APA Newsletters

HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
LGBTQ ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY
PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
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FROM THE EDITOR

Special Issue on Education and Pedagogy

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In the professional philosophical community, few activities are more impactful and more challenging than the work we do as educators. Teaching is an activity that is ripe for philosophical reflection, insofar as our beliefs about what knowledge is, how knowledge is produced and transmitted, and what is worth knowing manifest in our pedagogies. In a multitude of ways, teaching is also a practice that is inescapably political. Education—and institutions of education—can be liberating, or they can further entrench unjust systems of power. It is in relation to this particular concern that the Latin American and Latinx philosophers/teachers contributing to this issue of the newsletter offer us work that is especially valuable. Given that the authors are all oriented by their commitment to students who are members of marginalized social groups and to communities pursuing social justice, it comes as little surprise that the authors present bold critiques of the discipline and inspiring visions for how we might transform our institutions and practices. I am delighted and honored to introduce the following issue on education and pedagogy.

The issue begins with three meditaciones on education and philosophy. The meditaciones dwell at the intersection of theory and praxis. Here, each author’s practices and their philosophical ideas intermingle on the page in a way that adds dimension and gravity to both. It is one thing to postulate about pedagogy, and another to live one’s ideas.

The first essay, “Philosophy in Action in the US-Mexico Border: Desenterrando Conocimientos y Resolana,” is written by Manuela Alejandra Gomez. Gomez presents her rich concept of Desenterrando Conocimientos (Unearthing Knowledge)—a method for knowledge production that emerges out of the experiences of those living in the US-Mexico border, and which can lead to social transformation. She illustrates this concept through an account of her and her students’ extraordinary work in response to the major concerns facing their communities in El Paso-Juárez. Gomez advocates for Desenterrando Conocimientos as a method of teaching and doing philosophy in order to more effectively address the problems facing communities of color.

The second essay is also inspired by an innovative approach to teaching philosophy. In “Finding Nepantla,” Minerva Ahumada reflects on her experience creating and teaching a Spanish-language philosophy course at Arrupe College in Chicago. Her narrative artfully traces the way that the unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable challenge of doing academic philosophy in that context ultimately helped to bring various philosophical ideas to life for her and her students.

The third essay calls for a transformation in the way that philosophy is taught and practiced. In “Notes on Decolonizing Philosophy: Against Epistemic Extractivism and toward the Abolition of the Canon,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres warns readers about the increasingly common practice of epistemic extractivism, in which social movements are taken to be the object of theoretical reflection that nevertheless fails to challenge the liberal order of knowledge production in academia. Rather than merely expanding the canon to include more diversity, Maldonado-Torres proposes a recommitment to philosophical thinking that is neither restricted nor oriented by the discipline of philosophy.

This issue of the newsletter also contains two articles, which take up the theme of instructors’ attitudes toward their students. In “Judging Students and Racial Injustice,” author Eric Bayruns García notes that instructors’ judgments about students’ academic character can unwittingly be influenced by and contribute to the very racial injustice that impacts students’ academic performance in the first place. To address this concern, Bayruns García advances the thesis that both just and accurate assessment of students and their work must involve taking into account how racial injustice affects students’ performance in their work.

The second article, “Paulo Freire’s conscientização: Mindful Awareness and Trust,” examines Paulo Freire’s writings on trust towards students. Author Kim Díaz critically analyzes Freire’s arguments that, as teachers, we ought to believe in students’ ability to come into their own power while also remaining distrustful of students’ internalized oppressive patterns. Díaz also extends Freire’s advocacy of trust to her own work teaching philosophy and mindfulness to students who are on probation.

Finally, this issue includes both an interview and a book review about the recently published Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography by Walter Omar Kohan. The English-language text follows the 2019 publication of the first edition of Paulo Freire, mais do que nunca: Uma Biografia Filosófica (Editora Vestfigio). The conversation between the author and the book’s translator, Jason Wozniac, provides...
an opportunity for multilayered explorations of the nature of time and space; of hope, struggle, and emancipation; and of childhood and the mode of errancy.

The review of the book, written by Magda Costa Carvalho and translated from Portuguese by Bryan Pitts, highlights questions raised by the book on the nature of translation, such as the following: What questions are born of the possibility (or impossibility) of saying something in different linguistic codes? What epistemological cleavages will remain silenced in the idiomatic gaps? In what sense is translation a political issue? Consistent with the theme of this issue of the newsletter, the review also explores the value of biography for philosophy. Costa Carvalho puts the point most poignantly when she writes: “An individual’s gestures are the word translated into action, and . . . this action is the very life of thought.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I am thankful to Josef Mathews for his assistance with copy editing.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

The APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the spring 2022 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latinx thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as meditaciones, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

ARTICLES AND MEDITACIONES

All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All essay 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.

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, Lori Gallegos, at LoriGallegos@txstate.edu, Department of Philosophy, Comal Building 102, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666.

FORMATTING GUIDELINES


Journal of World Philosophies

Journal of World Philosophies (e-ISSN 2474-1795) is a semiannual, peer-reviewed, international journal dedicated to the study of world philosophies. Published as an open access journal by Indiana University Press, WP seeks to explore common spaces and differences between philosophical traditions in a global context. Without postulating cultures as monolithic, homogenous, or segregated wholes, it aspires to address key philosophical issues which bear on specific methodological, epistemological, hermeneutic, ethical, social, and political questions in comparative thought.

If you’d like to submit a paper, or if you have an idea for one and would like to discuss it, contact Carlos Alberto Sanchez, carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu.

MEDITACIONES

Philosophy in Action in the US-Mexico Border: Desenterrando Conocimientos y Resolana

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This piece introduces my concept of Desenterrando Conocimientos (Unearthing Knowledge) as a process of inquiry and praxis that reveals and produces knowledge of the US-Mexico border. Desenterrando Conocimientos is grounded in pragmatism and is a qualitative vision of philosophy in action. I argue that conceptual analyses, thought experiments, and armchair philosophy have been insufficient by themselves for capturing radical knowledge that enables social transformation in the US-Mexico border. Consequently, my proposition is metaphilosophical and epistemological. Desenterrando Conocimientos is a philosophical instrument to question, challenge, and heal some of the structural racism, violence, and injustices many have witnessed and experienced in the US-Mexico border. It is a method for knowledge acquisition and knowledge production that can be linked to social activism.
Historically, Western epistemologies have excluded minoritized voices in academia, and communities of color have been disenfranchised in multiple ways and in various degrees that range from exclusion in intellectual discourses and academic spaces to the devaluing of their ways of being and knowing. As a result, philosophy is one of the least diverse fields in the humanities. For Ofelia Schutte, one of the few Latina philosophers in the US, “The continually low representation confirms that given the current practices, standards, and teachers of philosophy, Latinos/as tend not to be attracted to the field because they see studying philosophy as a mark of social privilege and they fail to identify with either the subject or its professors.” She claims that, at best, they perceive philosophy as a protected space for asking unusually clever questions, and at worst, a field reserved for exclusionary white privilege. Therefore, Desenterrando Conocimientos offers a remedy, as it arises from the unique complexity of living in a transnational space and navigating between experiences that manifest different parts of multidimensional identities. It emerges from the distinctive challenges of demonstrating allegiance to one or two countries, and from exploring the boundaries between nationality, citizenship, language, and social class. In other words, Desenterrando Conocimientos is as hybrid as Mexican Americans and Mexican American philosophy. It is meant as an epistemological and pedagogical tool that promotes inclusion in philosophy.

I compare Desenterrando Conocimientos to the concept of Resolana by Tomás Atencio. I argue that both concepts uncover and create powerful truths about Mexican American communities in unconventional but meaningful ways. While I explore some similarities between the accounts, I also note some crucial distinctions. Ultimately, the purpose of this comparative work is to elevate Resolana into a philosophical discourse that serves as a backdrop for Desenterrando Conocimientos and to elucidate two different approaches that highlight the philosophical importance of everyday lived experiences.

**RESOLANA**

In the book Resolana: Emerging Chicano Dialogues on Community and Globalization, Atencio claims that Resolana is a physical and figurative space, where the sun (el sol) strikes and reflects off a wall creating a warm place of light and serenity. Atencio states that Resolana is usually where villagers in Northern New Mexico and many places in the Spanish-speaking world gather to talk. Resolana serves as a casual and welcoming center of communication. It is the Chicano parallel to the Socratic dialogue and a metaphor for enlightenment through discourse. Enlightenment for Atencio serves an emancipatory function that enables the oppressed and marginalized to become full agents. This dialogue is a way to uncover what he calls “subjugated knowledge” from the community. It is also a way to use everyday lived experiences as a source of truth. Atencio relies on Hispanic New Mexican history and oral traditions that embrace community stories and ways of being in the world. Resolana shines light on community knowledge. It is a process of reflection that exposes el oro del barrio or, as Atencio refers to it, the “gold of the community,” even though a more appropriate translation would be “gold of the hood” because of its informal and subversive nature. Just like Socrates compared himself to a midwife to help the birthing of ideas through discourse, Atencio believes that el oro del barrio must be mined from individual and communal lived experiences to extract knowledge.

For Atencio, life experiences can be reflected upon and discussed to unveil a body of knowledge that can be linked with universal knowledge and, as such, is transmissible to others. Atencio affirms that he was intimidated by the term phenomenology until he realized that Resolana could be another word for it, since it is a process of analyzing experiences and their meaning. He claims that while Martin Heidegger had an individualistic orientation, Resolana uncovers meaning from the community’s experiences through conversations with people. According to Atencio, each culture has its own Resolanas, but they must be nurtured.

Most examples of Resolana knowledge presented by Atencio were gathered in New Mexico. For instance, he recalls a Navajo physicist who had been drawn to the study of theoretical physics through his native religion, and through Resolana, he connected similarities between Navajo myth and theoretical physics. Atencio believes that ideas share Platonic archetypes, and they exist universally independently of cultural particulars. Other examples include young men learning to butcher animals under the supervision of experienced men, and young women learning to deliver babies by apprenticing under experienced midwives. For Atencio, storytelling is the primary way of passing on and exchanging life lessons, knowledge, and values.

In summary, Resolana is reflexive and reflective learning based on the following assumptions:

1. life stories are history and sources of knowledge;
2. imagination, visions, and other psychic productions are foundations for knowledge;
3. traditional cultures have indigenous knowledge by which they interpret themselves to themselves;
4. stories consist of themes that are universal while remaining specific to time and place; themes are essential to democratizing knowledge, allowing for dialogue within as well as across cultures, by crossing cultural boundaries and linking cultures through the thematic bridge.

Atencio’s account successfully lifts individuals’ experiences to the status of knowledge. His contribution to philosophy is that social networks are key to ways of becoming known and being a knower. Furthermore, he opens the door for a collective unity where people participate in and become epistemic agents through dialogue. He recognizes the subjugation and dismissal of certain types of knowledge and presents an urgent argument for the acknowledgment of this and the creation of new knowledge networks. Likewise, he defends storytelling as a way of communicating and enabling reflexive processes of reasoning. He also captures this knowledge as being discounted in virtue of being associated with subjugated people. His equalization of ways of knowing entails that his account also has room for a pluralism of inquiry.
While Atencio’s account effectively emphasizes community dialogues and propositional knowledge, my account of Desenterrando Conocimientos has a social activism component that goes beyond dialogical efforts and focuses on actions that solve problems in the communities in which it exposes and produces knowledge. My account of knowledge is more dynamic and open-ended. However, both methods of philosophical inquiry relate to the value of lived experiences. Resolana is the embracing condition, the safe, warm, and welcoming setting, while Desenterrando Conocimientos is the praxis that can occur within that condition.

