Socrates justifies censorship with an account of human flourishing in which the unity of the polis plays the central role. Of course, we together with our students believe nearly unfettered freedom of expression and publication is good. But good for what, exactly? And according to what conception of human nature and human flourishing? Which conception, Socrates’ or ours, is truer to the facts of our nature as we experience those facts?

In all these cases, we overcome—if only for a moment—the student’s linear and merely cumulative sense of time and convert the teaching of historical texts into a conversation with direct implications for his or her life. We do so not by making those texts “relevant” to students’ lives, but by forcing on them the opposite (and, in my estimation, much more profound) question: Are their lives and opinions relevant, when viewed from the radical and comprehensive standpoint aimed at by philosophical thought? When the philosophical text is deployed in this way, it finds an ally in the natural adventurousness of youth, and the pleasure youth feels in being liberated from the merely given and familiar.

Clearly, however, not everyone will experience this particular form of liberation as pleasurable. Many students regularly find it less enticing than other pleasures, or even intolerable. Nor is there a recipe for which texts to choose and how to deploy them that can be easily replicated by any teacher. These well-known facts of life bring us up against what I hinted at earlier: the outer limits of all method when dealing with a subject like philosophy.

Without in any way meaning to undercut the practical lessons set forth above, there are—at the deepest stratum of philosophical education—no “models” for achieving desired “learning outcomes” nor “metrics” for enhancing the effectiveness of the teacher. Teaching the history of philosophy becomes philosophical most fully only when the teacher is actively philosophizing, that is, when he or she is gripped entirely by the question: “Could this thinker be right about the highest and most comprehensive matters?” To expect otherwise, to seek first to teach the history of philosophy and then engage in “real” philosophizing, is akin to Hegel’s example of the fellow who is determined to learn how to swim before getting wet.16 And, for similar reasons, a student will really grasp the trans-historical unity of philosophical eros behind the bewildering variety of positions and doctrines only when he or she is already seized by that same eros—the surest mark of philosophically inclined spirit. It is thus a pedagogical achievement of great philosophical significance to recognize when, and why, method must finally yield the floor to nature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This is a thoroughly revised and expanded version of remarks given at the annual Ronit Hoida Memorial Colloquium, in the Department of Philosophy of Ben Gurion University of the Negev, my home institution. My thanks to all in attendance, colleagues and students, for their penetrating questions. Further sincere thanks to the Editor and two anonymous reviewers at the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy for excellent comments and suggestions well-taken and, hopefully, well-used.

NOTES
1. Why? Because for Aristotle, matter is not an independently understandable concept, as much modern philosophy seems to assume. It can be understood, if at all, only in relation to form. Taken by itself, matter is something exists only en logōi, in our thinking, and specifically in the act of abstracting from all the identifiable properties of some determinate being. Similarly, “body” is a radically ambiguous term for Aristotle, since there is a fundamental difference between a natural self-organizing body and other bodies. Natural self-organized bodies are ensouled, and it is the soul which is both the principle of nutrition and maintenance of the living body and the principle of many of the activities we call “mental” (such as perception,
mental representation, and thinking). From an Aristotelian point of view, then, the mind-body problem only becomes a problem by ignoring the unique status of natural, ensouled bodies and redefining all bodies as inert mass-points, at which point the anguish question arises of how body thus understood relates to mind thus understood—i.e., as something completely discontinuous with body. This is a perfect example of how the study of ancient texts, approached properly, can be a critical enterprise directed at modernity, rather than merely a doxastic museum tour of the past. For more on this, see p. 7.

2. Hobbes, Leviathan, I, iv, 13: “By this it appears how necessary it is for any man that aspires to true knowledge, to examine the definitions of former authors, and either to correct them when they are negligently set down or to make them themselves. For the errors of definitions multiply themselves according as the reckoning proceeds, and lead men into absurdities, which at last they see, but cannot avoid without reckoning anew from the beginning, in which lies the foundation of their errors. From whence it happens that they which trust to books do as they that cast up many little sums into a greater, without considering whether those little sums were rightly cast up or not; and at last finding the error visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds, know not which way to clear themselves but spend their time fluttering over their books as birds that, entering by the chimney and finding themselves enclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glass window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in.” Note that in the 1668 Latin version of this passage, those “first grounds” which Hobbes intimates are untrustworthy are the Magistrorum principii ("the principles of their teachers").


4. This, of course, is not to deny that some philosophers will explicitly claim to have replaced and made obsolete an earlier form of thinking. Such claims were especially characteristic of the early modern philosophical struggle against the scholastics. One thinks here of Hobbes or Descartes as examples. But, of course, in teaching such philosophers we cannot take such a claim at face value. It must be thought through and challenged.


6. This is how I understand the gnostic, but profound, statement attributed to Alcmaeon: “Human beings die for this reason, that they cannot join the beginning to the end.” Aristotle, Problematika, XVII, 3, 916a33.

7. Or, at least, emendation or qualification. But these only serve to highlight the main point, viz., that this or that teaching is not yet wisdom.


10. See Plato, Gorgias, 505e4-5. While I cannot argue for it fully here, I believe it demonstrable that this applies even to what purports to be a frontal assault, such as we find in Nietzsche, on traditional philosophical rationalism tout court.

11. Metaphysics, A, 9, 991b1-2. This chapter contains a detailed criticism of what Aristotle took to be the doctrine of Ideas.

12. Metaphysics, A, 6, 987b7-14, and 9, 991a20-22.

13. This is why Aristotle can simply assert that the theoretical life is happiness and that “this has already been said,” even though this is the first time he actually says it. Chapter 7 is his demonstration that the superiority of the theoretical life “seems to be in agreement with what has been said and with the truth.” Ethica Nicomachea, X, 7, 1177a12-b26.

14. The history of philosophy can doubtless provide numerous other examples, but I prefer to speak whereof I know.

15. “Of the things which are, some are by nature and others through other causes…” See Physics, B, 1, 192b8-13.


“Philosophy That Is Ancient”: Teaching Ancient Philosophy in Context

Nickolas Pappas
CITY COLLEGE AND THE GRADUATE CENTER, THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

“Ancient philosophy is philosophy that is ancient.” I have taught a course in ancient philosophy almost every year for the last thirty years. Lately I’ve taken to beginning it with this sentence, cribbed from other pedagogical tautologies.

The truism about philosophy that is ancient is my way of bringing students into the double experience, hermeneutically speaking, of reading the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. Ancient philosophy really is philosophy, which is to say that it confronts topics of perennial interest at the level of generality we associate with philosophy that is not ancient, and deploys many of the argumentative and interpretive methods found in contemporary philosophy. Ancient philosophy is philosophy (and we use the present tense of the verb “to be” in saying so) as ancient weather is weather, and as ancient architecture and geometry are architecture and geometry.

But we also speak in the past tense. This is what philosophy was. In archaic and classical Greece, philosophy was materialist cosmology or Sophistic ethics. We distinguish ancient philosophy as ancient by virtue of its differences from later traditions: differences in scientific knowledge, in religious thought and practices, in political and social assumptions, etc. Its antiquity creates a distance. At the introductory level as well as the scholarly, reading ancient philosophers calls for historical contextualization that goes beyond anything we do with Descartes or Hobbes, or even with Aquinas or Anselm.

Reading ancient philosophy is a double game, in other words, and some doubleness enters fruitfully even into a student’s first glimpse of the subject. Socrates is our contemporary as an inquirer into matters of human life and death—but also an antiquarian figure dressed in clothes we can hardly imagine, observing the rules of an etiquette which is to say that it confronts topics of perennial interest at the level of generality we associate with philosophy that is not ancient, and deploys many of the argumentative and interpretive methods found in contemporary philosophy.

Add to the interpretive predicament the very mundane difficulty of students entering a course like this one unprepared to move back and forth between ancient and modern contexts. The mundane difficulty has increased for me over the years, as it may have increased for other people who teach ancient philosophy. At the City College of New York, my course has evolved (for a collection of good reasons) from serving philosophy majors to functioning as the early modern philosophical struggle against the scholastics. One thinks here of Hobbes or Descartes as examples. But, of course, in teaching such philosophers we cannot take such a claim at face value. It must be thought through and challenged.

To the modern student, reading ancient philosophy is weather, and as ancient architecture and geometry are architecture and geometry. At the introductory level as well as the scholarly, reading ancient philosophers calls for historical contextualization that goes beyond anything we do with Descartes or Hobbes, or even with Aquinas or Anselm.

Reading ancient philosophy is a double game, in other words, and some doubleness enters fruitfully even into a student’s first glimpse of the subject. Socrates is our contemporary as an inquirer into matters of human life and death—but also an antiquarian figure dressed in clothes we can hardly imagine, observing the rules of an etiquette which is to say that it confronts topics of perennial interest at the level of generality we associate with philosophy that is not ancient, and deploys many of the argumentative and interpretive methods found in contemporary philosophy.
It is hard to be certain which treatises in the Hippocratic corpus would have been part of medical theory during the lifetimes of Socrates and Plato. Over a period of centuries, the corpus acquired works all of which came to be associated with Hippocrates. Plato knew something about Hippocrates (see a mention at Protagoras 311b-c as well as a statement of medical method at Phaedrus 270c-e), but we hesitate to assign dates to most of the treatises. Two works that do seem to come early, however, are On the Sacred Disease and On Ancient Medicine. The former is a short account of epilepsy that can look refreshingly scientific to the modern reader for its refusal to call epilepsy any more sacred than any other disease (chapter 1). Epilepsy begins in the brain, the author insists (chapter 17). Reading this work, one wants to make Hippocratic medicine a standard for knowledge. But the confidence with which its author attributes epilepsy to phlegm at work in the brain (chapter 18) foretells a long tradition of medical inquiry misled by this theory of humors that stands at such a remove from experience.

This is not to condemn the Hippocrates but rather to say that however we interpret the work, On the Sacred Disease opens up the Socratic technê analogy. The treatise On Ancient Medicine, also likely to date from this time, dwells on the question of what makes medicine a technê (chapter 3), and so also might enter the process of understanding Socrates. (Phaedrus 270c-e might even be a reference to that work.)