DESENTERRANDO CONOCIMIENTOS
Desenterrando Conocimientos is a proposition to expand the parameters of what philosophy is expected to do. When we think of Mexican American labor, many immediately think of physical agricultural work in the fields, like picking fruits and vegetables from the ground (la tierra). My proposal reimagines Mexican American labor to include much-needed intellectual work. Desenterrando Conocimientos is the active unearthing of knowledge in communities full of rich epistemological crops. It happens when we engage with la tierra y desenterramos los conocimientos of it and of its people. Through social interactions of first-person synthetic experiences grasped as qualitative data, we uncover knowledge from the ground up.

In English, we do not typically use the plural form of the word knowledge, as it is commonly perceived as a single body of truth; however, the Spanish language allows us to conceive of conocimientos as plural. So I intentionally present conocimientos, as this plurality allows for the democratization of knowing. Desenterrando Conocimientos is an individual and shared uncovering of experiential truths that cannot be deduced a priori. Unlike Resolana, individual and communal experiences—but most importantly praxis, not just communal dialogue—are what reveal knowledge. Conocimientos appear in the actions and organically unfold in the experiences of individuals.

Desenterrando Conocimientos is a process grounded in experience, and unlike Atencio’s epistemological commitments, my account is not tied to metaphysical idealism or representationalism. Additionally, the knowledge revealed through Desenterrando Conocimientos is beyond cultural and generational. While Atencio opens up the possibility for el oro del barrio to be philosophical, my account explicitly allows for the desenterrando of conocimientos to occur intentionally within a philosophical context and for the knowledge revealed to be clearly within the bounds of ethics, existentialism, metaphysics, and many other philosophical realms and sometimes beyond.

Atencio believes that the best way to illustrate Resolana y el oro del barrio is through his own story. Even though autobiographical stories and recollections of lived experiences may be perceived as self-indulgent, when these stories come from those who have been historically silenced and underrepresented, they reveal power and become a disruption to mainstream epistemologies. For example, when we analyze the trailblazing work of Gloria Anzaldúa in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, we are looking at a revealing counterstory that violates academic and linguistic parameters. In my opinion, Anzaldúa is not offering an autobiographical piece; she is a pioneer of presenting a philosophical testimonio, one in which she depicts the US-Mexico border as an intricate space of hybridity and of constant navigation of in-betweeness through her own experiences. Testimonios have been a critical Latin American oral and written practice that is contingent upon personal and communal experiences as important sources of knowledge in understanding one’s place within political, social, and cultural contexts. However, they are not just a source of knowledge, but also of empowerment, and political strategies for claiming rights and bringing about social change. Unfortunately, this is rarely acknowledged philosophically. Some stories or testimonios are perceived as merely anecdotal and are delegitimized as not having much epistemic merit. One clear example is that many still categorize Anzaldúa as a Latin American thinker instead of a Latin American philosopher.

Yet, Atencio argues that listening to other people’s stories allowed him to understand individual perceptions about life and detect a collective undercurrent, a mutual consciousness, and unconsciousness, that told of a people’s shared beliefs and views about life. Most importantly, these stories reveal the knowledge and skills people use in everyday life to survive. Like Atencio and Anzaldúa, to understand my account of Desenterrando Conocimientos, it is crucial to situate my own lived experiences of being born and raised in the US-Mexico border of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and of teaching philosophy on both sides for over fifteen years.

US-MEXICO BORDER
“Aquí es todo diferente
Todo, todo es diferente
En la frontera, en la frontera, en la frontera.”

–Juan Gabriel.

Borders are not just physical; they are also metaphysical. La frontera is an axis of inclusion and exclusion that manifests the best and worst of two worlds simultaneously. Particularly, on the one hand, El Paso has been considered one the safest cities in the US. On the other hand, Ciudad Juárez has been labeled one of the most dangerous cities worldwide, infamous for its ongoing narco-violence and horrific femicides. They are sister cities simply separated by concrete bridges and incomplete border walls, polarized by contradictory, but coexisting dichotomies.

Post-9/11 threats increased what were already extraordinary challenges of continuous border enforcement and the militarization of both sides of the binational community. The El Paso-Juárez border has become the epicenter of immigration debates and where we house most undocumented brown children in cages and migrant adults in tent cities. People here constantly face fears of deportation and family separation, even with legal documentation, as they are often considered illegal and demonized on both sides. Daily migration for work, school, or fun implies long wait times at the bridges, or at the very
least, denigration when trying to prove citizenship at both points of entry.

El Paso has a population of 85 percent Mexican American residents. On August 3, 2019, this community became the site of the deadliest massacre on Mexican Americans in modern US history, when a white supremacist killed twenty-three people at a local Walmart because he feared a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.” Before this horrific act, El Paso and Ciudad Juárez had been a safe Resolana of proud displays of culture and heritage. El Paso had been a carefree, warmhearted place for people of color, different from the rest of Texas, until the secure bubble we had been living in was busted, and we realized we were not exempt from the deadly reality of racism.

A lot of the experiences here have forced individuals to become naturally philosophical. For instance, many people of all ages were confronted with the question, Why would somebody drive over six hundred miles to kill us just because of who we are? Philosophy can serve as a mirror for self-reflection in examining and making sense of contested border identities. In many instances, it is precisely the exposure to the experiences of crime and injustices in the border that has allowed some of us to desenterrar conocimientos even before reading any philosophy books. Border suffering sometimes leads to raw introspection and social reflections that reveal pivotal ethical, existential, metaphysical, and epistemological questions, but above all, it leads to authoritative philosophical answers that arise from lived experiences.

An example of communal Desenterrando Conocimientos happened after the August 3 incident, when the binational community of El Paso and Juárez, despite multiple political and military efforts of being divided, was obligated to realize that it was particularly targeted as one. The community desenterró political knowledge of border identities. The victims were Democrats and Republicans, supporters of El Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and El Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Mexican nationals, and Mexican Americans from Juárez and El Paso. However, they experienced one common enemy of white supremacy. This revelation forced an unexpected unity between the two sides. The tension between “pochos” and “juareños,” two pejorative terms used to refer to incomplete and disloyal identities of each side, was softened. While the complex relationship between the two sides continues, a powerful counternarrative, different political identities, and critical consciousness against hateful and dehumanizing rhetoric about the US-Mexico border was reinforced. It is essential to note that the victims of August 3 were not just the twenty-three people murdered. The collective lingering trauma permeated beyond and is still present in many ways, especially and inevitably in the context of education.

PEDAGOGY

In terms of pedagogy, both Desenterrando Conocimientos and Resolana have Freirean influences, as they recognize that not all lived experiences are valued equally and that a critical education is the key to liberation from oppression. They also have Deweyan undertones, as they uphold the advantages of the combination between theory and practice and cherish the organic connection between education and personal experience. Additionally, they also share a common thread to Freire and Dewey through their commitments to democracy.

However, one necessary distinction between the two concepts is that my account of Desenterrando Conocimientos seeks to create social activists, and not just everyday knowledge-producers or scholars. Desenterrando Conocimientos, beyond an epistemological method, is also a proposition to begin a new way of doing and teaching philosophy. When students live philosophy and see themselves as agents in their learning and in the creation of knowledge, the outcome is student engagement with outstanding tangible effects. This becomes relevant when we acknowledge the current state of academic underrepresentation of minoritized individuals in the academy in general and in philosophy in particular.

One example of Desenterrando Conocimientos that occurred in the classroom emerged during a discussion of sociopolitical philosophy. A student started crying while confessing that she was scared that President Trump would be reelected and that the racist rhetoric and actions that had already hurt the El Paso-Juárez border community after August 3 would continue or increase. I reassured the student that those feelings were valid, but then I asked, “So, what can be done? How can philosophy be practiced in this context?” Students started sharing ideas, until they proposed creating a voting initiative project. The original idea was for some students to become deputized and register other students to vote in a county with historically low voter turnout, but then the proposal evolved into ensuring family and friends also voted. By the time of the 2020 elections, more people got involved with the project, like the parents of a student who voted for the very first time after living in the US for twenty years. They had never voted because the process had been too foreign and intimidating.

The conocimiento desenterrado was the overall value of voting and the recognition of the students’ political agency. This new knowledge was outside of traditional cultural expectations. The student who was scared reasoned from her individual fears to a sense of communal responsibility and action. Many students claimed that they could not have learned this value from a book, a simple discussion, or a philosophical lecture. It was the experience and the process that unfolded in the project, including collecting I Voted stickers, and proudly showing off their selfies with them on social media, that led them to recognize themselves as political beings. The final results showed that El Paso had a 17 percent increase in voter turnout compared to the 2016 presidential election and an all-time high for the county. My students held the knowledge that they had done their part to contribute to this historic increase.

Another example happened at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic during a virtual Zoom meeting. El Paso was a hot spot for the Coronavirus and because of its unique demographic: 90 percent of the cases and deaths were of Mexican Americans in the community. Again, I asked students, “How can philosophy be put into action in this
context?” One student answered that while everyone would be focused on prioritizing the safety of medical professionals, if we wanted to be ethical, we had to focus on the most vulnerable in our community, which would be the homeless and migrants. At a time when there was a toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and mask shortage, another student said, “We should make masks.” Nobody knew how to sew. But what seemed like a far-fetched idea actually became a reality. Students started borrowing sewing machines, looking up patterns and tutorials online, and involving their loved ones. The initial goal was to make one hundred masks. Over the next months, we ended up making more than 2,500 reusable facemasks and distributed them on both sides of our community.21 Students desenterraron the value of their own potential, even in a situation like a global pandemic, in which they felt at risk and helpless. One student claimed, “No matter what, there is always something we can do.” The philosophical lesson learned was a deeper understanding of social obligations and the concept of the common good. Other existential revelations included the recognition of the power of choosing to act to create change and meaning in our community and the satisfaction of knowing that perhaps at least one life was possibly saved.

For many philosophers, it is easy to make normative claims of what should be done and what needs to change from the comfort of the ivory tower. Desenterrando Conocimientos is about doing it and changing the world by solving real problems at the community level. We do not live in the era of Socrates or Descartes or Heidegger. While their contributions are valuable, the question is how are they relatable? If students cannot connect to philosophy, if they cannot see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they will not become philosophers or experience the benefits of philosophy. So as philosophers, we need to recognize our influential role of first and foremost being educators, and we must convey our material in a way in which it can have practical worth.

In the implementation of a grounded philosophical pedagogy of Desenterrando Conocimientos, students examine various historical and contemporary philosophical ideas, but beyond theoretical understandings, the emphasis is on the application of philosophical notions in a real-world context. Philosophy can be a powerful tool for marginalized students who may lack confidence and self-advocacy. If taught correctly, it can arm students with the capacity to question and act on behalf of themselves and others. By combining classroom-based instruction with practical hands-on experience of philosophy in action, students can learn to care about themselves and their communities.

In his work on Resolana, Atencio similarly refers to the reflections on the experience of serving a community as “praxis learning.” He had as one of his lifelong goals the creation of the Academia de la Nueva Raza, a grassroots educational school that he and his friends founded in Dixon, New Mexico. La Academia aimed at creating awareness, conscientiousness, a thirst for justice, and a commitment to work towards a free society. It included projects in Texas and New Mexico in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Some of these projects included recording oral histories from Mexican farmworkers in California and Arizona. Atencio’s vision was also for intellectual work to happen outside the classroom.

Atencio argues that storytellers, cuentistas, not only recall their immediate experiences as sources of knowledge, but often share stories from the past and others in the form of folktales, songs, and dichos. In my pedagogical research over the years, I have asked philosophy students to share examples of Mexican American philosophy in the form of everyday dichos—something that is not in philosophy books, yet which is valuable knowledge to students because it is part of their lived experiences. The two most pertinent and recurring examples provided by them have been El que no tranza no avanza and El jale Chicano. It is almost impossible to charitably translate these. Lived experience itself has taught some of us their unique meaning, and a literal translation would never capture their profound value.