The students’ questions that I have referred to might have come out of no more than idle curiosity. But their specificity convinced me that I had been presenting ancient authors in the classroom without enough background information. I started moving consciously toward learning more about the political, scientific, and social history that we need for understanding our ancient authors, and then bringing what I’d learned into the classroom. Now I teach Plato and Aristotle amid details of political, scientific, and social history. Not only how the Athenians governed themselves and what cities they warred against, but every other aspect of their lives as well, is welcome. What did their doctors do? What did people wear? Where did they go on a free afternoon, and what did they do there? Diet, religious practice, romantic love, and physical labor are all important to our conceptions of our own lives today. And my gamble (when I brought the subjects into the classroom) was that seeing the persons of the ancient world as people who cared about comparable things would help my students see the names in their books as concrete persons. Even as a more detailed description of the ancient world situates Socrates in a setting very different from our own, it might help to bring out something of his ordinariness as well.

Aristotle and science. Before moving on to my main examples, which come from Plato, let me qualify what I am saying in connection with Aristotle. Daily life does not enter his writings as it enters Plato’s. We possess none of Aristotle’s dialogues, so we are less likely to find in him the details to be elaborated that we see everywhere in Plato. This is no reason to give up on the larger world when we come to Aristotle’s writings, but it might be a reason to include some of his biological writings, even in an introductory course,

Even passing details about “the porch of the king archon” or Aristotle’s inquiry into “that for the sake of which something happens” threaten to make the philosophy in the course resemble a museum piece. Worse than that, such reminders of the differences between then and now threaten to make philosophy as such, all philosophy, look not like an ongoing and widespread human activity, but something that a few people used to do.

Now, when it comes to antiquity itself, my experience is that students find information about the ancient world interesting—more interesting than we assume—and over the past decade I have altered my teaching of ancient philosophy to immerse students in the daily life of the antiquity that gave birth to that philosophy. This is the single greatest change I’ve made in my teaching method, and I believe it engages students in their reading of ancient philosophy. The only problem, practically speaking, is the question of how much class time can be devoted to readings and topics that are not strictly philosophical. Pedagogically, the question is what philosophical value such teaching has. When is a detail about ancient life significant to the reading of philosophy, and when is it just local color?

Student questions. It was questions from students that originally prompted me to say more about the ancient world when teaching ancient philosophy. Some of those questions sound trivial. One year we had reached the end of Plato’s Phaedo and the last words Socrates said: “We owe a cock to Asclepius” (118a). (It is a weighty utterance; and the last words Socrates said: “We... Phaedo of Plato’s dialogues, so we are less likely to find in him the details to be elaborated that we see everywhere in Plato. This is no reason to give up on the larger world when we come to Aristotle’s writings, but it might be a reason to include some of his biological writings, even in an introductory course,
alongside his logical, ethical, and metaphysical works. This is because in a way Aristotle's biological writings offer the best opportunity of all for seeing where the ancient world lies far from ours and where it touches ours. Sometimes Aristotle generalizes about animal life or medical principles based on what he himself encountered when he spent a few years on the island of Lesbos and where he catalogued the land and sea animals he found there. A recent book, _The Lagoon_, by Armand Marie Leroi, returns to the lagoon on Lesbos that still contains many of the marine species Aristotle observed. Unlike shoes, schools, and social clubs, the fish and fowl of today are the fish and fowl of Aristotle's time. “His favorite animal,” Leroi writes, “was that weirdly intelligent invertebrate, the cuttlefish.” Leroi’s expertise at returning to an Aristotelian species with a contrasting modern description shows another way to keep ancient philosophy both accurately ancient and philosophically contemporary.

Aristotle also plays a part in C. R. S. Harris’s work on ancient theories of circulation, a work that looks at the heart and blood vessels as they were described by Aristotle, Galen, and other ancients.” But I should say that Harris treats the cardiovascular anatomy in greater detail than most nonexpert readers have the patience for. I am grateful for his expertise, but I would not assign this book to a student.

**Plato's Lysis.** Among the works of Plato, there are some that almost always find their way into the classroom. The defense speech of Socrates in the _Apology_ has obvious appeal and significance, and its portrayal of moments in the life of Socrates leads easily to talk about the Peloponnesian War and the subsequent tyranny in Athens, all of which informs the question of how philosophy can coexist with democratic culture. But the speech also leads to more prosaic matters. Socrates proposes a fine he can pay (38b), and we need to say what those amounts mean in modern currency. He compares himself to a foreigner in the courtroom (17d), and it is worth asking what kinds of foreigners did live in Athens, and what kind of lives they lived.

But Socrates is on trial for his life in the _Apology._ This is not the place to observe him in the midst of ordinary existence. Longer dialogues like the _Protagoras_ and _Symposium_ set the stage for Socratic conversations so extensively that a class could happily move at a slow pace through one of those dialogues and not miss a detail. To make my point about teaching Plato, however, I prefer those slices of philosophical life in which Socrates turns casual conversations into incipient theorizing: the _Alicibiades I, Charmides, Euthyphro, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Laches, and Lysis._ Especially in their opening moments, these dialogues communicate glimpses of daily life as it took place in a city like Athens before Alexander reshaped the political and cultural landscape. And because they are all short, these dialogues move quickly into the heart of their philosophical inquiries so the student can get both a snapshot of ancient life and an abstruse conceptual tangle in a single night’s reading.

The _Lysis_ contains both sides of ancient philosophy as I have been talking about it. In one way it doesn’t need any historical context. For even though some of the dialogue’s serpentine arguments are hard to translate into concrete English, the conclusion is clear in every language, as is the idea of philosophical life that the conclusion implies. The _Lysis’s main conversation is about philia—‘friendship’ in the most common rendering, or ‘affection’ (but often applying where ‘friendship’ does not). Socrates and his teenage interlocutors try to determine what philia is and how it comes into existence. Whether they begin with the premise that “like is friend to like” or, instead, that “unlike is friend to unlike,” they fail at achieving the theory they want. Then Lysis and Menexenus, the boys that Socrates has been talking to, have to go home. Socrates has the last word:

“Now,” I said, “Lysis and Menexenus, we’ve made ourselves ridiculous, both I an old man and you. For when these others go away they’ll say that we consider ourselves one another’s friends—I put myself with the two of you—but we haven’t been able to discover what the friend is.” (223b)

I translate the last clause as literally as possible to bring forward its provocation. We don’t know what we’re talking about and yet we help ourselves to impressive words. It is common to accuse a disloyal friend of _not knowing_ what it is to be a friend, and to confess you hadn’t _known_ what love was until one great love came along. Likewise we speak of coming to know or failing to know what courage, grace, courtesy, anger, or greed is like. The Socratic provocation consists in claiming that we achieve such knowledge—that we can _only_ achieve such knowledge—through the process of defining our terms.

The _Lysis_ begins a long way from that challenge to existence, and I want to focus on those opening pages to suggest how much an instructor can draw out of the dialogue’s beginning in the classroom.

Socrates is walking, outside the city walls, from one Athenian gymnasium to another, from the Academy to the Lyceum (203a). He sees Hippothales and other young men near a _palaistra_ “wrestling-room, wrestling school” and they all propose going in (204a). Socrates learns that there are good-looking younger boys inside, including Lysis who Hippothales is infatuated with (204b). Hippothales has been writing songs about Lysis’s father, Democrates, and about his grandfather, Lysis (204d). Hippothales begins his conversation with Lysis and his friend Menexenus. As a warm-up, and to show Hippothales how one wins a boy over, he asks Lysis what liberties his parents allow him (207e-210d). The family’s mule-driver, not Lysis, drives the mule cart, even though the mule-driver is a slave (208b). Another household slave is his tutor (208c). So how (Socrates asks) can Lysis consider himself free and not enslaved (207e, 208e)?

Reading these few pages of the _Lysis_ along with my students, I add conversational footnotes along these lines to the beginning of the dialogue:
• **outside the city walls.** Athens included both the walled city and considerable countryside outside those walls. It is easy to focus on urban life, but many Athenians lived in villages in the Attic countryside; others may have lived on their land in family farms. (Victor Hanson’s work has done much to fill in our sense of Athenian rural life.) And we can already raise one obvious question about Socrates. How is he able to pass his days far from any workplace, given the popular portrayal of him as a poor man?

• **from Academy to Lyceum.** This reference touches on the exhaustively discussed topic of ancient Greek athletics. By the time of Socrates, many Greek cities had public places devoted to exercise and athletics. There seem to have been three main gymnasia at Athens: the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Cynosarges. It has widely been noted that Plato founded his school at the first of these and Aristotle later made the second one his own school. (Later testimony tells us the Cynics got their name from the Cynosarges.) Plato cannot have intended a joke about Socrates drifting from Platonic into Aristotelian studies, because although he may well have founded the Academy before writing the *Lysis*, the Lyceum did not become a philosophical school until after his death.

• **palaistra.** We are still in the domain of athletics. A *palaistra* was not a *gymnasion*. These smaller institutions appeared in many cities, as gymnasia did, although unlike the public gymnasion, a *palaistra* apparently could be privately owned. A younger crowd exercised here. That Socrates carries on a discussion on these grounds reinforces our sense that Athenian philosophers linked their enterprise with physical exercise.

• Passages in Plato’s *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, and *Theaetetus* suggest the popularity of gymnastic spaces among friends of Socrates. Ancient sources about athletics include Philostratus *Gymnasticus* and Lucian *Anacharsis*. For selections from other primary sources, Miller’s *Arete* is the sourcebook to consult.

• Excellent secondary sources include Kyle, Miller, and Scanlon.

• **Hippothales infatuated with Lysis.** Given that the motivating force behind Socrates’ conversation with Lysis is said to be the infatuation that Hippothales has, there is no reading the *Lysis* without discussing ancient Greek same-sex love, another broad topic with (these days, after a long period of the opposite) an extensive bibliography. Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* are incomprehensible without some explanation of these ancient same-sex customs. In connection with the *Lysis*, essential facts include the difference in age between the man (often a young-enough man) who pursued the object of love, and the younger adolescent boy he pursued who, according to the stereotype, could never be an adult. Because the object of love played a passive role in this pursuit, and because Greek men had to represent themselves as active parties, there was some ambivalence surrounding these romances. The younger partners had to make at least a show of resisting the older men’s attentions.