Nonetheless, these two sayings hint at the fact that in order to thrive, we have to think differently, that we must deviate from the norm to make things work. Philosophy cannot continue to be predominantly Eurocentric if we expect it to solve the challenges of communities of color. Desenterrando Conocimientos is an attempt to develop a philosophy of action that pushes the limits of philosophy to create social activists who are more than academic scholars. As philosophers, we need to ask ourselves if scholarship is really changing the world. If the answer is yes, then my proposition is a way to speed up that change. If the answer is no, then what are we waiting for?

CONCLUSION: RESOLANA AND DESENTERRANDO CONOCIMIENTOS

Both of the concepts of Resolana and Desenterrando Conocimientos aim to make philosophy relevant to particular social realities. They both treasure what a person already knows, like individual and communal funds of knowledge. They also set up the embracing social conditions that invite for new knowledge and make individuals feel valued while being emancipatory. Moreover, they equally appreciate the significance of context to understand communities commonly ignored. But we must realize that Resolana and Desenterrando Conocimientos are more than mere useful metaphors. They are products of Mexican American philosophy.22 One might wonder if these propositions can be applied outside of Mexican American communities or the context of the US and Mexico. The answer is perhaps, though it is important to recognize that they arise from unique circumstances and valuable lived experiences. They also have epistemological consequences on whose knowledge matters and lead to practical applications.

There are deep mythical connections between el sol y la tierra, y la resolana que ayuda a desenterrar conocimientos. Our ancestors were the people of the sun.23 Miguel Leon-Portilla24 states that Nahuatl philosophic thought revolved around an aesthetic conception of the universe and life, and that to know the truth is to understand the hidden meaning of things right in front of us, or in the case of Resolana, above through el sol, and Desenterrando Conocimientos, through la tierra below. According to Portilla, philosophy
of metaphors does not pretend to explain the mystery completely, but perhaps will awaken the desire for further understandings. My proposition is a simple return to our own words, as quoted in Robert Eli Sánchez, Jr., "nuestra tierra
á
, November 2, 2020.

NOTES

1. Michael Baffoe, Lewis Asimeng-Boahene, and Buster C. Ogbuagu state that the field of academic research and publication have traditionally been almost exclusively the domain of white academics and that they institute, control, and apply "white codes" to circulate the publication of academic journals, magazines, and books, all from their white privileged positions in academia, especially in the Western world. Consequently, "knowledge has been constructed, reconstructed, distributed, and reproduced by whites who fail to see value in the knowledge base of academics and researchers from the so-called Third World." See "Their Way or No Way: 'Whiteness' as Agent for Marginalizing and Silencing Minority Voices in Academic Research and Publication," European Journal of Sustainable Development 3, no. 1 (2014): 13–32, https://doi.org/10.14207/ejisd.2014.v3n1p13.

2. As of 2020, the American Philosophical Association’s demographic statistics report that out of almost 2,000 members, 248 self-identified as Hispanic/Latino (Demographic statistics APA, 2020). These statistics are not broken up further to distinguish between those who identify as Mexican American, or Chicano, or anything else. The label Hispanic/Latino is used as an umbrella term, proving that it is as far as the diversity distinctions go, illustrating the need for more intersectional categories. Diversity in terms of gender, race, class, orientation, and experiences. See American Philosophical Association, FY2020 Demographic Statistics Report – Final, “American Philosophical Association,” https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/data_on_profession/fy2020-demographicstatistics.pdf.

According to Eric Sliebers, the current philosophy teaching canon systematically excludes whole cultures, is biased, and is primarily white and European. See Ten Neglected Classics of Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Marilyn Friedman identifies some aspects of professional philosophy that seem relevant for explaining women’s low participation in the field. This includes a look at the way philosophical activity is portrayed in some introductory philosophy textbooks and a reminder of the adversarial style that is common throughout philosophy. She has categorized the issue of underrepresentation as two problems. The first one being that some philosophical gatekeepers, mostly white men in the academic philosophy, who hold positions of power, may alienate women, and make it difficult for them to engage in philosophical work. The second being that some features of philosophy, such as the dominance of abstract conceptual reasoning that excludes social ways of understandings, might alienate women and prompt them to avoid the field. These features have historically been associated with men in philosophy. Friedman argues that men in philosophy have historically not engaged respectfully and attentively in serious intellectual interchanges with women. This practice seems connected to the informally closed nature of philosophy and the way those already in the profession act as gatekeepers who determine who gets to enter and stay in the academic field, whose voices are heard in prestigious refereed publications, and so on. See Marilyn Friedman, “Women in Philosophy: Why Should We Care? in Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change,” ed. Katrin Hutchinson and Fiona Jenkins (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–39.


4. Miguel Montiel, Tomás Atencio, and E. A. Mares, Resolana: Emerging Chicano Dialogues on Community and Globalization (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009). Thank you, Dr. José-Antonio Orozco, for introducing me to this valuable work.

5. Atencio's Resolana emerges from Chicano dialogues, which necessarily leads us to the recurring trouble with labels. Who counts as Chicano? Is it Chicano? Chicano? How is this different from the labels of Latino/a, Latinx, Hispanic, Mexican American and their variations? Various terms are frequently used interchangeably to describe a group of minoritized people. The trouble occurs when the various labels used to define diverse groups are often presented as monolithic, and they erase the visibility of important distinctions. These common labels have changed through time, they mean something different depending on the geographic location of those who use them, and are used for, and often can be politically charged. Ultimately, these overlapping terms signify the absence of an in-depth understanding of the complex identities of each of these groups, and of minoritized people in general because they lack reference to important personal lived experiences that constitute those identities. This semantic issue of categorization becomes relevant when we realize that minoritized groups are severely underrepresented academically in the US.


17. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the City (New York: Continuum, 1993).


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22. The future of Mexican American philosophy depends on philosophy’s ability to engage students practically in addressing the problems that they face in their everyday lives. Carlos Sanchez and Robert Sanchez argue that there is a growing tendency to take seriously the question of Mexican national identity as a philosophical question. See Carlos Alberto Sanchez and Robert Eli Sanchez, *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Manuel Vargas (2013) claims that accounting for the origins and parameters of Mexican American philosophy, just as with Latin American philosophy, has been a difficult business, both because of the messy, slowly emerging nature of academic fields and because of special challenges about how to characterize the field. This relates to the trouble with labels and to figuring out what these philosophies are supposed to do. First, there is a disagreement about whether “Latinx” ought to be understood expansively (as including both Latin Americans and US Latinx) or whether it ought to be understood narrowly (as focused on those who identify as Mexican American). Additionally, it is important for philosophers of color. Grant Silva explains that the act of writing philosophy as a Mexican American often results in alienating and existentially meaningless experience for many philosophers, especially for those who wish to think from their racialized and gendered identities in academic philosophy. Grant J. Silva, “On the Difficulties of Writing Philosophy from a Racialized Subjectivity,” APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy 18, no. 1 (2018): 2–6, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resourcecollection/60044C96-F3E0-4049-BC5A-271C673FA1E5Hispanic18n1.pdf. Even when trying to highlight the work of other philosophers of color, many encounter resistances and delegitimization, but it is time we vindicate Mexican American philosophy.


Portilla, 182.

Finding Nepantla

Minerva Ahumada

ARRUPE COLLEGE OF LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago received its first cohort of students in August 2015. A two-year college within the university, Arrupe College attracted students who are usually underrepresented in higher education. In many cases, students are coming to Arrupe because it lessens their financial burden and eases their path to their bachelor’s degree. As the very first class got underway, I was not expecting to hear a student swear in Spanish. As I expressed my surprise and admonished the student, I realized that my students were also surprised to have a professor who understood the student’s expletive. We chatted about this exchange, and I learned that about half the students in that classroom spoke Spanish. Because of Chicago’s demographics, Arrupe College has attracted high numbers of students who have grown up speaking Spanish at home. Some of our students attended high schools that had bilingual programs (i.e., Cristo Rey) and/or have taken AP Spanish. Getting to know their stories—and especially their doubts around their mastery of Spanish—made me realize that we needed an environment that understood our students’ bilingualism, honored it, and helped them embrace it. What started with a Freirean understanding of education ended up moving us to experiencing an instance of Nepantla, following Gloria Anzaldúa’s work.

THE STUDENTS

Arrupe started with 158 students; 71 percent of them identified as Latino. There is no information about how many of these students are fluent in Spanish, maybe because there are no language classes at the college. As a philosophy professor who was born and raised in Mazatlán, México, I was excited to see—and hear—so many students who identified as Latina/o/x or Chicana/o/x and to hear the different ways in which they had gotten to Arrupe. We have students whose families have been in the US for generations and others who have recently gotten here—some live in mixed-status households, while others came to the US as refugees; we have had students who got to
the US as unaccompanied minors and others who barely missed the eligibility criteria to apply for DACA. Arrupe has many students who have received all of their education in the US and some others that have received their education in different countries.

Spanish is always present in the college, whether that is in the hallways or in the classroom when students are working in small groups. This is one of my favorite things at Arrupe. For example, when students are working in small groups drawing the “Allegory of the Cave,” as I walk by their tables I can hear that some of them are peppering their work with Spanish here and there: “la cueva,” “las shadow.” As Paulo Freire says in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.” So how do we hear the word and engage with them in dialogue? How do we honor our students’ bilingualism?

Our first attempt was to create a “Spanish Table” club where we would meet in a classroom once or twice a week and hold conversations in Spanish. While some students joined in, the effort was short lived. Students felt nervous to speak in Spanish in front of their peers, other activities were happening at the same time, and my schedule kept changing, so it became a bit of a guessing game to schedule the meetings.

In January of 2018 I started teaching a philosophy class for Illinois Humanities and its Odyssey Project. The Odyssey Project is a Clemente Course in the Humanities, where students take classes such as history, philosophy, literature, US history, and art history at no cost and can earn college credits. I started teaching in the Spanish program Odisea. The experience was fun, and I was overjoyed with the opportunity to teach a philosophy class in Spanish—something that I had never done, because even when I taught philosophy in Mexico for a year, I was asked to teach the class in English. I was able to share the classroom with adults that were working on their college credits and who, despite working all day, came to class at night ready to discuss philosophy.

Teaching for Odisea made me wonder if we could not do the same at Arrupe: Would it be possible to offer a philosophy class in Spanish? This would have several advantages over offering Spanish as a club, but mainly it would change the locus of operation from a social to an academic one. Throughout the years I had heard students talk about how Spanish is the language they speak at home, but it did not translate to their academic endeavors. Many students believed that their Spanish wasn’t refined, academic, or “good enough” and often felt embarrassed to use it, especially when they needed to talk to someone from a Latin American country. A social context can only go so far in addressing these needs, fears, and anxieties.

Since Arrupe students need to take three philosophy classes, I proposed using ACPHI 205 (The Person and Society) as a class that could be taught in Spanish. Students could practice the same skills they had been practicing in their philosophy classes, but we could also work on increasing their vocabulary in Spanish, presentation of arguments in a language other than English, plus—what I saw as the most exciting opportunity—students would be more intentionally exposed to an academic and scholarly community of people with backgrounds similar to theirs. The proposal to pilot this class was accepted in June 2019. We scheduled the class for spring 2020. Twelve students enrolled in it.

LA COYOLXAUHQUI

I did not imagine that twelve students would register for this class. I was hoping for at least four. The class had been advertised, but students were the ones who decided if they felt ready for this class. There were no language tests or requirements for them to fulfill. The first day, I think we were all nervous. There was a giddiness that I had never experienced in a classroom before.

In Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro Anzaldúa invites us to think of the Coyolxauhqui and her dismembered and disjointed body as an analogy for the constitution of those who are marginalized. Anzaldúa says, “I don’t write from any single disciplinary position. I write outside official theoretical/philosophical language. Mine is a struggle of recognizing and legitimizing excluded selves, especially of women, people of color, queer, and othered groups.” As an excluded self, Anzaldúa uses those identities within herself to articulate the whole they shape. This is how Anzaldúa threads a connection between herself and the Coyolxauhqui: the disc that delineates the Coyolxauhqui also shows the different parts/members/identities that shape her.

I grew up listening to my dad talk about the Coyolxauhqui. The lunar goddess that had convinced her brothers to attack their mother, Coatlicue, when they found out she was pregnant. Huitzilopochtli defended their mother and vanquished Coyolxauhqui. On vacation in Mexico City, my dad—who taught history and literature—always made it a point to take us to the National Museum of Anthropology and History so we could see the stone that represented her: a disc where the goddess lay dismembered. When I first read Anzaldúa’s use of Coyolxauhqui, that image from childhood helped me make sense of this immigrant who still feels like a foreigner in this country. The first time I ever presented on Anzaldúa’s use of the goddess was in a conference in Chiapas, Mexico, where I was told that both Anzaldúa and I had misused the myth, which was understandable since neither of us was Mexican. My own ancestry was now being erased; I was being told who I was. And in that moment, Coyolxauhqui became even more relevant in my life.

“Coyolxauhqui,” Anzaldua writes, also represents the “me” tossed into the void by traumatic events (an experience of the unconscious). I disintegrate into hundreds of pieces, hundreds of separate awarenesses. A plurality of souls splits my awareness so that I see things from a hundred different viewpoints, each with its own intelligence that can “do” a hundred different things (think, feel, sense, observe) in a continuously changing consciousness moment to
moment. Yet while experiencing the many I cohere as the one reconstituted and restructured by my own unconscious urge towards wholeness.1

That giddiness I mentioned before is represented in this quote from Anzaldúa. But if we think about this experience of granting Spanish an academic space, it also brings these hundreds of pieces that have been separated and aims to integrate them. While it is possible that everyone in that classroom had spoken Spanish while at Arrupe, this was our first experience of doing so in an academic setting. These different viewpoints that had been taught to exist in different modes, in different spaces, were colliding with each other, activating a new consciousness and a way of being among others whose identities are also being reconciled in the moment. In the classroom, we laughed, and that released us from this moment.

We talked about it: Who was nervous? Was anybody feeling anxious? Students had questions about whether there would be any penalty if they spoke English instead of Spanish; we agreed that there was no reason for a penalty. As a matter of fact, since everyone was feeling rusty, we established that we would always work in Spanish (all readings and assignments would be in Spanish), and use English and Spanglish for those moments when the right word escapes us, since everyone would be able to understand one another. Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui felt extremely relevant in this moment: we were bringing together these different identities, and we needed a space to recognize and reconcile them.

As we continued to work together, this new consciousness allowed us to travel as each other’s companions. We all made mistakes; we all forgot words; we all supported each other in this process. There was an acceptance of these different identities we all hold that made it OK to have more fluidity with the language and our embodiment of it.

Teaching this class in Spanish felt very different for me, personally. While I knew that I needed to guide my students to be at least as successful as they would have been if they had not taken the class in Spanish, being in this classroom with them helped me understand myself differently, and I became playful with the students in a way that I cannot do in my other classes. I saw myself care for my students differently, as if this care was now emanating from two sources within myself. Anzaldúa says that she “stare[s] up at the moon, Coyolxauhqui, and its light in the darkness. I seek a healing image, one that reconnects me to others. Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui felt extremely relevant in this moment: we were bringing together these different identities, and we needed a space to recognize and reconcile them.”

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Anzaldúa talks about the Coyolxauhqui imperative. She says that it “is the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us.” She continues, “I call this impulse the ‘Coyolxauhqui imperative’: a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us.” While I had read this prior to teaching the class in Spanish, being in the classroom embedded these words with a new lived urgency: this opportunity to reconcile, rejoin, and gather those pieces that have been wounded before has the power to heal because it helps us to recognize the ways in which we have moved on, survived, and learned. Accepting that my students and I carry these different pieces—that we are made out of pieces—can make us more resistant against the many ways in which we are told that we are different, that we do not belong, that we need to hide some part of who we are (or maim it, file it, shrink it). These parts then become hinges, joints, junctions. The more we explore them, activate them, and nurse them, the more resistant we can become. To heal from our wounds we must embrace an awareness that privileges flexibility, ambiguity, and adaptability between our different identities and those of others.

**ENTERING NEPANTLA**

In acknowledging and leaning into these hinges, the classroom space became a crossroads: different pieces or our souls, different experiences, were addressed here. The difference is that we did not feel pressure to choose a road onto which we could continue. This crossroad, unlike some proverbial ones, was a resting, healing place. This experience bears resemblance to Anzaldúa’s idea of Nepantla.

Anzaldúa sees Nepantla as a transitional space where we arrive after experiencing a choque. She writes,

> Este choque shifts us to nepantla, a psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future. Nepantla is the space in-between, the locus and sign of transition. In Nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to the idealized goals. We’re caught in the remolinos (vortexes), each with different, often contradictory forms of cognition, perspectives, worldviews, belief systems—all occupying the transitional nepantla.7

As we were exploring topics in social and political philosophy, the classroom became the proper space to examine our connections, belongingness, and longing in our society and communities. For example, students speak of how they feel a lack of support from their families when it comes to the practical reality of attending college. Parents and other relatives encourage them to attend college, but they also make demands for their time that
clash with their obligations as students. While at school, students also feel that they are being encouraged to remain engaged, but they find themselves navigating spaces that are not built for them or with them in mind. While students might have enrolled in this class because it was in Spanish, our conversations threaded academic/philosophical discussions and personal concerns in such a way that students were able to see that they were not the only ones who had had these experiences, had felt a lack of belonging, or were longing for some part of their selves to be more incorporated into their academic life.

In a way, I think that those few moments we had at the beginning of the semester, where we giggled and discussed expectations of using Spanish in the class were part of that first choque we experienced. Before this class, I have mostly experienced choques/shocks/clashes by myself. I have been one of the few people in the room with an accent; I have been the one thinking of soccer but calling it fútbol; I had been the only one struggling to translate that word that would only come to me in Spanish. In this classroom, I was not the only one. This place of encounter—this Nepantla—provided bontía, healing from previous wounds/slights/erasures and a way to move forward. Anzaldúa emphasizes this by claiming, “Only by speaking of these events and by creating do I become visible to myself and come to terms with what happens. Though it is hard to think and act positively en estos tiempos de Coyolxauhqui, it is exactly these times of dislocation/separation that hold the promise of wholeness.” Students seemed to have experienced this even in the final project: a video essay. They chose to analyze media that had been created in Spanish. One group analyzed Bad Bunny songs, another one analyzed the movie El Hoyo. They did not need to translate the work they were engaging with, and they did not have to provide a lot of detail as to why they had chosen these lesser known works. Conversations in class became more invested in making connections between the texts and what these ideas had created. The class, as a whole, was more thoughtful about the ways in which, for example, social contract theorists have constructed and idealized some subjects at the expense of others. The texts were still challenging in Spanish, but because of the makeup of the class, certain conditions and experiences, and the erasure of some knowledge had become more visible.

As I was coming to the realization that the class was offering us more than I had envisioned, we needed to switch gears and move to a virtual setting. This put an end to our plans to visit the Chicago campus of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, just fifteen minutes away from Arrupe College, and Instituto Cervantes, ten minutes away from campus. These are organizations that most of my students had not heard of. There was more that we wanted to do, but what we did do helped us move—I hope—to a more complex understanding of who we are and how and why we operate the way we do in different environments.

**NEXT STEPS**

There is much to consider when teaching a philosophy class in Spanish. As I think back to my experience teaching this class, I wanted to offer my students the world of philosophy that I enjoy when I read in Spanish or when I attend presentations in Spanish. In a political moment when immigrants were being vilified, a philosophy class in Spanish was needed. What I did not imagine was the healing it would offer as we convened as a class: where anxiety over the language had been the first shock we experienced together, we had the rest of the semester to examine how those different pieces in our Coyolxauhqui can best interlock with one another.

We will offer this class again, hopefully in spring 2022. Between now and then, we at Arrupe need to figure out how to make the class be transcribed, and what opportunities we have to give students credit for taking a philosophy class in Spanish.

**NOTES**

3. Anzaldúa, 50.
4. Anzaldúa, 10.
5. Anzaldúa, 2.
6. Anzaldúa, 1.
7. Anzaldúa, 17.

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**Notes on Decolonizing Philosophy: Against Epistemic Extractivism and Toward the Abolition of the Canon**

Nelson Maldonado-Torres

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There has been a proliferation of writings on the decolonization of various areas of knowledge in the last decade. One reads about decolonizing anthropology, psychology, political science, critical theory, and, of course, philosophy, among other fields and disciplines. While these discussions open up spaces for the circulation of ideas that are grounded on decolonial movements, it is nonetheless the case that many of the recent publications are mainly academic in a narrow sense and that perhaps too many of the scholars who pursue these topics have little connection with the movements that are mainly responsible for keeping the discourse of decolonization urgent and relevant. One notices the usual pattern of taking social movements as objects of research more than as producers of knowledge. In critical theory and philosophy, including some work often cited as liberationist or decolonial, this takes the form of theoreftical, cognitive, or epistemic extractivism: social movements and their intellectual creations are taken as zones for intellectual excavation and as springboards for theoreftical and philosophical reflection that remains caught within the liberal order of knowledge production in academia.
It is an essential part of the modern academic and liberal order of knowledge production that epistemic extractivism—not only in Philosophy, but throughout the liberal arts and sciences—becomes dominant and that a few authors are made to appear as a vanguard of sorts, or as part of a proto-canon that unsurprisingly includes figures whose problematic translations and elaborations of movement-based knowledges undermine the very movements with which their work is often identified. From then on, the limited and compromised reflection and theoretical elaboration of decolonial themes takes the place of actual engagement with producers of knowledge at the forefront of decolonial movements. Extractivism is combined with a new kind of scholasticism, leading to the formation of a cadre of experts on decolonization and decoloniality: from senior scholars to assistant professors and soon to be assistant professors, who in turn help to produce an entire industry of publication about—a largely detached and purely academic conceptualization of—decoloniality. Since the modes of knowledge production in the modern Western and liberal academy were imposed, reproduced, and imported globally—they were part of the civilizing mission of the West and belong to the apparatus of the modern nation-state—epistemic extractivism takes place in the “north” as well as in the “south.” As a result, geopolitical location alone is not a sufficient condition of possibility for delinking from this system of knowledge production. Racial or gender designation or identity are not a sufficient condition, either.

In some cases, engagements with decolonization in scholarly debates go beyond publications and help promote calls for institutional change—in degree granting departments and programs, professional organizations, and journals, for instance. However, these efforts tend to be met by what Houria Bouteldja refers to as the “white immune system,” among which she counts Western humanism as a centerpiece. Today, the “white immune system” is most active and present in universities in the uncritical reproduction of the white academic field, including calls for multiculturalism and mistranslations of Black Lives Matter and other such movements in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion has become the most recent dominant expression of modern/colonial humanism, perhaps its liberal and neoliberal face in the contexts of racial formations that include formulaic rejections of vulgar racism and even certain celebrations of racial difference; an industry seeking to protect corporate and liberal institutions by monopolizing the terms of legitimate calls for transformation and change.

Surely, the white immune system has many ways of protecting the white academic field beyond seeking to limit the terms of debate about institutional change to matters of diversity and inclusion. This is one reason why pursuing the decolonization of the university or the decolonization of disciplines within the university today is a difficult and risky endeavor, as Naomi Snow, a philosophy student at King’s College London (KCL) recently put it in the opening to a panel on “Decolonising Philosophy” at KCL. Snow, whose work is greatly inspired by the Rhodes Must Fall movement, considers that:

What has become clear throughout the course of my project is that decolonisation is no easy task. It is a very risky endeavor. On the one hand there is the risk of the call being reduced to a box-ticking approach. Within neoliberal universities there is the risk that decolonisation becomes a performative exercise whereby the core structures that have upheld systems of coloniality remain vastly unchanged.