• Primary sources include Plato’s *Symposium* and Aeschines’ *Against Timarchus*, a courtroom speech against an Athenian citizen on the grounds of his past as a prostitute.

• As Dover’s pioneering work has already shown, there is evidence to be collected from every part of both Greek life and Greek art to inform our understanding of ancient male-male relationships; Halperin, Davidson, and Winkler round out and qualify some of Dover’s conclusions.

• **Hippothales writing songs.** I like this tidbit about Hippothales composing songs for the very specific light in which it casts Greek homosexuality, making the ancient romantic relationships look similar to modern ones in some ways and distinctly different in others. The anecdote cited here tells against an excessively “anthropological” reading of ancient homosexuality according to which the relationships were based on “coming-of-age” rituals. There may well have been initiation rites behind Greek pederasty, but ritual practices do not call for individualized strategies of seduction. Hippothales is in love. And then, as now, there is no more reliable impetus to song-writing than unrequited love. But while such songwriting today is expected to be about the loved one, I am hard-pressed to name one love song written during my lifetime that celebrates the athletic achievement of the loved one’s parents or grandparents.

• **Lysis, the grandfather of Lysis.** This one is a small detail. Students sometimes wonder where ancient Greek names came from. According to one dominant custom, the first boy in a family would be named after his father’s father, as Lysis was.

• **Hermes.** Athenian gymnasia, and perhaps many around Greece, had three statues of their governing deities: Heracles, Eros, and Hermes. Heracles was an obvious choice given his legendary strength, and the connections between athletic culture and romantic love made Eros a natural choice as well. But Hermes, a god with numerous functions, is harder to pin down. Does his inclusion, and the connections between athletic culture and romantic love made Eros a natural choice as well. But Hermes, a god with numerous functions, is harder to pin down. Does his inclusion, and the performance of a prayer in this dialogue, attest to the intellectual side of life at the gym?

• It is hard to know where to begin reading about ancient religion given that (unlike some of these topics) it has been studied by scholars...
for centuries. And students may already know something about ancient religious beliefs and practices. Still it’s worth having sources on hand. Along with only three other gods (Zeus, Poseidon, Athena), Hermes joins in much of the action of Homer’s Odyssey, which affords us a good first profile of this divinity. Homeric Hymn 4 To Hermes tells the story of the god’s birth.

• Among recent secondary sources, Burkert’s Greek Religion is the acknowledged authority. See also books by Buxton, Mikalson, and Zaidman and Pantel. On Hermes specifically (but also on mythology generally) Vernant is both a necessity and a pleasure to consult.14

• **nicely dressed.** Socrates (as narrator) tells us that Lysis and the other boys were “done up” attractively. (The contrast with Socrates’ own appearance goes without saying.) This is a point at which a reader may ask what Athenians wore when they were “nicely dressed.” When exercising, they wore nothing, but what was the attire of a man of property? For an answer, see the following:

• Scattered anecdotes in Herodotus’s Histories and an atypical passage in Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War (1.6), both of which create a first impression, as does a speech by Persia’s Queen Atossa in Aeschylus’s Persians (lines 176-196).

• On Athenian clothing of the time, Geddes; on nudity, Bonfante.15

• **knucklebones.** This one is a small detail too, and not much information is available, but knucklebones apparently could be thrown like dice.

• For available facts about board games in antiquity, see Kurke.16

• **household slaves.** I emphasize this point because although in one way modern American society is highly sensitive to mentions of slavery, in another respect references to slavery in literature from the distant past tend to be taken for granted as something that was done “back then.” But even a mention of slaves in ancient sources, such as these asides in a conversation that is putatively about Lysis’s minority status, suggests how large a role slaves played in Greek society and economy. Although many cultures owned slaves in ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, they differed widely in the degrees to which they depended on slaves. Like the U.S. South before the Civil War, and like a few other times and places—but unlike many or most—Greek and Roman antiquity relied on slavery. Slaves amounted to one-fifth or more of the population, they were essential to the production of food, and they were omnipresent in urban life.

• Primary sources again include Plato. He gives one slave a rare speaking part in the Meno when Socrates leads that slave through a geometrical proof. And to the extent that his dialogues dramatize philosophical theory’s emergence out of quotidian conversation, the recurring appearance of slaves in these quotidian settings makes the most powerful suggestion we have of their place in Athenian life. See the opening scenes of Aristophanes’ Wasps, Knights, and Frogs for other representations of slaves. Aristophanes has the advantage of letting himself depict the most mundane elements of life, although the fact that he plays scenes for laughs limits the historical use we can make of those scenes as evidence. Surely, the necessity of slavery to the culture’s existence helps to explain Aristotle’s defense of the practice (Politics I, 1253b14-1255b40), although such a defense was unusual even in his own time and might have been heard with embarrassment.

• For contemporary discussions, see, first of all, Finley, who initiated the scholarly discussion of ancient slavery. Works by Garlan and de Ste-Croix are thorough and, though controversial in places, necessary reading. For a most recent work, see duBois, who insightfully calls Greek slaves both ubiquitous and invisible.17

In speaking of the Lysis as I am doing here, more or less spying its arguments from the periphery, I do not mean to play down the dialogue’s arguments. I am only assuming that an instructor knows how to follow the Socratic conversation through its logical turns, and will be doing so after having situated that conversation in the Athenian wrestling room. Those in search of a guide to the arguments themselves may consult, for example, Penner and Rowe.18

**Historical information in the philosophical classroom.** We are back at the question of what makes this history philosophical. I pointed out that some Hippocratic treatises, which you might think belong in the history of science, illuminate the Socratic analogy between knowledge and techné. There will be student questions, and informed answers to them, that end up providing no more than local color. But it is not always clear in advance what will be merely local color and what is philosophically significant.

Take the biographical detail that Socrates walked around Athens barefoot (Phaedrus 229a, Symposium 174a). Is this proof of his poverty? If so, it would make a mystery of the fact that he has so much leisure time and knows so many aristocratic Athenians. At one time Socrates’ lover was Alcibiades, the foster son of Athens’s de facto political leader. Athenian culture would have to have been highly democratic to permit such class-crossing, and Socrates would have to have been not only poor but ungrateful not to acknowledge his good luck in living in such a democracy.

More likely, Socrates went barefoot not out of poverty but out of personal preference. Do we want to say he was being
hardy? (See Symposium 220b, where he is said to have walked barefoot even on snow.) Or that he had his mind on higher things and ignored mere discomforts in his feet?

Of course, even hardiness calls for further interpretation. We should not rush to think that Socrates was merely denying himself comforts for he dressed not like any old poor man but in that particular unostentatious way that the governing class of Sparta did, i.e., the military elite in that city who called themselves homoioi (“equals, peers”) and who dressed to efface differences in wealth within their numbers. In other words, Socrates dressed to display his solidarity with Spartan culture, even in the midst of the bitter twenty-seven-year war between Athens and Sparta. This view of him supports the Athenian suspicion of Socrates as anti-democratic and even as disloyal to the state.

Who were those Athenians who suspected him of disloyalty? Again, what might look like non-philosophical details can move us toward an informed assessment of which elements of the population he most offended.

When we read about the trial of Socrates—I’ve already drawn students’ attention to the points in Plato’s Apology at which Socrates asks the jurors to be quiet—I invite my students to picture 501 jurors getting noisily impatient. I draw on the first half of Aristophanes’ Wasps for a profile of the stereotypical juror. Philocleon, the hero of Wasps, claims to have carried his jury-pay home in his mouth (lines 609, 787-795)—apparently the way in which the ancient Greeks carried their small change. An aging male citizen counted on jury duty for extra money and would have voiced his displeasure at Socrates’ highbrowedness about the system that had given rise to juried trials.

Aristophanic stereotypes aside, we know that the jurors were not the wealthy men that Socrates mostly kept company with. Most ancient people worked on farms, but farming life and other sorts of field labor have been left out of our picture of classical Greece. I mentioned Victor Hanson’s book, The Other Greeks, in which he writes about the farmers who made up most of Athens’ citizen population. Theophrastus’ character sketch of “the rustic” supplements Hanson’s descriptions; see also the opening scenes of Aristophanes’ Acharnians and Clouds in which those plays’ heroes Dikaiopolis and Strepsiades, respectively, describe the life of Athenian farmers in what they take to be an alienating big city.

From a social and legal point of view, Josiah Ober is essential reading to understanding what was said in Athenian courts and how the rhetoric used there was intended to be understood. And John Dillon’s Salt and Olives fills out our sense of the moral worldview that went into many jury decisions. Learning more about who the jurors were and how they viewed their city helps to shift your sense of the trial of Socrates from needless blundering into an unjust verdict to deeper worries about how the committed participants in a democracy are likely to perceive an intellectual critique of democracy.

Back to the Lysis: philia, athletics, and slavery. What is local color for readers of the Lysis, and what is philosophically significant?

I think that just about everyone will agree on the necessity of knowing what the Greek word “philia” means and whom to call a “philos.” No sound interpretation of the Lysis can ignore the question of how best to render its subject in English.

Although “friendship” and “fondness” and even “liking” do capture much of the semantic field of philia, that semantic field also has broader applications. “Philia” is the most natural word in classical Greek for the feeling that parents and children have for one another, and one spouse for the other. “Friendship” has a forced sound in the latter case and is controversial in the other (having your children as your friends). The Republic calls one who loves an artistic spectacle a “philothamôn” (“lover of sights”) (5.475d), whereas we naturally call ourselves music-lovers but rarely, or only awkwardly, “friends” of music.

There is, however, a way in which the words “friend” and “friendship” fit right in with the discussion in the Lysis, a way which returns to the erotic or romantic sense of the philos: no words are more automatic to our romantic lives than “girlfriend” and “boyfriend.” With such examples, and others we can draw from Books 8 and 9 of Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, we preface our reading of the Lysis.