On the other hand, there is the risk that calls for decolonisation will not be sufficiently strategic or practical to be incorporated into the mechanics of the university. There has indeed been a fine line to walk between the practical and the radical.

Snow’s formulation captures the drama of calls for decolonization of the university, and of philosophy in particular, as well. South African student activists and their close supporters, among which I count myself, would probably agree with this general assessment concerning the difficulty and the risks in having liberal institutions consider the question of their own decolonization.

In the United States perhaps the principal generator of claims for decolonizing the university so far has been the Third World Liberation Front, which emerged in 1968 and led to the formation of Ethnic Studies, the family of trans-disciplinary studies that includes what today is called Latinx Studies, among other crucially important fields. Since its inception, Ethnic Studies has been confronting the severity of the white immune system, and there is much to learn about the difficulty and risk of calls for decolonization in liberal and academic institutions by examining its history carefully. Anyone with a serious pretension of advancing decolonization in any area of the academy today should seriously consider the promise and the challenge to create the equivalent of what the Third World Liberation Front referred to as Third World College. The existence of a College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, which emerged out of the Third World Strike, has long defied the idea that it is impossible to approach knowledge production outside the largely nineteenth-century Eurocentric institutional formations of the humanities and the sciences. The ongoing struggle for Ethnic Studies in California and the recent call for “the creation of visionary institutional spaces, such as centers, institutes, schools, and new divisions” by a group of Black and Indigenous faculty as well as faculty of color at Rutgers University, New Brunswick (USA) helps to considerably expand and challenge the narrow realm of the possible within liberal academic frameworks.
I would like to contribute to national and international calls for decolonizing the university and decolonizing philosophy, more specifically, from my perspective as someone who has spent most of his career teaching and writing theory and philosophy within Ethnic Studies units. There is no doubt that part of my interest in advocating for decolonizing philosophy comes from my own grounding in the history and efforts of the Third World Liberation Front, but another part of it comes from my exposure to philosophy in Puerto Rico, a contemporary colony of the United States, followed by my work in Africana Studies and Africana Philosophy. If, rephrasing Paul Ricoeur’s sentence in The Symbolism of Evil, colonialism and coloniality—two very concrete and complex forms of evil; that is, not only symbolic—give rise to thought, how are we to expect at least some philosophers in a territory facing a long history and contemporary reality of colonization and coloniality not to want to engage in the question of decolonizing philosophy—and do so against the coloniality of philosophical education, the humanities, and the liberal arts and sciences in the island and elsewhere? It may be easier for some to ignore or set aside colonization as a problem and a concept while working in academic institutions in the US, but not for contemporary colonial subjects or others whose thinking has been marked by the questions raised by the anticolonial and antiracist movements all across the world.

It was in the colonial territory of Puerto Rico that I was first introduced to philosophy as an activity and to Philosophy as an academic discipline. We should not confuse one with the other; while philosophy—with lower letter p, or, in the context of this reflection, philosophy conceived as an activity and an attitude—could be characterized as a rigorous formulation and exploration of fundamental questions, the discipline of Philosophy—with capital letter P—not only tends to confuse rigor with disciplining, but also to significantly narrow the definition and the scope of fundamental questions.

In a colonial context, Philosophy, the academic discipline, serves the interests of colonization when it fails to consider the ways in which colonization raises fundamental questions, which is often paired with the apparent impossibility to consider the colonized as a questioner. Approaching the colonized as questioner is different from seeking to include them in the discipline of Philosophy. Given that many of those who have questioned colonization most profoundly have done so outside of academia, it is rather about the possibility of finding philosophy outside Philosophy, which can only raise questions to and about Philosophy itself. In a colonial context, Philosophy tends to delegitimize the philosophical interrogation of colonialism while simultaneously seeking to colonize philosophy itself.

If Philosophy plays an active role in the colonization of philosophy, decolonizing philosophy can be understood as a way of countering the colonization of philosophy by Philosophy and as a form of reindroducing philosophy into Philosophy. This is not to mean that we should delimit the decolonization of philosophy to decolonizing the discipline of Philosophy. When limited in such a way, the so-called decolonization remains within a limited and problematic framework that reproduces, rather than challenges, coloniality.

One could conclude, for instance, that decolonizing philosophy is about adding more authors into the canon of Philosophy, or about adding more classes focused on non-European or non-Western thinkers into the specialization in Philosophy. Decolonizing philosophy is not a matter of multiculturalism or of diversity and inclusion. Paying attention to the culture of the colonized without addressing colonialism is as problematic as incorporating texts written by colonized subjects to the canon without seriously addressing the ways in which the discipline of Philosophy, its scope, and its pedagogy reproduce coloniality. That is why while practices of hegemonic multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion—the new woke white man’s and woman’s burden, as well as the new marker of liberal and neoliberal benevolence—seek to appear as progressive—when, in truth, they seek to accommodate the interests, perspectives, and rights of (principally white) individuals within a liberal legal order and to counter robust appeals to justice and reparations, not to speak of decolonization—they easily collapse into the categories of the offensive and the obscene. There is no apparent harm done in a colonial and racial world when the offense and the obscenity are only seen and felt by minoritized sectors, especially if they are colonial and racial subjects. How else could coloniality continue for so long?

So how should one then approach the project of decolonizing philosophy? I’d like to submit two basic ideas: first, that decolonizing philosophy should be less about decolonizing the discipline of Philosophy, an activity that still leaves the academic discipline at the center and therefore always remains oriented and limited by it, and more about the rigorous pursuit of the fundamental questions that emerge in the historical and still unfinished struggle for decolonization. I am proposing a shift from decolonizing Philosophy, the discipline, to producing a philosophy—an activity and attitude that explores fundamental questions—that advances decolonization. Second, I submit that the struggle for decolonization is an intergenerational and collective project, as well as one that bridges spaces and temporalities in the process of creating an-other world. Let me explore these two proposals.

1. DECOLONIZING PHILOSOPHY AS A COUNTER-CATASTROPHIC TASK

The main idea that I would like to explore here is that decolonizing Philosophy is less about decolonizing a particularly academic field than about generating a philosophy that is itself decolonizing or a philosophy that is decolonial. Without generating a decolonial philosophy, any effort to decolonize Philosophy—the discipline—is bound to remain caught in the coloniality of modern Western scholarly research and scholarly production. Decolonial philosophy, or maybe even better put, decolonial philosophical thinking, does not abandon but rather reclaims the material taught by Philosophy—the discipline—to assess it and in the process critically revise it, reject it, and/or transform it. Too much has been left out of the corpus of academic Philosophy for
decolonial philosophizing to be restricted to it or oriented by it. Decolonial philosophical thinking demands the abolition of the canon, which does not mean the rejection of every idea found in existing canonical texts, but rather, a fundamental reorientation of the ways of conceiving knowledge production and creation—one that cannot take place without active involvement in decolonal struggles and without generative relations with knowledge creators and explorers embedded in those struggles.

Since decolonization is an ongoing movement, decolonal philosophical thinking is to be anchored, not in a discipline, but in a movement or movements: the movements of and for decolonization. From the perspective of decolonial philosophical thinking, movements for decolonization are not simply social manifestations of various forms of resistance against the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality, which includes the presence and afterlives of Indigenous genocide, conquest, colonization, and racial slavery in the contemporary world. Rather decolonal movements, looked at philosophically, are movements that seek to restore the conditions of possibility for love and understanding in our world. Likewise, philosophy, looked at decolonially, cannot possibly seek to affirm the “love of wisdom” without committing itself to counter the catastrophe that makes love and wisdom an exception to a colonial rule in the world. Decolonial philosophical thinking can therefore be understood as a counter-catastrophic practice that seeks to restore the ample conditions of possibility for love and wisdom to flourish in our world. Decolonal philosophical thinking does this in part by identifying, engaging, critically assessing, and building from the fundamental questions that are posed by decolonal movements. Decolonizing philosophy is rooted in questions that emerge in movement and in movements.

2. DECOLONIAL PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING AS A COLLECTIVE AND INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECT

Since love and understanding are eminently intersubjective activities, this should mean that philosophy is too. If so, this would indicate that decolonal philosophical thinking has a point of departure in the struggles for love and for understanding that emerge in the midst of the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality. This view has various consequences. For example, it means that decolonizing the curriculum of Philosophy—the discipline—cannot be done without decolonizing the multiple other areas in the academy that can potentially offer insight into these struggles for love and understanding in an antiblack, anti-Indigenous, and colonial world. The classroom has to be decolonized too: it should no longer be in the service of the occupation of land and the erasure of questions that emerge from the ground of decolonal struggle, but be opened to contact and engagement with decolonal struggles outside the university.

If decolonal philosophical thinking is to be nurtured in academic settings, it has to include an effort not only to critically revise and expand the reading materials, but also to decolonize the classroom and the very conception of education and research. The decolonal classroom cannot end in the physical walls of a room or the library, as important as these could be. The decolonal classroom extends to the streets and to spaces led by community and activist organizations that also counter catastrophe by making love and understanding an increasing possibility for those who Fanon called the condemned of the earth.

Decolonial philosophical thinking cannot emerge without this form of learning, as many crucial lessons for decolonal thinking are much better formulated by community and activist organizations than by academics. In fact, the symbolic value of academic work often depends on and advances a schism with other forms of knowledge production, just as it reproduces the ethos of modern/colonial scholarly work. Instead of starting with the discipline, or taking the academy as the point of departure, we should start from who we are and where we are: not merely as individuals, but as part of networks of oppression and emancipation, and not so much to assert our individual importance in the world or the uniqueness of our individual or regional perspective, but first and foremost to practice solidarity, understood as “the enactment of the social debts we owe each other.”

These are “acknowledgement of debts owed: from top to bottom and horizontally too, between and within groups, communities, and movements” as a transition to a post-extractivist decolonal world—also a post-MoMA’s world, in the terms of the “Strike MoMA” document cited here. In this approach, solidarity is a quintessential task in the effort to restore and expand love, understanding, and intersubjective reason, and therefore philosophy in the world. By participating with others in decolonal struggles and by learning from our ancestors’ ways of thinking and acting, we can seek to become worthy of saying some of these things and be heard.

NOTES

1. The first draft of this essay was presented at the “Decolonising Philosophy” panel discussion organized by philosophy students at King’s College London on May 10, 2021. I thank philosophy student Naomi Snow as well as the student groups Decolonise KCL and KCL Minorities and Philosophy for the invitation and for making the event possible. I also thank the Strike MoMA working group of the International Imagination of Anti-National and Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF) for providing a space to explore the linkages between extractivism and coloniality.


3. I turned my attention to epistemic extractivism and the abolition of the canon in the context of discussions about extractivism and abolition as part of Strike MoMA, some of which is documented on video. See the conversation among Kency Cornejo, Saudi García, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Mónica Ramón, facilitated by Nitasha Dhillon and Shellyne Rodríguez. Strike MoMA, “Kency Cornejo, Saudi García, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Mónica Ramón,” YouTube Video, 2:15:05, June 3, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saHtvfyFVEs&list=1s. Strike MoMA is an initiative led by the Strike MoMA Working Group of the International Imagination of Anti-National and Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF) and supporters. See https://www.strikemooma.org. I approach epistemic extractivism as a normative practice in the modern research university, which means that, most likely, everyone who has gone through the university has practiced it or become complicit with it in one form or another. Epistemic extractivism is the order of the day in doctoral seminars, academic reading groups, professional organizations, etc., even in spaces that
engage colonization, racism, sexism, and homophobia critically. To be sure, this does not mean that epistemic extractivism needs to be condemned. It is necessary to identify it, criticize its operations, and, most importantly, engage in non- and post-extractivist practices of knowledge creation. Other approaches to epistemic extractivism include: Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle-No-More’s Leanne Simpson,” Yes Magazine (March 5, 2012), and Ramón Grosfoguel, *Epistemic Extractions: A Dialogue with Alberto Acosta, Lina Betasamosoke Simpson, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui," in *Knowledge Born in Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South*, eds. Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (New York: Routledge, 2019): 203–18.

4. See Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017): 43. Bouteldja analyzes the "white immune system" as a political-ideological apparatus, but her reference to humanism suggests that it is also an epistemic-academic one. This is how I approach the concept here. This is part of a conversation with Bouteldja’s work that I have pursued elsewhere. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Interrogating Systemic Racism and the White Academic Field.” Frantz Fanon Foundation, June 16, 2020, https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/interrogating-systemic-racism-and-the-white-academic-field/.

5. Maldonado-Torres, “Interrogating Racism and the White Academic Field.”


8. Decolonizing the university has been one of the persistent themes in ethnic studies scholarship. Consider publications such as Carole Boyce Davies, et al., eds. *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), and the conference that commemorated the 40th anniversary of the birth of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley: "Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of the Third World College," see https://vimeo.com/15729523.

9. Among other sources, see the special issue of the fiftieth anniversary of the Founding of Ethnic Studies in the *Ethnic Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2019), https://online.ucpress.edu/esr/issue/42/2.


11. I have written about my experience as a philosophy student in Puerto Rico and about doing philosophy in Ethnic Studies in *"Thinking at the Limits of Philosophy and Doing Philosophy Elsewhere: From Philosophy to Decolonial Thinking," in Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Knowledge, ed. George Yancy (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012): 251–70. I was fortunate to find in Lewis Gordon and Enrique Dussel supportive teachers, advisors, and mentors while in graduate school, and to later collaborate with the late latina philosopher and friend Lugones since my early years as an Assistant Professor. The Caribbean Philosophical Association offered an important space for the kind of work that we pursued.


13. The most recent work of Rocio Zambrana is an example of this. See *Colonial Debits: The Case of Puerto Rico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). Also of crucial importance are works in Puerto Rico by Anayra Santorý Jorge, whose publications, classes, as well as her initiatives while chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, played an important role motivating and supporting a new generation of philosophy students with interests in decolonization and who are now in the process of completing their PhDs. This includes Pedro Lebrón, author of the recently published *Filosofía del cimarronaje* (Toa Baja: Editora Educación Emergente, 2020). From Anayra Santory Jorge, see, among others: *Nada es igual: bocetos del pais que nos aconseje* (Toa Baja: Editora Educación Emergente, 2018); *Convidar* (Toa Alta: Editora Educación Emergente, 2020); and the co-edited anthology *Antología del pensamiento crítico puertorriqueño*, eds. Anayra Santory Jorge and Maria Quiñeto Rivera (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2019). Another important author and teacher in Puerto Rico whose work in the history of Caribbean and Puerto Rican philosophy has animated interest in the philosophical exploration of questions and themes that are prevalent in the field is the Colombian-born Carlos Rojas Osorio, winner of the 2005 Frantz Fanon Fellowship Award by the Caribbean Philosophical Association.


15. As evinced in the "Outline of Ten Theses," the works of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* have been crucial in the formulation of this view of philosophy and its operations and mutations in colonial settings. See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

16. I am building here from a view of philosophy presented in Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," where I write: “That is, while philosophy is traditionally conceived as the love of wisdom, for Fanon, or rather through Fanon, we can conceive of philosophy as the intersubjective modality of love and understanding. Philosophy is therefore not simply a particular form of questioning or production of knowledge that characterizes the work of some people called philosophers. Rather, philosophy can be conceived as a name for the basic coordinates of human subjectivity: the modality of intersubjective love and understanding.”


18. This last sentence is to be read along with Fanon’s initial lines in the introduction of *Black Skin, White Masks*: “Don’t expect to see any shouting today. It’s too early . . . or too late. I’m not the bearer of absolute truths. No fundamental inspiration has been heard. Things I’m going to say, not shout. I’ve long since given up shouting. A long time ago . . . " See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Wilcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008): xi.
ARTICLES

Judging Students and Racial Injustice

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In 2002, I was a student in a political science course at the City University of New York’s LaGuardia Community College. At this time, I was working fifty to fifty-five hours a week in a warehouse in the Woodside, Queens section of New York City, and I was also living with my grandmother, mother, and brother in a one-bedroom apartment in Jackson Heights, Queens. As a result, I often did not have the space, time, and energy to devote to producing high-quality essays or coursework. But from time to time, circumstances would allow me the space, time, and energy that I needed to produce high-quality work.

On one of these occasions, I managed to produce a good short essay in this political science course. The instructor’s comment on my work was simply that “I must have plagiarized some published political science work” because, by his lights, there was no way that I could have produced work of this quality or be aware of the historical facts that I referenced in the essay. This instructor clearly based his false inference on a false assumption about the capacity of Black and Latinx students at LaGuardia Community College. But he also based this inference on the false assumption that the work that I produced in the past represented the highest quality of work that I could produce. This assumption, I submit, betrayed his ignorance of how racial injustice can negatively affect the conditions under which Black, Indigenous, and Latinx persons produce philosophical essays or work. I assume that if he had understood how racial injustice relates to these conditions, then the likelihood that he would have erred in this way would have been depressed.

Leaving aside many of the political and moral features of this case, this political-science instructor made two kinds of judgment. The first kind of judgment is about the quality of a student’s philosophical work. The second kind of judgment is about a student’s general capacity or disposition to produce philosophical work of a certain quality level. Instructors’ bailiwick seemingly involves precisely these kinds of judgments about students. This essay’s aim is to get clear on how racial injustice relates to these kinds of judgments and how instructors can do better by way of these judgments.

Instructors at the university level who care to take racial injustice into account when they assess their students’ work face a challenge. This challenge is that we, instructors, also care to assess students’ work according to university-level academic standards of quality, such as clarity of prose and argumentative rigor.

In the discipline of philosophy, as in other disciplines, instructors often refer to their students as “good” or “bad” while discussing their students with other instructors. A charitable interpretation of how instructors use these terms to describe their students is that a student is “good” if she performs in accordance with some evaluative academic standard and, similarly, a student is “bad” if her performance does not accord with this academic standard.

With this academic standard in mind, instructors often judge students as “good” or “bad” on the basis of the work that a student submits over the course of a semester. Here the assessment of a student’s work can differ from an instructor’s judgment of her as a student who can produce “good” work. Good students can turn in bad work and bad students can turn in good work according to this conception of how students relate to their work. I will call the disposition that students have to produce good or bad work academic character.

I assume that instructors often judge students’ academic character on the basis of how they have judged their work. I take it as commonplace that instructors judge a student’s academic character good because she has turned in good work and vice versa.

I also assume that the academic-character judgments that instructors make of a student will tend to affect whether they afford a student leeway or give them the benefit of the doubt in terms of handing in assignments late, arriving late to class, deciding whether to give students the higher of two grades when they are on the borderline, and awarding course grades of incomplete rather than a failing grade for a course.

The picture that I am painting involves how assessment of a student’s work affects assessment of academic character and then, in turn, affects the final grades that students receive in a course. This affects students in terms of their grade point averages and whether faculty are willing to write letters of recommendation for law school or graduate school. As a result, accurate and just assessment seemingly matters quite a bit for our students’ life plans and goals.

I will argue that just and accurate assessment must involve taking into account how racial injustice affects students’ performance in their work. To this end, I will motivate what I call the RACIAL-INJUSTICE-ASSESSMENT THESIS. According to this thesis, instructors must account for how racial injustice affects a student’s work for an instructor’s judgment of her work to count as just.

To motivate the RACIAL-INJUSTICE-ASSESSMENT THESIS, I will defend the ACCURACY THESIS and the JUSTICE THESIS. According to the ACCURACY THESIS, the accuracy of an instructor’s judgment of a student’s work will tend to affect whether the degree to which she considers how racial injustice affects performance enshrined in the instructor’s work. According to the JUSTICE THESIS, the justness of instructors’ judgments of student work will tend to affect whether the degree to which instructors consider racial injustice’s effect on student work.

The argument that I present will take the following form. If (P) the ACCURACY THESIS is true and the JUSTICE THESIS is true, then (C) RACIAL-INJUSTICE-ASSESSMENT THESIS is true. I show that (P), thus (C) obtains.
THE ACCURACY THESIS
I now defend the ACCURACY THESIS. According to this thesis, the accuracy of an instructor’s judgment of a student’s work will covary with the degree to which she considers how racial injustice affects the performance enshrined in the student’s work. To defend this, I will present cases that illustrate how racial injustice affects the performance that a student’s work enshrines.

Take Yuderky. She is an Afro-Latinx Dominican undergraduate student in philosophy at a public university in New York City. She lives in the south Bronx in a one-bedroom apartment with three siblings and her mother. Her mother is an immigrant from the countryside in the Dominican Republic who speaks no English and received only a primary school education. To help make ends meet, Yuderky works forty hours a week while she attends university full time to complete a philosophy BA. And she has attended New York City public primary and secondary schools that underserved her in terms of the rudiments of writing, such as favoring the active rather than the passive voice.1

Now take Chad. He is a White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant man undergraduate in philosophy at the same public university in New York City. He lives in the Upper West Side of Manhattan in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment with his one sibling and parents. His parents provide him more than enough funds so that he can devote as much time as his academic work requires. He attended private primary and secondary schools in Manhattan that played a crucial role in the development of his capacity to write clear prose.

Yuderky and Chad are in the same upper-level ethics course with Professor Smith. This course involves a seven-to-ten-page term paper in which they defend a thesis. Professor Smith clearly communicates to students of this class what is expected in terms of clarity and rigor. He also makes himself available to discuss paper topics and arguments during his office hours, which he holds at 2 p.m. twice a week.

Professor Smith gives Yuderky’s essay a grade of A-. Her essay is good, but not worthy of an A+ in his eyes because it does not satisfy the criteria it must meet to receive an A+. On the other hand, Chad’s essay receives a grade of A+ because his essay satisfies these criteria.

Yuderky regularly receives grades of A-, and Chad regularly receives grades of A+. At a faculty meeting, someone asks Professor Smith whether Yuderky or Chad is a “better” student. Smith answers that despite the good quality of Yuderky’s work, Chad’s is excellent and thus he is a “better” student. Here, Smith judges on the basis of the work that Yuderky and Chad turn in that Chad is a better student. But Smith does not consider how racial injustice affects the philosophical performance that is enshrined in the work that they turn in. I assume that defending a thesis by presenting reasons or premises in an essay and clearly explaining relevant philosophical views is a kind of philosophical performance that can be judged more or less successful and thus more or less “good” according to some academic standard of clarity and rigor. That is, I assume that the philosophical argument and exposition enshrined in the work that students submit is a kind of performance that can be judged more or less successful.

Professor Smith judges Yuderky’s and Chad’s performances on the basis of the performance enshrined in the essays they submit. But here Smith judges these performances without considering how racial injustice affects the difficulty of the performance. I assume that if one actor performs an action under more difficult conditions than another actor’s outwardly identical performance, then the actor who performs similarly under more difficult conditions exhibits a higher level of skill and thus a better performance.

Take José. He is an archer who hits his target from two hundred feet away in clear and calm conditions. One can evaluate his performance as “good” because he did successfully hit his target from this distance where his success is due to his skill rather than luck.2 But now take Marisol. She hits the same target from two hundred feet away, but under foggy and windy conditions, because of her skill rather than luck. One can evaluate her performance as even better than José’s performance because the conditions under which she performs it elevate its difficulty. These are external performance conditions that figure into proper judgment of their performances.