Taking the translation of philia as an unproblematic case of non-philosophical information that matters to a philosophical reading, consider two aspects of the Lysis’s opening scene that I discussed above. First there is athletics. Not only did Socrates frequent the gyms and wrestling-rooms of Athens, but those places seem to have been considered natural sites for philosophical exchange. The philosophers who founded schools in or near gymnasia drew on the existing pedagogical aspect of gym culture. Thanks to them, but really thanks to their understanding of athleticism, three modern words for educational institutions have come down to us from the gymnasia of Athens.24 It is worth remembering that it was not a Socratic philosopher but rather Isocrates, a student of Gorgias and a very different type of intellectual, who first spelled out the parallel between gymnastic training for the body and philosophy for the soul.25

Even more established in Athenian thought, as well as in Greek cities outside Athens, was the connection between athletic spaces and romantic encounters. The earliest evidence for love at the gym dates from a century before Socrates, when the archaic poet Theognis wrote, in lines now often quoted, “Happy is the one who exercises while he loves and comes back home to sleep all day with a good-looking boy.” To emphasize the connection among such uses of the athletic space, Plato has Socrates perform his cross-examination as an example of seduction.27 As a character in the Symposium will say explicitly, exercise and philosophy and pederasty all flourish in the same places and among the same people (182b-c).
Maybe because the three—sports, romantic seduction, and philosophizing—flourish together, they are all more readily conceived as competitions. Sports in classical Greece were contests between individual athletes, the only cooperative effort being that between an athlete and his trainer. This difference between ancient Greek sports and our team games appears at the metaphorical or proverbial level. A lot of sports language today describes rule-abiding behavior and its violations, and athletes’ collective effort; in Greek culture, metaphors from athletics focus on individual accomplishment and victory. When Apollo gets his way with the Fates he is said to have “tripped them up”; even the apostle Paul follows Greek tradition when he contrasts what he is doing with inefficacious “beating the air,” i.e. shadow boxing.29

We may ask whether the athletic setting of the Lysis leads the conversation held between Socrates and the boys to take on an air of victory and defeat. People often still philosophize that way today, believing that the enterprise calls for arguments that “defeat” all others: “knock-down,” “drag-out” arguments, as they are called without embarrassment. Is argumentative “victory” essential to clear thinking and the pursuit of the truth, or is it a legacy of Socrates’ version of conceptual gymnastics?

The intermingling of athletics, philosophy, and love also forces a more uncomfortable question—whether we can speak of love without reference to active and passive participants or even of winners and losers in affectionate relationships. John Winkler has written poignantly about the kinaidos, the adult man in ancient Greece who wanted to play a passive role in same-sex relations: “Since sexual activity is symbolic of (or constructed as) zero-sum competition and the restless conjunction of winners with losers, the kinaidos is a man who desires to lose.”30 Gender may have been fluid for lovers in classical Greece; victory and loss were not.

Once alerted to the competitive spirit in athletics that comes to apply to philosophical cross-examination on the one hand and to romantic affections on the other, we can review the dialogue’s philosophisic arguments more attuned to their assumptions of asymmetry in love. And then, when what Socrates says appears to translate most smoothly into things we say about friendship and love, we may ask to what degree our own thinking presupposes a polarity in romantic relationships between pursuer and pursued, between the active and passive.

For instance, it might look surprising that although Socrates begins with the friendship between Lysis and Menexenus, a reciprocal relationship in which each is the other’s philos (212b), his subsequent discussion and the puzzles worried over have to do with unequal love—as if that sort of relationship were found to be the conceptually more interesting one.

Do we want an antipodal organization of phenomena in our discussions of love? I propose that by now what you might have considered an extraneous detail in the setting of Lysis is seen to be a point of some philosophical significance.

It might also have seemed extraneous to the philosophical point of the dialogue (or at least tangential to it) that I pointed to the talk of slavery in Socrates’ opening conversation with Lysis. My purpose was not to reiterate that slavery is wrong nor to condemn ancient Greek civilization for its callous dependence on slaves (not that I do not have those concerns). The work of Page duBois has convinced me that although the Greeks rarely spoke about their slaves, they can be seen to speak about themselves in light of the fact of slavery. For to explicate your own nature is to show how you differ from those persons whose nature you would never imagine to be worth explicated.

In the Lysis, the use of slaves as a foil for free Athenian citizens does not end with the contrasts that Socrates draws early on when he asks Lysis why a slave should be allowed to drive the mules while Lysis, the son of the family, is not. The dialogue ends, and the whole philosophical inquiry is interrupted when the paidagôgoi (“tutors, attendants of children”) of Lysis and Menexenus appear and call the boys to come home (223a). This is when Socrates says (more or less), “I say I’m a friend but I don’t know what a friend is,” or as we might also put it, “I have not defined myself. There is this thing that I am and I don’t know what it is.”

The scene has a realistic touch. The tutors are drunk and speak hupobabarizontes (“with foreign accents”) (223b) as most Athenian slaves would have spoken. The Spartans had reduced an indigenous Greek population to servdom while Athens mostly used chattel slaves, most of them non-Greeks normally captives taken in battle. Having foreign-born slaves in the city probably helped Athens guard against revolts for partly Scythian, partly Thracian, partly Persian, and also partly Greek, the slaves of Athens would not have seen themselves as a unity nor have been able to communicate easily. By comparison, Sparta’s Helots revolted on several occasions, ruinously for their Spartaite oppressors.

The foreign origin of Athenian slaves also made it easier for a citizen to distinguish himself from them. These particular tutors’ drunkenness only underscores their difference from good citizens, as does Socrates’ saying that the tutors appeared hôsper daimones tines (“like sprites, spirits”) (223a). As duBois observes, the liberty that Athenian free citizens place at the center of their sense of themselves is not liberty as a positive quality they possess but liberty as the negation of the undesirable subordinate status of the slaves they see around them. Liberty is not being conceptualized in modern terms, as escape from governmental intrusion, but instead seems to derive its value from signifying that the one who possesses it is not a slave.

In other words, although the dramatic entry of the slaves is made to end this pursuit of self-knowledge, thus figuratively associating self-definition with the work of a free man, the idea of enslavement had (like sprites or spirits) been haunting the conversation all along. Indeed, I would even argue that an unexamined fear of enslavement contributes to the tension around the final conclusion Socrates springs on the boys, namely, that anagkaion (“it is necessary that”) the legitimate erastês (“lover”) phileisthai...
Some people will introduce the kind of context I've been imagining that it can be done either casually or formally. The conclusion Socrates brings them to is paradoxical, to be sure, and almost certainly false. But would it feel so important to ward off that conclusion if you did not think you had to demonstrate your status as free citizen? Is being a non-slave more fundamental than being a friend? To my mind this question is a philosophical outcome of attending to the slaves and the condition they represent in and around this dialogue.

A last practical thought. I've knocked at your door and delivered a sales pitch—but where are my vacuum cleaners? I have failed to say how this splendid illuminating information can actually make its way into the classroom.

I'm no expert at pedagogical techniques, so I won't waste time and space pretending to say how an instructor can best bring historical background into a philosophy course. I imagine that it can be done either casually or formally. Some people will introduce the kind of context I've been describing only now and then, as needed and in response to student questions. Others will want to add reading assignments to their syllabus. The most formal option would be to plan student presentations timed to coincide with the main reading a class is doing: The students have just read Plato's Apology, so one student reads selections from Wasp and describes its image of the juror, or when the class begins the Symposium, one student presents part of Dover's Greek Homosexuality.

Under the best conditions, the third option makes the most learning possible. But instructors will have to decide for themselves how close their classrooms come to the best conditions. Are all students prepared to research and present necessary information? Will they require so much coaching that a side project turns into a major time commitment for both student and instructor?

At the other extreme, the first of the options merely calls on the instructor to possess all this additional information ready to be dropped into a lecture or classroom discussion. Those who already know a fair amount about classical life and culture will find it easiest to introduce the material this way. To those who don't, it sounds like a disproportionate amount of outside reading.

In many cases I think that the second option will work best. Choose the topic you want to amplify in any given semester and find good primary and secondary readings; then assign those readings in tandem with the philosophy that students are reading. The selections I have identified from ancient sources are brief. The secondary sources vary from article-length to big, thick, book-length, but even the very long sources can be edited for classroom use. It takes surprisingly little work, in the end, to enhance the charm that antiquity still possesses for modern students.

NOTES

1. One example turns up in guides to creative writing: "A short story is a story that is short."

2. In what follows I will specify passages in ancient works using standard page or line numbers. In the case of Plato's dialogues, this means the Stephanus pages, a number followed by a letter from a to e, which appear in nearly every edition and translation of the dialogues. In the case of most other ancient authors I will cite, it means the line numbers. Passages in Thucydides are marked by book, chapter, and section.


8. The appearance of a name prompts me to mention a reference work that I have found both invaluable and irresistible: Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002). Look up any name you notice in one of Plato's dialogues, and Nails will supply all the information available about that person. Nails offers the reminder that "Hippothales" was an aristocratic name in Athens (xlv, citing Aristophanes, Clouds, 60–67); as for Lysis, she reconstructs his family tree, cites relevant archaeological inscriptions, and adds what is known about his extended family. His father-in-law "was very likely the Isthmoneus who is known to have signed the Peace of Nicias and fifty-year alliance with Sparta in 421" (196).

9. The appearance of a name prompts me to mention a reference work that I have found both invaluable and irresistible: Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socrates (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002). Look up any name you notice in one of Plato's dialogues, and Nails will supply all the information available about that person. Nails offers the reminder that "Hippothales" was an aristocratic name in Athens (xlv, citing Aristophanes, Clouds, 60–67); as for Lysis, she reconstructs his family tree, cites relevant archaeological inscriptions, and adds what is known about his extended family. His father-in-law "was very likely the Isthmoneus who is known to have signed the Peace of Nicias and fifty-year alliance with Sparta in 421" (196).


13. Chance the Rapper just announced that he will be paying homage to Muhammad Ali at the 2016 ESPY Awards. I know of songs that refer to Kobe Bryant, Joe DiMaggio, Rubin Carter, and LeBron James. But if such a song were written today by someone in love with the athlete’s descendant, it would come around to identifying that true object of attention: “You’re the one who really knocks me down”; “you can score better than him,” etc. To modern tastes, what Hippothales does is excessively indirect, almost deceptive.


21. If students do not notice it, they quickly grasp the significance of the fact once it’s pointed out to them, that Socrates keeps asking the jurors not to thorubein (“make a disturbance”): Apology, 17d, 21a, 27b, and 30c.