But an actor’s internal conditions can also affect the difficulty of their performance.3 Famously, Michael Jordan exhibited an extremely high level of skill and successful performance in a game of the NBA finals even though he had an extremely high fever. Each successful sinking of a shot, assist, or steal in this condition can be judged as more difficult and thus “better” than performances by other players not in this condition.

Suppose that Marisol had unwittingly consumed a hallucinogen before she successfully hit her target. If both she and José hit their target from an equal distance, but Marisol is under the influence of a hallucinogenic substance, then Marisol’s internal condition elevates the difficulty of her performance in comparison to José’s.

Consider how racial injustice affects Yuderky’s external condition in terms of the philosophical performance she enshrines in her essay. Racial injustice explains (1) why she must complete her work without quiet in the apartment she shares with her siblings and mother, (2) that wage work consumes the lion’s share of her time such that she has comparatively little time to devote to developing her philosophical work, and (3) the comparatively depressed level of preparation she received in primary and secondary schools in terms of the clarity of her writing.

But racial injustice also explains Yuderky’s internal condition. Racial injustice explains (1) the level of psychological stress she undergoes as a result of working forty hours a week while attempting to produce high-quality philosophical work, (2) why she sustains elevated levels of cognitive load due to tracking whether interlocutors misperceive her as not credible or not a knower because of anti-Black Woman prejudices, such as the angry-Black Woman stereotype,4 and (3) a generally elevated level of stress that results from
dealing with the possibility of police maltreatment in the south Bronx.

Chad’s external and internal conditions are comparatively much better because he benefits from racial injustice. In terms of external conditions, racial injustice explains (1) why he has tranquil environs in which he can complete his philosophical work, (2) why he need not engage in wage work, and (3) why he received ample preparation in primary and secondary schools in terms of the clarity of his writing.

In terms of his internal conditions, racial injustice explains (1) the lack of psychological stress that he faces from having to both engage in wage work and work on philosophy, (2) why he benefits from positive prejudices and stereotypes regarding White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant men, and (3) why he lacks any significant levels of stress due to worries about police harassment.

THE JUSTICE THESIS
According to the JUSTICE THESIS, the justness of instructors’ judgments of student work covary with the degree to which instructors consider racial injustice’s effect on student work. I now present a reason that motivates the JUSTICE THESIS.

This reason is what I call the INJUSTICE-PROMOTION REASON. According to this reason, that an instructor errantly judges, because he does not take racial injustice into account, can promote racial injustice. Erring in this way promotes and sustains the disadvantage that Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students suffer as a result of racial injustice.

Take Professor Smith. He errantly judges that Yuderky’s work is not as good as Chad’s work because he does not take into account how racial injustice affects Yuderky’s performance conditions in comparison to Chad’s conditions. Suppose that a result of this is that Yuderky will receive a lower grade and thus grade point average, a letter of recommendation with a depressed level of praise and less commitment and guidance from Smith because he thinks Chad has the best odds of gaining admittance to a good graduate program or law school.

Smith’s judgment of Yuderky promotes and sustains racial injustice because this judgment sustains Yuderky’s disadvantaged position. That Smith does not take racial injustice’s effect on Yuderky’s performance into account results in the curtailing of her life chances and opportunities.

Here racial injustice curtails her life chances and opportunities through its effect on Smith’s judgment of her work and also through its effect on her performance conditions.

Smith’s judgment can either maximally contribute to this curtailment, not contribute at all to this curtailment, or form some degree of this curtailment. This degree of curtailment that his judgment comprises will in turn depend on what degree he takes racial injustice to have an effect on Yuderky’s performance. Put simply, whether Smith’s judgment comprises racial injustice itself depends on whether he takes into account racial injustice’s effect on the target of his judgment.

That Smith errs in judging Chad also promotes and sustains racial injustice, as he does not consider that racial injustice’s effect on Chad’s performance conditions promotes and sustains the advantage that Chad, as a White student, enjoys as a result of racial injustice. As a consequence of this errant judgment, Chad will receive an elevated grade point average, a letter of recommendation with an elevated level of praise and more commitment and guidance from Smith than Yuderky receives because he thinks that Chad has the best odds of gaining admittance to a good graduate program or law school.

Smith’s judgment promotes racial injustice not only in terms of how it shapes external features of Yuderky’s and Chad’s worlds, such as grade point average and likelihood of admittance to graduate programs, but also in terms of how it affects their internal features, such as their intellectual confidence and abilities. This errant kind of errant judgment is an instance of what Charles Mills calls white ignorance. Someone is in a white ignorant state if she falsely believes or lacks a true belief because of white supremacy, racial injustice, or anti-Black, Indigenous, or Latinx racism. I assume that this is an instance of white ignorance because the likelihood is infinitesimally small that white supremacy or racial injustice plays no causal role, whether structurally or psychologically, in Smith forming his false judgment.

Suppose that the performance enshrined in Chad’s and Yuderky’s essays are equally good if one controls for the differences in performance conditions that obtain because of racial injustice. This supposition should put into sharper relief that Chad gains a larger vote of confidence in his intellectual abilities than Yuderky even though their performances are the same. This difference in vote of confidence obtains because of racial injustice and, as a result, Chad unjustly benefits in this internal or self-attitudinal way. Smith’s judgment that his essay deserves an A+ is a signal to Chad regarding his intellectual abilities, which not only involves false content, but also promotes racial injustice. On the other hand, Yuderky does not receive a similar vote of confidence in her intellectual abilities that she should receive from Smith because of racial injustice. Smith’s judgment that her essay deserves an A- is not only a signal to her regarding her intellectual abilities, but also involves false content that promotes racial injustice. This capacity for Smith’s judgment to promote racial injustice is both an example of the causal constructive power of instructors’ judgments and an example of how systemic injustice can continue to perpetuate itself.

TWO KINDS OF ERROR
The two cases of instructor error that I have presented both feature errant judgments based on bad information where this information is bad because it lacks inferentially relevant information about how racial injustice relates to students’ philosophical performance. But these cases can differ because the political science instructor could poorly base his judgment due to some kind of racist motive while Professor Smith could poorly base his judgment due to
a lack of sensitivity of how this information evidentially relates to his judgment. Put simply, in the former case, the political science instructor’s errant judgment largely tracks his antecedent racist attitude about Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, and in the latter case, Smith’s errant judgment is largely a result of not properly sensing how racial injustice relates to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students’ performance.

Evidence sensitivity is a notion that distinguishes these two cases as instances of two kinds of error. In the political science instructor’s case, he errs because he harbors a kind of a racist and thus morally noxious attitude that wholly or largely determines how he judges when it comes to the racial-injustice-information domain. Kristie Dotson points to this phenomenon when she explicates the idea of testimonial smothering. For Dotson, a Black woman suffers testimonial smothering if she truncates some information she would otherwise fully convey due to the testimonial incompetence of her audience.

The case Dotson presents of this phenomenon features a White woman who signals her inability to comprehend information that Black women must raise their Black sons in ways that differ from how White woman raise their White sons in the US. That this White woman wittingly or unwittingly antecedently harbors a racist attitude towards Black persons explains why she is testimonially incompetent. In this case of testimonial smothering, this Black-woman speaker anticipates that a racist attitude will result in this White-woman hearer’s evidential insensitivity, and as a result, she smothers her own testimony to avoid the consequences of this insensitivity. The political science instructor, like this White-woman hearer, judges in ways that correspond to his racist attitude rather than his evidence.

On the other hand, suppose that Professor Smith does not harbor such a racist attitude and that he errantly judges because he does not properly sense how racial injustice causally relates to the circumstances in which Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students philosophically perform. But Smith is not completely insensitive to this evidence. He acknowledges that racial injustice is relevant when considering, say, how schools are underfunded and how economic opportunities are depressed in Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities even though he does not sense the causal relevance of racial injustice vis-à-vis his students’ philosophical performances.

One way to distinguish Smith from the political science instructor is that if someone explained to Smith this evidence’s causal relevance, he would likely understand this evidential relation and believe in accordance with it. On the other hand, if someone explained this evidence’s causal relevance to the political science instructor, he would not understand it because his racist attitude would in a sense block him from understanding this evidential relation.

This distinction between these two kinds of errors matters because remedies that an education system could develop and implement that do not countenance this distinction will tend to fare poorly in comparison to remedies that do take this distinction into account. Remedies that countenance this distinction will tend to fare better because instructors like the political science instructor who resist evidence and explanation will tend to not respond to remedies that merely aim to inform instructors of how racial injustice relates to students’ performances. But remedies that not only aim to inform, but also disabuse or deal with instructors’ racist attitudes will tend to fare comparatively better because instructor populations will tend to consist in both kinds of instructors.

HOW JUSTNESS RELATES TO ACCURACY

According to the analysis that I have presented, justness and accuracy are distinct but related features of instructors’ judgments of their students. But to some, these judgment features might seem not to significantly differ and as a result these features improperly figure as distinct in the analysis that I have presented. I will show how these features are analytically distinct even though they tend to run together empirically.

A subject justly judges, on my account, if her judgment is based on evidence that takes into account how injustice shapes the world. For example, if a subject bases their judgment that “Central American persons seeking asylum at the US border should be granted asylum” on evidence that involves how racial injustice and colonialism shape the situations and actions of Central Americans, then this subject justly judges.

A subject accurately judges, on my account, if her judgment is true. For example, if a subject forms a true belief that “Central American asylum seekers should be granted asylum at the US border,” then this subject accurately judges.

Even though justness and accurateness will, in point of fact, tend to feature together in subjects’ judgments, they can come apart. For example, a US politician could base their judgment that “Central American asylum seekers should be granted asylum” not on any evidence that involves the causal role of injustice and colonialism but rather on evidence that the likelihood of their retaining political office is elevated if the US grants this asylum. Here this US politician’s judgment is accurate but not just. So even though these two judgment features tend to obtain together, they need not obtain together.

WHAT SHOULD INSTRUCTORS DO?

The argument that I have presented raises the issue of what instructors should do to avoid promoting racial injustice through their judgments of student work, given that not only do instructors have a limited amount of time to evaluate student work, but that they must also hold students to some kind of generic academic standard.

There are at least two general ways to deal with this issue. The first is structural. The problem of racial injustice’s effect on student work is a structural one because US society’s structure has been shaped by centuries of racial injustice, white supremacy, and colonialism. As a consequence, any remedies that will make a difference for Yudery over the course of her educational and academic career will affect...
the structure of society so that it depresses the degree to which it favors White persons over Black, Indigenous, and Latinx persons.

Decreasing the amount of grading and evaluating that any one instructor must do by increasing the number of instructors, graders, or teachers’ assistants is one such structural remedy. The idea here is that if instructors have limited time to evaluate papers and decreasing the number of papers they must evaluate will allow them to take into account how racial injustice might affect the performance of this student, then decreasing the quantity of papers that instructors must grade will result in providing instructors with more time to consider racial injustice’s effect on student work. This remedy, of course, is in conflict with the current trend in higher education to diminish the number of tenure-line faculty who instruct students. But that this conflict obtains is a further reason for instructors to push back against this trend.

There are, of course, more general structural remedies, such as shifting the resources that White communities enjoy due to slavery, Indigenous genocide, and colonialism to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. But I will only focus on structural remedies that, say, higher education administrators can implement.

The second general way to deal with this problem is individualist. The problem of racial injustice’s effect on student work is partly an individualist one because individual instructors often do not consider racial injustice’s effect on student work. As a consequence, individual instructors can opt to implement policies at the course or classroom level.