22. Also see Aristophanes, Women in the Assembly, lines 815–822; in Theophrastus Characters, “the recklessly man” charges interest on small loans and puts the interest in his cheek.


24. Besides “academy” we have German Gymnasium, Albanian gimnaz, Polish gimnazium, and similar words in Scandinavian languages; meanwhile the Lyceum lent its name to the French lycée, Romanian liceu, and Italian liceo.


26. Theognis, 1335–1336; also see Plato, Laws, 636a-c.

27. See Socrates at Lysis, 210e: “I looked over toward Hippothales ... if occurred to me to say, “This is how to talk to a boyfriend, Hippothales, humbling him and trimming him back, not pampering and making him vain as you do.”

28. Rule-abiding behavior and violations: “a level playing field” versus being “out of bounds,” “over the line,” or “below the belt.” Collective effort: “a team player,” “stepping up to the plate,” “inside baseball.”

29. Apollo trips up Fates, Euripides, Alcestis, 33–34; Paul doesn’t beat the air, 1 Corinthians 9.26.


---

**Teaching about the Existence of God**

Steven M. Cahn  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK GRADUATE CENTER

Relatively few philosophers specialize in the philosophy of religion, but many teach an introductory problems course in which one usual topic is the existence of God. The routine approach is to present and assess the three traditional arguments for the existence of God, then shift to the problem of evil, and finally the unthe on God’s existence ends.

My new book, Religion Within Reason (Columbia University Press) suggests that this approach often takes place within a set of misleading assumptions that may be shared by students and faculty members. One of these assumptions is that if God’s existence were disproved, then religious commitment would have been shown to be unreasonable. Various religions, however, reject the notion of a supernatural God. These include Jainism, Theravada Buddhism, Mithraism, and Samkhya Hinduism, as well as “death of God” versions of Christianity and Reconstructionist Judaism.

Here, for example, is how Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, an opponent of supernaturalism, responds to a skeptic who asks why, if the Bible isn’t taken literally, Jews should nevertheless observe the Sabbath:

> We observe the Sabbath not so much because of the account of its origin in Genesis, as because of the role it has come to play in the spiritual life of our People and of mankind. . . . The Sabbath day sanctifies our life by what it contributes to making us truly human and helping us transcend those instincts and passions that are part of our heritage from the sub-human.¹

Consider next the outlook of one of the major figures in the Christian “Death of God” movement, the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich John A. T. Robinson, who denies the existence of a God “up there,” or “out there.” Here is his account of the Holy Communion:

> [T]oo often . . . it ceases to be the holy meal, and becomes a religious service in which we turn our backs on the common and the community and in individualistic devotion go to ‘make our communion’ with ‘the God out there.’ This is the essence of the religious perversion, when worship becomes a realm into which we withdraw from the world to ‘be with God”—even if it is only to receive strength to go back into it. In this case the entire realm of the non-religious (in other words ‘life”) is relegated to the profane.²

Of course, a naturalistic religion can also be developed without deriving it from a supernatural religion. Take, for example, the outlook of philosopher Charles Frankel, another opponent of supernaturalism, who nevertheless believes that religion, shorn of irrationality, can make a
distinctive contribution to human life, providing deliverance from vanity, triumph over meanness, and endurance in the face of tragedy. As he puts it, “it seems to me not impossible that a religion could draw the genuine and passionate adherence of its members while it claimed nothing more than to be poetry in which [people] might participate and from which they might draw strength and light.”

Such naturalistic options are philosophically respectable. Whether to choose any of them is for each person to decide.

Teachers and students should also recognize that theism does not imply religious commitment. After all, even if someone believes that one or more of the proofs for God’s existence is sound, the question remains whether to join a religion and, if so, which one. The proofs contain not a clue as to which religion, if any, is favored by God. Indeed, God may oppose all religious activity. Perhaps God does not wish to be prayed to, worshipped, or adored, and might even reward those who shun such activities.

Yet another misleading assumption is implicit in the definitions which are usually offered: a theist believes in God, an atheist disbelieves in God, and an agnostic neither believes or disbelieves in God. Notice that the only hypothesis being considered is the existence of God as traditionally conceived; no other supernatural alternatives are taken seriously. Why not?

Suppose, for example, the world is the scene of a struggle between God and the Demon. Both are powerful, but neither is omnipotent. When events go well, God’s benevolence is ascendant; when events go badly, the Demon’s malevolence is ascendant. Is this sort of doctrine, historically associated with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, unnecessarily complex and therefore to be rejected? No, for even though in one sense it is more complex than monotheism, because it involves two supernatural beings rather than one, in another sense it is simpler, because it leaves no aspect of the world beyond human understanding. After all, theism faces the problem of evil, while dualistic hypotheses have no difficulty accounting for both good and evil.

In sum, I would suggest that both faculty members and students should remember the following four essential points: (1) belief in the existence of God is not a necessary condition for religious commitment; (2) belief in the existence of God is not a sufficient condition for religious commitment; (3) the existence of God is not the only supernatural hypothesis worth serious discussion; and (4) a successful defense of traditional theism requires not only that it be more plausible than atheism or agnosticism but that it be more plausible than all other supernatural alternatives.

I am not suggesting, of course, that the proofs for the existence of God or the problem of evil not be taught. I am urging, however, that all participants be alerted to the limited implications of that discussion.

NOTES

Considering the Classroom as a Safe Space

David Sakris
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION
In the APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy, Lauren Freeman (2014) advocates that faculty turn their classrooms into “safe spaces” as a method for increasing the diversity of philosophy majors. Safe spaces, according to Freeman, are spaces where students can feel “fully self-expressed” and relax “without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability.” Freeman believes that by turning classrooms into safe spaces, students from underrepresented groups will be more likely to pursue philosophy as a major and more actively participate in class. This goal of increasing diversity among philosophy majors is one I fully support, and I agree that much work needs to be done to increase diversity in higher education. However, even a casual follower of academic news knows that there is much hand-wringing over the demand for, and a willingness to create, safe spaces on college campuses. Few commentators believe safe spaces will have positive results: Lukianoff fears that not only will safe spaces (among other practices) infantilize students, but that the turning away from debate supposedly encouraged by safe spaces hinders the development of necessary critical thinking skills. As part of this pushback against safe spaces, George Yancy, one of our profession’s few public philosophers, says he actively works to make his classroom unsafe. The University of Chicago had a similar response: in the spring of 2016 the university sent out an undergraduate admissions letter stating that students will find no support for trigger warnings or the “creation of intellectual ‘safe spaces’ where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.”

I also reject turning classrooms into “safe spaces” in part because I reject characterizing classroom spaces as safe or unsafe, and I write here to discourage faculty from doing so, but not because I want to force students to “grow up/toughen up,” or believe that they need to do so now more than ever. I begin by distinguishing between two kinds of spaces on campus that can be made “safe”: classroom spaces and extracurricular spaces. I argue that the extracurricular safe space(s) is consistent with the practice of philosophy and the current conception of the university, and it is a space/practice to which faculty should have few objections. I then argue that making the classroom into a safe space as defined by Freeman is not a practical goal, especially for a subject like philosophy. More significantly, I argue that attempting to turn the classroom into a safe
space is at odds with the pedagogical goals of philosophy, as well as with how the university currently conceives itself. Many of Freeman’s ultimate aims can be achieved in other ways, and, I believe, more effectively. Finally, I argue that faculty calls for safe spaces creates confusion concerning the educative environment one should expect to find at the majority of American universities. If faculty and students want to advocate for safe campuses that include “safe” classrooms, then they should do so by arguing for a change in a given university’s code of conduct or mission statement. Given different educative aims, classroom safe spaces could well be consistent with those aims.

SAFE SPACE(S) AND THE GOALS OF A UNIVERSITY
We can distinguish between at least two kinds of “safe spaces”: extracurricular spaces where students can go to find a supportive community in order to “have a conversation with students, staff, and faculty knowing that they have a basic understanding of the challenges these students face in developing their identities,” and the creation of safe spaces as a pedagogical approach to the classroom, as advocated by Freeman. The University of Chicago admissions letter decries safe spaces on the grounds that they supposedly interfere with what the letter describes as the “defining characteristics” of a university: “commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression.”

Safe spaces are typically assailed without any attempt to make the foregoing distinction, yet it is hard to see how spending time in an extracurricular space with practices and rules that faculty might disapprove of is much different from a student going home each weekend to parents/guardians with practices and rules that faculty might disapprove of, and for this reason it is hard to see how faculty could have grounds for objecting to extracurricular safe spaces. Therefore, although the admissions letter never explicitly makes this distinction, the letter must be objecting to the classroom as a safe space. The admissions letter also references the University of Chicago’s faculty report on freedom of expression, which reiterates the point that “universities exist for the sake of free inquiry.” The “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at Yale” makes explicit what is perhaps implicit in the Chicago report: that the main goal of a university is the production and dissemination of knowledge, and that freedom of inquiry supports that goal. So if the curricular safe space is, in fact, objectionable, the objection must be on the grounds that such spaces will interfere with that goal.

So even if we think extracurricular safe spaces are “coddling,” they aren’t directly impacting what we can take as the default goals of a university, the production and dissemination of knowledge. Surely students should be able to make a dorm room or a student lounge into a “safe space” if they so wish, and refuse to make their dorm room into a safe space as well—decisions like these would be an example of freedom of association and expression on campus. Students, however, do not live in classrooms, and the classroom, laboratory, and faculty office are the primary places where the goals of the modern university are carried out. Should these places be turned into “safe spaces” as well? Given current conditions, I argue that the answer should be “No.” Nonetheless, I accept and support many of Freeman’s recommendations, as I shall explain.

CURRICULAR SAFE SPACES
Freeman takes her definition of “safe space” from Kenney and fully defines it as the following:

A place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person’s self-respect and dignity and strongly encourage everyone to respect others.

Freeman believes that fashioning one’s classroom into a safe space will both reduce Stereotype Threat (ST) and Implicit Bias (IB). ST is a well-studied phenomenon in which the salience of negative stereotypes about an individual can affect that individual’s performance. ST involves anxiety about being judged on the basis of one’s group membership or confirming negative stereotypes about one’s group through one’s performance. For example, a woman taking a math test may fear confirming negative stereotypes regarding women and math, and this anxiety ironically leads her to confirm the stereotype: the anxiety leads to a worse performance. IB involves anxiety about being judged on the basis of one’s group membership. IB is a concern in the classroom because unconscious bias can lead faculty to treat students from underrepresented groups unfairly, e.g., by calling on minority students less often, or by grading their work more harshly. The hope is that by reducing ST and IB women and minority students will feel less “unsafe” and as a result more willing to pursue philosophy as a major and, perhaps, as a career.

In order to fashion one’s classroom into a safe space, Freeman recommends a number of strategies: that faculty distribute a survey which asks about classroom climate in the first week, that faculty actively discuss stereotype threat with students to disarm its effects, that faculty discuss classroom climate/department climate in informal meetings with students outside the classroom, that faculty encourage and mentor students from underrepresented groups outside the classroom, and that faculty work to make philosophers from underrepresented groups more visible in the classroom or in the department.

I wholeheartedly agree with several of Freeman’s suggestions. The first thing to note about the suggested interventions is that two of them do not even occur in the classroom, and so there is little reason to think that they will disrupt the goals of the university: discussing concerns of students outside the classroom in a setting with special norms and expectations is similar to an extracurricular safe space, a place where students can interact by their own lights and at will, which, as I argued in section 2, are student activities that faculty members should, at the very least, be indifferent towards. For example, Freeman states that she “started a task force on the status of underrepresented groups in philosophy” that she says “enabled underrepresented students to feel solidarity with one another and created a safe space within the department where they could share their experiences with other students who were in the same boat.” Notably,
A reason for making philosophers from underrepresented groups more visible is that it reduces both ST and IB: students see people like themselves who have succeeded thereby potentially encouraging them, and a faculty member’s own biases regarding what a successful philosopher looks like may be reduced.24 There are a number of ways to make underrepresented philosophers more visible: hire faculty members from underrepresented groups, invite speakers from underrepresented groups, hang posters of successful philosophers from underrepresented groups in the halls of the philosophy department, and encourage faculty to assign readings from underrepresented groups. A further method for reducing ST is to actively discuss ST with students, which helps to disarm its effects.25

The hiring of another faculty member will not necessarily have an impact on what I do in the classroom, nor does said hiring necessarily affect any classroom practices—we can’t be sure the new faculty member will implement “safe” classrooms regardless of their background.23 The invitation of a speaker does not necessarily directly impact what happens in the classroom and could well be viewed as an extracurricular activity—student and faculty attendance is typically optional. Those who want to safeguard the mission of the university, it would seem, have nothing to fear from these practices. Presenting these practices as practices that can be pursued outside the classroom might well make them more palatable to the critics of safe spaces. For this reason it would be helpful for Freeman to make the distinction I drew in section 2. The activities described thus far that do have the potential to directly impact classroom practice are encouragement to diversify assigned readings as well as encouragement to discuss ST in the classroom. Again, I take both of these things to be goods: if faculty care about tapping into student potential, and encouraging students from all backgrounds, then these are things they should consider doing—even if diversifying their syllabus is a bit “uncomfortable.”24 An astute reader may now wonder why exactly I have written in response to Freeman. I turn to those issues now.

**AGAINST CURRICULAR SAFE SPACES**

After laying out her preferred definition of “safe space,” Freeman asks whether the definition is compromised by the fact that it is, as defined, unachievable. She answers that “even if such a space can never exist, it can still be a normative goal towards which we should strive and which we should aim to achieve to the best of our abilities, acknowledging that a fully safe space might never be possible.”23

As Freeman admits, her goal is unachievable; I believe it should be rejected as teaching advice on those grounds, as I believe the goal is inconsistent with the human condition. Here is why: one person’s “being fully self-expressed” always has the potential to make another person uncomfortable—the goal of full-expression and full comfort in many cases will be on a collision course.26 Stengel points out that it is an unavoidable fact that the conservative Christian students who made up a large share of the university population she taught at likely felt uncomfortable in her class, *Women and Education: Socialization and Liberation*, due to the students’ commitments in relation to the subject matter, as well as the fact that they were no longer in an environment where their own viewpoint aligned with the majority. As Stengel states, “There are reasons to think that both sets of students [the conservative Christian students and the avowed feminist students who made up the class] experienced both comfort and discomfort, both privilege and threat in this particular pedagogical environment.”27 Hence such an environment could never effectively be made “safe” for all—when groups of students have opposing viewpoints on an issue (or whole way of life, which may be the case with this example), one group’s being at ease will often imply that another group will be ill at ease.

Further, attempting to achieve Freeman’s goal could require a radical revision of the curriculum: as Stengel’s example highlights, it is very likely that some students, given their commitments, won’t be completely comfortable discussing the ethics of abortion or considering arguments for positions with which they strongly disagree, and it is hard to see how having a diverse faculty or discussing ST would help to mitigate this particular problem. This isn’t to say that therefore we shouldn’t care about faculty diversity; it is to raise questions about Freeman’s method in relation to her definition of “safe space”—i.e, whether her recommendations actually make the classroom “safe” and facilitate learning. When teaching large sections of ethics (or multiple sections), for example, there is some chance that a student in the class has had, or considered having, an abortion—these are real-life issues that make people feel uncomfortable! A student who has had or considered having an abortion will almost certainly feel uncomfortable when the moral status of abortion comes up, and may well have wished that that topic was not included in the syllabus, and even dreaded the week in which it would be discussed. Nonetheless, it’s hard to see how such a topic could be justifiably scrapped from an applied ethics course on those grounds, or discussed in such a way that no one felt uncomfortable. Having one’s values challenged on any issue that one cares about is typically uncomfortable, and the interrogation of values is a frequent occurrence in a philosophy class.

It is true that Freeman never tells the reader not to discuss certain topics.28 However, she does recommend use of the following survey in the first week of class:

During the first week of the semester, we can have students write down, share, and as a class, discuss answers to the following questions:

i) What was a classroom situation in which you felt unsafe?

ii) How could this situation have been avoided?
iii) What was a classroom situation in which you felt safe?

iv) How did the professor facilitate this situation?

v) What have teachers/professors done to create safe classroom environments?

vi) What are your goals for this class?

vii) How can we as a class help you to achieve them?

viii) How can we make this classroom a safe environment?

Although I support some of the stated goals of the survey, such as giving students a stake in how the class proceeds, I reject such a survey for the following reasons: 1) a student may well answer this survey by saying that certain topics make him or her feel unsafe; 2) faculty should reject tools that encourage students to conceptualize classrooms as safe/unsafe.

Reason (1) has basically been addressed. It may well be that a student answers (i) by responding “I felt unsafe in a class in which race was discussed”; this situation has the faculty member put him or herself in a bind: they either modify course content or risk ignoring the student’s comments, defeating the purpose of the survey. Freeman gives no advice on how to deal with a student who claims that a whole topic would make him or her feel uncomfortable. Freeman maintains that for sensitive topics to be fruitfully discussed, the classroom must be a minimally safe environment, but when the topic itself is the cause of uncomfortable feelings, it is hard to see how this is to be achieved.

The more pressing problem is (2): that the survey encourages the student to cast ordinary classroom experience, and I take ordinary classroom experiences to sometimes involve feelings of discomfort, as “safe” and “unsafe.” As Strengel points out, by using the “safe/unsafe” language, we encourage students to interpret feelings of unease or discomfort, as “safe” and “unsafe.” As Strengel points out, by using the “safe/unsafe” language, we encourage students to conceptualize classrooms as safe/unsafe.

For Strengel, the ordinary classroom is “safe enough,” and to encourage students to seek out “safer” spaces is to forego learning opportunities for all kinds of students. Encouraging a student to interpret feelings of unease regarding a topic or situation as “unsafe” is encouraging that student to be fearful and withdraw from the object of fear—be it other students or the subject matter—resulting in a failure to truly consider the issue. I believe it would be a dereliction of my duty as a philosophy professor to expose students only to arguments for the permissibility of abortion at some predominantly liberal institution or to expose students only to arguments against abortion at a predominately conservative one, thereby reaffirming their pre-existing beliefs and maintaining, or even thereby increasing, feelings of ease and comfort.

It would also violate the stated mission of many universities: it would be a stifling of inquiry on the part of the students, as well as a failure to disseminate knowledge on the part of me, the faculty member. In short: prioritizing student comfort may be a pedagogical disservice to them.

Freeman is missing the point made by Strengel: it is not the case that in every single philosophy class underrepresented students are going to feel uncomfortable and white male students are going to feel comfortable as a default; women students might feel comfortable in a course on feminist ethics or when a particular topic is discussed and white male students might feel uncomfortable—presumably this can serve as a learning opportunity for both groups. Additionally, by challenging the assumptions of the majority group in a classroom, it seems that this could well signal to members not in that group that no person’s beliefs are exempt from scrutiny, thereby increasing that person’s relative level of comfort. Hopefully, in a philosophy class, each student is forced to examine some previously unexamined belief, e.g., his or her unreflective meat-eating, and this may well make that student uniquely uncomfortable. Does this render the classroom unsafe on Freeman’s view? Given her definition of “safe space,” if the student did not welcome such feelings, then the answer is “Yes.” Such a conclusion is so at odds with our ordinary understanding of “safety,” as well as the practice of philosophy.

Although none of the activities described by Freeman is presented as necessary conditions for making one’s classroom “safe,” the line of thinking present in her definition of “safe space” and encouraged by her survey worries the pundits of academia; I believe that worry is well placed. This survey invites students to conceptualize the college classroom as an unsafe space to begin with—one that needs to be made “safe.” It does so by implicitly inviting students to think of topics as off-limits, or of certain positions as unassailable, thinking that Freeman herself claims to reject. Yet I have seen this very thinking firsthand, and I believe many of my colleagues have as well.

It is wishful thinking to believe that students can easily separate out class content from class experience. We press slippery slope arguments when they slide our way and call them fallacious when they slide against us. But some slopes really are slippery and we shouldn’t ignore the mounting evidence when we really are sliding down. There are other teaching strategies that can be used so that students are more likely to feel that they are being treated fairly, or more likely to participate in class whatever the subject matter, without characterizing the classroom as a place where one’s well-being is at severe risk.
ACHIEVING FREEMAN’S GOALS WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT SAFETY

As I have frequently stated, I agree with most of Freeman’s recommendations: faculty should seek to encourage all students in philosophy, encourage them to believe that they are all capable of succeeding, and work to reduce their own implicit biases; I agree with these recommendations because these practices enhance learning outcomes, whatever else they may do in relation to feelings of comfort. All these things can be done without invoking the concept of “safety,” or encouraging your students to “feel being uncomfortable.” Steele, one of the pioneers of ST research, holds that one way of mitigating ST is to make clear that you hold all students to high standards, and that you believe that all students are capable of meeting those standards. Fostering the belief that all students are capable of improving is a way of combating feelings of inadequacy. This can be carried out by asking your students to revise their papers in light of your thorough feedback, as giving rigorous commentary on student assignments indicates that you believe that each student is capable of doing better. Further, faculty can reduce IB by grading papers using student ID numbers instead of student names, as well as simply making an effort to attempt to call on all students, e.g., by referring to the student roster instead of looking out at a sea of faces, which might invite unconscious preference. They can also more effectively engage shyer students, or students who are diffident, and do not wish to give their opinion to the whole class by having students work in small groups on a set of questions before they are discussed by the whole class.

These are little things, but that doesn’t mean that they don’t take effort and that faculty aren’t commendable for doing them; these are actions that facilitate learning and student success, and to describe them as efforts to make the classroom “safe” is a disservice to their real effects and the real goal of the classroom: the dissemination of knowledge. I believe that these are the activities that should be promoted to foster inclusion in philosophy, as they may well serve two goods: promoting the learning of all students, and making students from underrepresented backgrounds feel capable of succeeding. Characterizing classrooms as safe or unsafe is counterproductive, and Stengel is likely right to maintain that occasions of uncomfortableness are opportunities for growth—not occasions to be avoided at all costs. We can’t necessarily predict who feels comfortable and who feels uncomfortable within a given classroom dynamic, and to attempt to do so is a kind of giving in to stereotyping. Caring about ST and attempting to counteract it makes one a conscientious instructor; however, it can be combatted without ever asking your students to conceive of the classroom environment as “unsafe.” Safe/unsafe talk encourages students to think of themselves as victims and other students or experiences (like taking a test) as fearful and victimizing. Further, it fosters the belief that complete ease facilitates learning, or that it is required to learn. However, it may be that great growth comes from moments of unease.

CONCLUSION

Safe spaces as described by Freeman are inconsistent with the practice of philosophy and the university mission as it is currently conceived because it is likely very difficult to separate classroom experience from classroom content, and the goal of making the classroom “safe” could interfere with the purpose of the classroom: the dissemination of knowledge. Students should likely expect to feel somewhat uncomfortable during their college careers, as they are challenged by ideas they have never considered before. To then encourage students to characterize those feelings as feelings of a lack of safety serves to turn whatever circumstances caused those feelings into ones that should be avoided—this is what a survey like Freeman’s seems to facilitate. That does not mean, however, that a campus should not have spaces where like-minded students can get together and support each other on their own terms. Likely current unrest on campus cannot be easily explained, contrary to the popular belief that it can all be blamed on millennial coddling. Colleges themselves deserve some blame. Faculty and administrators send mixed messages by describing classroom conditions as safe/unsafe, thereby encouraging students to reject one of the major values of the university environment: freedom and open inquiry. This confusion is further compounded by administrative practices such as referring to the campus community as a “family”—I haven’t heard of many families that have explicitly stated conditions for expulsion; however, many families have certain topics they just don’t talk about, and this is precisely the outcome that faculty and administrators should fear. To present academic spaces on campus as “safe” or “unsafe,” to refer to the university community as a “family,” is to create confusion about the institutional goal of the university in the minds of those institution members.

It may be the case that universities should adopt other missions and goals. Some universities do, in fact, have quite different missions from the typical state or secular institution. The Brigham Young University mission statement states that the university aims to “assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.” There is a reason I didn’t apply to BYU as a student, and there is a reason that I would be unlikely to apply there for a faculty position, the reason being that my values do not match well enough with the broader mission of BYU.

To bring about the sort of space that Freeman calls for would require radical changes. A place where no person need worry about feeling uncomfortable due to identity markers sounds like a place of potentially heavy thought policing indeed. Freeman should be arguing for a change in the very mission of a college or university, not for classroom by classroom changes within the paradigm of the open-inquiry university, as this is likely to interfere with the existing goals of the open-inquiry university and thereby create confusion for institution members. Faculty should take steps to facilitate student success, as that is part of the dissemination of knowledge. Acting to reduce ST and IB is believed to facilitate student success, and so conscientious faculty should take steps to reduce ST and IB. However, it is not clear where identifying classroom
spaces as safe and unsafe actually fits into those practices, and efforts to make classrooms into “safe spaces” seems contrary to the practice of free and open inquiry. On these grounds they should be resisted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the reviewers at the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy for their helpful feedback, as well as special thanks to Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen.

NOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Shapiro, a former faculty member and college president, says that many students have a “prolonged umbilical cord” (“From Strength to Strength”); Hakim (a professor) and Lukianoff are well known for their Atlantic article on millennial infantilization (“The Coddling of the American Mind”); Posner, a law professor, argues that “[college] students are children,” although he adds that fewer dismissals—some of which he claims to explain their demands (“Colleges Need Speech Codes because Their Students Are Still Children”).

4. Lukianoff, Unlearning Liberty, 11-12.

5. Yancy, “Loving Wisdom and the Effort to Make Philosophy ‘Unsafe’.”

6. The content of this letter was reported in a number of media outlets. See, for example, Vivanco and Rhodes, “U. of C. Tells Incoming Freshmen It Does Not Support ‘Trigger Warnings’ or ‘Safe Spaces’.”

7. I drew this quote from a University of Chicago web page to show that the very university that denounced safe spaces maintained safe spaces on campus at the time of the denouncing, which indicates that there are multiple ways to understand the term “safe space.” https://lgbtq.uchicago.edu/page/safe-space

8. A classroom safe space could have the very same goals as an extracurricular safe space, in theory. However, it is important to note that the extracurricular space will not have university-sanctioned or discipline-specific (e.g., psychology, philosophy) protection.


10. See note 1.

11. The University of Chicago admissions letter does use the phrase “intellectual safe space,” which may serve as an attempt at differentiation—although we might hope that intellectual activity is happening all over the campus of the University of Chicago. As stated, most commentators don’t bother to make this distinction; nonetheless, some do explicitly object to extracurricular safe spaces even without making the distinction. Shulevitz (“In College Hiding from Scary Places”) complains that Brown University student activists set up a calming room that students could go to instead of, or in response to, a talk on campus sexual assault. Shulevitz seems to dislike the fact that this room was set up with “cookies, coloring books, bubbles, Play-Doh, calming music, pillows, blankets and a video of frolicking puppies, as well as students and staff in the room trained to deal with trauma.” Yes, it sounds silly, but I am sure many students blew off the talk on campus sexual assault to go to a bar, or play video games. Which is worse? We should expect students to use their free time as they see fit—it is important to note that it was a student who organized the described room, just as a student might have organized a bar crawl that competed with the campus speaker’s time slot.


14. I think taking the production and dissemination of knowledge as the default goals for most universities is appropriate, but universities with special missions, say, religiously focused institutions, may take themselves to have different primary goals. For example, Biola University’s mission statement includes “impact[ing] the world for the Lord Jesus Christ.” See http://offices.biola.edu/hr/ehandbook/1.3/

15. Kenney, Mapping Gay L.A.


17. For a very accessible overview of ST, see Steele, Whistling Vivaldi. See also Steele and Aronson, “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans.”

18. For example, Steinpreis et. al (“The Impact of Gender on the Review of the Curriculum Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates”) found that both women and men show a preference for a CV when it is randomly assigned a male name. Saul (“Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and Women in Philosophy”) notes that studies of stereotype threat and implicit bias have not been conducted specifically on individuals studying or working in philosophy. Saul argues that there is no reason to think that philosophers are exceptions to the results found in other fields of study.


20. Stark (“Overcoming a Puzzle about Inclusion and Racism”) also argues that faculty work to change or challenge institutional racism, e.g., by advocating for the removal of names from buildings that honor racist individuals. Faculty should advocate for the issues they believe in outside of the classroom if those issues do not pertain to course content.


22. Freeman, “Creating Safe Spaces.”

23. Steele, Whistling Vivaldi.

24. The Princeton University “pre-read,” a book the whole campus is encouraged to read over the summer, was Steele’s Whistling Vivaldi in 2015. As part of the “pre-read” program, incoming freshman discuss the pre-read with their residence advisors (e.g., an extracurricular setting). This is a nice way of raising awareness of a pedagogical obstacle for both faculty and students without taking away from classroom time devoted to course content. See http://www.princeton.edu/president/eisgruber/pre-read/


26. Alison Bailey makes a similar point about this definition: topics that feel safe to some may well seem annoying or fraught with meaning to others. See Bailey, “Navigating Epistemic Pushback in Feminist and Critical Race Philosophy Classes.” Stark also states that some topics will make some students feel included while alienating others although overcoming a Puzzle about Inclusion and Racism”). An anonymous reviewer rejected my calling the goal “incoherent” on these grounds. The reviewer believes although empirically the goal may be unachievable, that does not make it incoherent. I take the reviewer’s point, but I have trouble even imagining a situation in which “everyone is fully expressed” yet no one feels uncomfortable!


28. However, Stark does. She suggests faculty avoid Eurocentric authors or Eurocentric topics, as “the particular answers given to philosophical questions often reflect the Eurocentric and racist culture of the authors” (“Overcoming a Puzzle about Inclusion and Racism,” 3). Yes, o Aristotel and Kant were racists/sexsists. Faculty would be remiss not to challenge the assumptions of Kant and Aristotle and point out how they are inconsistent with the theorists’ own thinking. But to avoid the authors/topics seems like professional misconduct. Further, Kant and Aristotle have been fruitfully studied by people from all over the world—Aristotle’s racism did not stop Middle Eastern scholars from studying him 1,000 years ago. I don’t think Aristotle thought too highly of any non-Greek, yet that has hardly slowed any non-Greek down in admiring what is admirable in his work. Further, to call Plato and Aristotle “male, cis-gender, straight” authors seems anachronistic (3-4). I doubt they thought of themselves as straight or white—although they were certainly part of the elite of their time. Both the Buddha and Confucius were “straight” and “cis-gendered,” and the Buddha came from the ruling class, yet I’ve never heard anyone lamenting these facts (perhaps I haven’t
looked hard enough). Faculty should teach topics/figures that interest them and would do well to increase authoritative diversity; however, I don’t believe they should leave off central figures solely because of the name of the author.

29. We might also wonder if all students have a shared understanding of what constitutes a safe classroom environment, which could also throw a wrench into the instructor’s ability to administer such a survey. It is not clear if Freeman defines what she means by “safe space” to the students prior to the survey.


31. I am assuming that no one threatens the students in class, has a weapon, or preys upon students in some fashion. I take it that these things aren’t occurring in ordinary classroom experiences. Perhaps these things happen more frequently than I imagine, and so some object to the use of “ordinary.” In that case, I use “ordinary” for lack of a better term.


33. There is little more comforting than having one’s unexamined assumptions confirmed as true!


35. Consider the case of Peter Singer. Students at the University of Victoria shouted down his Q&A session via Skype because they disliked his views on what to do about individuals with severe disabilities. On his DailyNous site, Justin Weinberg says the following about the incident: “As with the case of Charles Murray at Middlebury (still being discussed here), the protestors against Singer seem motivated by both a mix of well-informed perceptive criticism and misunderstanding and misrepresentation.” That sounds about right—it sounds like the very thing that should be challenged in a philosophy class, regardless of whatever pre-existing beliefs students have about disability or their desire to discuss the topic. See http://dailynous.com/2017/03/09/peter-singer-event-disrupted-protestors/.

36. Steele, “Thin Ice”; and Steele, Whistling Vivaldi.

37. Cohen, Steele, and Ross (“The Mentor’s Dilemma”) have found that giving students rigorous feedback as well as reminding them that you hold all students to high standards leads black students to attribute less bias to the instructor by demonstrating that the instructor takes their work seriously and is holding the student to the same standard as everyone else. Additionally, work by Aronson, Fried, and Good (“Reducing the Effects of Stereotype Threat on African American College Students By Shaping Theories of Intelligence”) has shown that encouraging students to think of intelligence as malleable boosted student engagement with course material as well as college grades. This is consistent with the Steele finding: by giving students constructive criticism and holding them to high standards, this shows that you expect them to improve and that intelligence is malleable.

38. See, for example, Jelenik, “Using Small Group Learning in the Philosophy Classroom”; and Gettings, “Student-Centered Discussions in Introductory Philosophy.”

39. In a follow-up mid-semester survey she asks students to complete the following sentence: “Please stop ...” (Freeman, “Creating Safe Spaces,” 7). We can imagine a student completing that sentence with “challenging my pre-existing beliefs.”

40. Sandoval, “Why Do So Many College Presidents Call Their Campuses a ‘Family’?”


42. And I would be extremely unlikely to be seriously considered; I’ve probably really blown my chances with this article.

REFERENCES


Freeman, L. “Creating Safe Spaces: Strategies for Confronting Implicit and Explicit Bias and Stereotype Threat in the Classroom.” American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy 13, no. 2 (Fall): 3-12.


In Matthew Pianalto’s recent discussion of Steven M. Cahn’s and my book *Happiness and Goodness: Philosophical Reflections on Living Well* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Pianalto suggests that the work could be used effectively in both introductory philosophy and ethics courses. I agree, but the pedagogical effectiveness of the book depends on recognizing a crucial point about the main example that Pianalto appears to have missed.

Here’s the hypothetical:

Pat received a bachelor’s degree from a prestigious college and a Ph.D. in philosophy from a leading university, then was awarded an academic position at a first-rate school, and eventually earned tenure there. Pat is the author of numerous books, articles, and reviews, is widely regarded as a leading scholar and teacher, and is admired by colleagues and students for fairness and helpfulness. Pat is happily married, has two children, enjoys playing bridge and the cello, and vacations each summer in a modest house on Cape Cod. Physically and mentally healthy, Pat is in good spirits, looking forward to years of happiness.

Lee, on the other hand, did not attend college. After high school Lee moved to a beach community in California and is devoted to sunbathing, swimming, and surfing. Lee has never married but has experienced numerous romances. Having inherited wealth from deceased parents, Lee has no financial needs but, while donating generously to worthy causes, spends money freely on magnificent homes, luxury cars, designer clothes, fine dining, golfing holidays, and extensive travel. Lee has many friends and is admired for honesty and kindness. Physically and mentally healthy, Lee is in good spirits, looking forward to years of happiness.

As an aside, I should mention that Pianalto, for some unknown reason, assumes that Pat and Lee are both male. Yet their genders are intentionally left unspecified.

These cases are presented as a challenge to the views of Ronald Dworkin, Susan Wolf, Richard Kraut, and Stephen Darwall, each of whom presumes that the good life involves what Dworkin calls “works of art,” Wolf calls “projects of worth,” Kraut calls “flourishing,” and Darwall calls “things that matter.” The question is, do any of these theories imply that Pat or Lee enjoys a better life than the other? Having students grapple with this question would lead students to explore a wide range of important and engaging philosophical issues, including the nature of morality, the relationship between morality and happiness, Nozick’s experience machine, the divine command theory of ethics, and the impact of death on life, including the question of whether death is actually bad for us.

According to Pianalto, we dismiss the theories of Dworkin, Kraut, Wolf, and Darwall as “too vague,” yet we “come to the conclusion that there is no general reason to rate either Pat’s or Lee’s life—as better than the other’s.” Put simply, our view is that one is living well if one is happy and has a morally decent life, and we deny the view favored by most philosophers that the intrinsic value or worthiness of one’s activities also makes one’s life better. Pianalto wonders whether our own view has “made no progress” either, and he suggests that we overlook the possibility that someone like Wolf could agree with us that “while Pat and Lee do different things, there are projects of worth in both lives, and so both lives are good.”

But the view we put forth implies there is no difference between the lives of Pat and Lee in terms of their worthwhileness because we reject the very criteria these other theories seek to impose when evaluating the good life. We do not differentiate between Pat’s and Lee’s lives in terms of their quality because, in our view, living well is simply living happily within the bounds of morality. Views that explicitly reject our position cannot view the two lives of Pat and of Lee as of equal quality for they appeal to standards (such as the worthiness or objective value of one’s projects) that must be met if one is to live well.

Although Lee’s life is morally decent, Lee’s choices do not include any of the admirable, worthy, objectively valuable activities these theorists invoke when explaining why some lives are better than others. (Lee is not married, and does not engage in intellectual or aesthetic pursuits, etc.) Thus it is not clear what “projects of worth” these theorists could appeal to in justifying the judgment that Lee’s life is of equal value to Pat’s.

According to Dworkin, Wolf, Kraut, and Darwall, living well must involve more than simply enjoying one’s life; their theories require a feature that presumably Pat’s life contains, but Lee’s does not. Our view rejects the imposition of such additional requirements because, as we argue, no standard is plausible as the standard for a good life.

The consequences for students in thinking about their own lives are striking.

NOTES


2. Ibid., 215-16.

3. Ibid., 216.

4. One historical note: Pianalto notes that we associate our approach with that of Epicurus, but fails to mention that we find more satisfying the same outlook found in the Book of Ecclesiastes. As we explain, while the dating of Ecclesiastes is uncertain, several leading authorities believe it to be a work of the fourth or third centuries B. C. E., that is, about the time of Epicurus or somewhat later. Given the interaction between the Hebrew and Greek cultures that occurred during this period, certain common themes might have influenced both Epicurus and the author of...
Ecclesiastes. The matter remains murky, but the similarities in outlook between the two are striking, although rarely, if ever, noted.) In light of this, using our book at an introductory level also offers the opportunity to demonstrate to students that philosophy and the Bible may have themes in common. In this case, both Epicurus and Ecclesiastes offer the same advice: Be good and enjoy.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

To the Editors: We have all no doubt heard of efforts to rewrite Twain’s Huckleberry Finn and remove the N word wherever it appears. I have decided to rewrite Dostoyevsky’s The Siblings Karamazov to make it impossible to determine whether Ivan, Alyosha, and Dmitri are men or women, or some combination thereof. Readers will not be able to tell whether Dmitri’s lusting after Grushenka is that of a man for a woman, a woman for a man, or two men or two women, only one of which does the-lusting. Readers will also not be able to tell whether the elder Zossima is a monk or a nun. Captain Snegiryov will be identified only as an officer, and readers will not be able to tell whether the agent of Alyosha, or the father of Ilyusha, or whether the latter is a boy or a girl or of ambiguous sexuality.

This will help provide a safe space in libraries for students who are perhaps challenged by the fact of being gendered at all, and they will be less confused when asked which lives in the novel are better, happier, or more moral by not having to bring gender into their judgment.

I’ll be glad to work on other novels, too!

Respectfully submitted,
Eugene Kelly

BOOKS RECEIVED


CONTRIBUTORS

Steven M. Cahn  
Professor Emeritus of Philosophy  
City University of New York Graduate Center  
The City University of New York  
365 5th Ave, New York, NY 10016  
scahn@gc.cuny.edu

Andy German  
Department of Philosophy  
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev  
Post Office Box 643  
Be’er Sheva 84105  
Israel  
andyr@bgu.ac.il OR agerman672@gmail.com

Nickolas Pappas  
Department of Philosophy  
City College and the Graduate Center,  
The City University of New York  
365 5th Ave, New York, NY 10016  
nickolaspappas60@gmail.com

David Sackris  
014 Baker Hall  
Princeton University  
Princeton, NJ 08544  
david.sackris@gmail.com

Christine Vitrano  
Brooklyn College  
Department of Philosophy  
The City University of New York  
2900 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11210  
cvitrano@brooklyn.cuny.edu