One such individualist policy is to implement grading policies that will tend to avert the penalty that Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students face when instructors evaluate their work. Allowing students to resubmit work that can be improved is an example of a policy that may tend to mitigate how Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students’ performance conditions differ from White students. This will allow students the room and opportunity to improve their work. The idea here is that if one set of students is disadvantaged in terms of their performance conditions, then allowing them to continually refine their work over multiple attempts will in a sense improve the condition in which they perform philosophical work.

Now reconsider the archery case involving Marisol and José. If Marisol’s archery performance conditions are much worse than José’s conditions, then allowing her multiple attempts to hit her target will result in her suffering less of a penalty because of her performance conditions. Similarly, if Yuderky’s performance conditions are worse than Chad’s, then allowing her to submit her essay multiple times will result in her suffering less of a penalty because of her conditions.

One might object that instructors do not have the time and energy to allow students multiple attempts or submissions. Thus, the individual proposal that I present fails. There are at least two responses to this objection. The first response cedes to the objector that indeed instructors have insufficient time and energy to implement this proposal. But it is just a brute fact that something of value must be exchanged or expended to remedy how Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students’ performance conditions generally differ from White students’ conditions. White students’ performance conditions benefit from unjustly obtained value in terms of free slave labor, opportunities gained due to Jim Crow and redlining policies, and expropriating of Indigenous land and exploitation of Latin American resources through colonialism. As a consequence, remedying these conditions will take the expending of this value that the White power structure enjoys. There are no free lunches here.

A second response to this objection is that this objector merely points to facts that motivate structural solutions to this problem. Instructors will only be in a position to implement policies that allow them to account for this problem if the White power structure introduces value in terms of instructor salary and wages into the higher education system so that instructors can implement these policies at the individual level across the education system.

NOTES
According to Denis Collins, a biographer of Freire, this critical awareness entails understanding the nature of oppression and creating conditions for people to be free from it. The process of conscientização is the beginning step of this awareness. Freire describes this first step as the difference between being an object (a thing) and a subject (a person). Once a person recognizes their own agency, Freire emphasized that human history and culture is given shape by the decisions that each human being makes, so that each one of us has the ability to give shape to our own lives, create knowledge, and make history. While conscientização allows us to become aware of the oppressive dynamics we have internalized, the internalization of our oppressors is an obstacle in the process of conscientização. Freire rejects authoritarian relationships due to their oppressive nature, not only for those who are obviously oppressed, but also for the oppression the oppressors experience in the process of oppressing others.

In the early 1960s, Brazil’s law required that a person be literate in order for her to vote. Freire taught Brazilian peasants how to read and write, and they gained the right to vote, but the peasants Freire worked with were not only marginalized people, but much worse. They saw themselves as being for others, not for themselves. Their social context had made the primary purpose of their agency to carry out their master’s wishes. The phrase criado mudo in modern-day Portuguese, means “nightstand,” and remains a telling example of how former slaves were perceived by their masters, and how they came to think of themselves. Their economic and political conditions and their experiences with others had conditioned these peasants to see themselves not as men and women (subjects), but as objects that existed to serve another. For this reason, Freire chose not only to teach literacy classes, but more importantly, to create the conditions where people could become aware of their own agency as human beings.

Freedom for Freire means the right of every human being to become more human. The notion of what it means to trust people but distrust the oppressor in them means that each one of us has developed patterns of oppression against ourselves and others. These patterns of oppression limit our freedom and the freedom of others, even when the external conditions are not themselves oppressive. For example, if I have a disability, and I have internalized the idea that accommodations for my disability lessen the worth of my effort, then I won’t ask for accommodations to be made for my disability. In this example, I have internalized one oppressive pattern that discriminates against people with disabilities. Even if employers were willing to accommodate me, I choose not to ask for accommodations because of my internalized belief that I should be able to work under “normal” conditions. Given that changing the external conditions is not enough to end oppressive patterns, Freire worked to create both the external and internal conditions for people to be free from oppression. Our becoming aware of the different ways in which we are conditioned to behave is part of the process of conscientização and our deepening freedom.

Also important for my argument is Freire’s distinction between the “humanist” and “humanitarian” approaches to helping others. Freire uses Erich Fromm’s biophilic and necrophilic descriptions from his book The Heart of Man (1967). Fromm draws a distinction between those of us who feel the need to help in order to control the
Confidence in the masses of oppressed people cannot be a naïve type of trust. Leaders must trust in the potentialities of the masses and not treat them as objects the leaders can use to reach their own goals. A leader must trust that the oppressed can seek their own liberation, but always mistrust the ambiguous nature of the oppressed. To mistrust the oppressed is not to mistrust them as men, but rather to mistrust the oppressor internalized within them... Thus as long as the oppressed are more their internalized oppressor than they are themselves, their natural fear of freedom may lead them to denounce not so much their oppressive reality but rather the revolutionary leadership.

This description of the moment of confusion which the oppressed undergo and which they are not able to overcome and may lead them to denounce the revolutionary leader is not unique to oppressed peasants, but actually common to all people who have internalized any patterns of violence and oppression. Freire describes this moment as a type of confusion that is played out by the inner struggle experienced between a person’s freedom wanting to assert itself and the internalized oppressor.

According to Freire, both trust and distrust are needed when facilitating the conditions for conscientização. Freire warns his readers to distinguish between the person/student that they are helping and the oppressor this person has internalized. He recommends that we trust the person/student, but distrust the person’s internalized oppressor. This is an important distinction, and Freire’s warning is helpful insofar as it sheds light on the difference between the person and the person’s internalized oppressive patterns. It is important to point out, however, that Freire chose an extreme case to explain the difference between the person and the person’s internalized oppressor. Given the context of combat, Freire agrees with Che that before an area is liberated, the revolutionary must be "realistic" and mistrust the peasants.

Freire’s example is problematic because, while it is true that some of us may need to keep the distinction between a person and that person’s internalized oppressive patterns at the forefront of our experience, a combat zone and a classroom are two very different environments. Surely both contexts entail people who have internalized patterns of oppression, but Freire’s analogy does not hold, given that we cannot draw the same conclusions regarding how to behave towards a stranger in combat and one of our students in our classroom. If we are helping to liberate people within a territory that has been occupied by oppressive forces and the threat of imminent death is one of our considerations, then it may indeed be crucial for us to mistrust the oppressive patterns they have internalized, but if we use Freire’s pedagogy to share, learn, and create knowledge with our students, we may want to consider a different approach.

2. TRUST IN THE STUDENT AND THE PROCESS

In his Democracy and Education, John Dewey suggests that the teacher’s role is to make use of her broader perspective to help the student explore her inclinations...
Freire’s advice to distrust the internalized oppressor is appropriate in certain contexts, but not all. He chose Che Guevara’s example as a case in point and then generalized it to all other situations, but not all of us are doing the work of conscientização in the middle of a combat zone within occupied territories. Most of us work in physical classrooms and, more and more these days, virtual classrooms through some type of learning management system, where the threat of imminent death is not something we must contend with. It is certainly important to acknowledge that we work with, include ourselves, have a variety of internalized oppressive patterns such as sexism, agism, classism, ableism, homophobia, racism, etc., which do at times influence our behavior.

In agreement with Freire, I suggest to simultaneously trust our students while distrusting the oppressive patterns our students may have internalized. There is harm in distrusting our students as students, because when we mistrust those we wish to help, our approach devolves into being humanitarian and necrophilic. This is theoretically inconsistent with Freire’s and Fromm’s preference for a biophilic approach to helping, because the mistrust we feel in our students’ process of authenticity causes us to feel the need to control the process and outcome. Our mistrust causes us to view the peasant in Che Guevara’s example, or the student in our classroom, as someone we want to “help,” “liberate,” or “educate.” Mistrust precludes us from seeing ourselves and others as the freedom-seeking beings that we are, as well as from further developing a sense of confidence and solidarity with others. Demanding that others be authentic, or become liberated, are not acts of love. These are necrophilic acts caused by our lack of trust and respect for the decisions of others. To educate and liberate from without, to aim to “fix” another person, besides the important fact that it does not work, is to attempt to colonize another human being, to control them and make them subject to our desires, good intentions notwithstanding.

In her article “Four Ways to (Re)consider Facilitating Discussions on Race and Social Justice,” Lindsey R. Swindall recommends cultivating trust as one of the conditions for facilitating any discussion on social justice issues. Swindall quotes an observation made by James Baldwin in his 1964 essay “Nothing Personal,” where Baldwin points out how “talking with Americans is usually extremely uphill work. We are afraid to reveal ourselves because we trust ourselves so little.” Swindall facilitates conversations on civil rights and African American history throughout the US. Her work has been supported by Humanities New York and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. In order to build trust, Swindall recommends facilitators of discussions on social justice issues begin by taking a few moments to reflect on our own relationship to privilege and how our background and our experiences have informed our perspectives on these issues. She also recommends that we ask ourselves what our goals for the discussion are, both for the individual and the group as a whole, as well as for us to consider our fears about leading discussions. Swindall recommends taking some time to think through these questions in order for us to come into the conversation, not as someone with all of the answers, but rather as someone who is willing to engage and grapple with the difficult questions and issues with honesty. Swindall recommends beginning the discussion by sharing about oneself. This need not be a lengthy biography, but simply some of our background and the reasons we do the work we do. She points out how allowing ourselves to be vulnerable in the discussion space is key to creating a space where others feel safe. If possible, she also recommends pairing up with another facilitator who comes from a different background but who shares similar goals. In her case, she works with Grant Cooper, an African American stand-up comedian and artist. Co-facilitating is a great way to generate trust with our audience or our students because we begin the conversation on the basis of trust from the co-facilitator relationship.

Trust has many layers, and time is on our side if we have patience, commitment, and respect for those whose trust we wish to earn. Listening closely is a skill that also helps to develop trust. Listening means not only allowing others to speak but being present, listening for cues such as body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and in my case as a mindfulness teacher, listening closely for the quality of their breath—listening to hear if my students are breathing with ease as they speak or if they are holding their breath. All of these cues are indicative of how my students are feeling. It also helps to have been teaching for some time and to have a reputation. When our former and current students trust us, it becomes easier for the new students coming into our classroom to feel they can also trust us.

3. MINDFULNESS AND CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO

Pedagogy of the Heart (1997) was one of the last books that Freire authored. He wrote it thirty years after Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968). During this time, Freire’s understanding of conscientização widened:

Consciousness of, an intentionality of consciousness does not end with rationality. Consciousness about the world, which implies consciousness about myself in the world, with it and with others, which also implies our ability to realize the world, to understand it is not limited to a rationalistic experience. This consciousness is a totality—reason, feelings, emotions, desires; my body, conscious of the world and myself, seizes the world toward which it has an intention.

Towards the end of his life, conscientização became for Freire, not only a political awareness, and not merely a rational matter, but also a matter of awareness of one’s body and emotions. In this section, I would like to share
Mindfulness is everywhere these days, meditation is an ancient practice that goes back at least 2,500 years. According to Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” Mindfulness is the practice of observing what we are feeling and thinking as we are feeling and thinking it.

The non-judgmental part of Zinn’s definition is particularly important for my extension of Freire’s work. There are two aspects to the non-judgmental part of Zinn’s definition. First, I simply notice that I feel a certain way, irritated for instance, without judging my feeling of irritation as being right or wrong. I am simply feeling irritated, just as a person may feel sleepy or hungry, which are neither right or wrong. I am simply feeling irritated, just as a person may feel sleepy or hungry, which are neither right or wrong. They are simply different feelings a person may feel. Second, once I notice that I am irritated, I choose to do something helpful for myself and others about this. What does it mean to choose to do something helpful for myself and others? Without a mindfulness practice, I do something helpful for myself and others. The following are well-known facts:

- It is estimated that one in three Black males, and one in six Latino males will go to prison at some point during their life. Around 111 White women will be incarcerated at some point during their life.

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them to behave differently so that I may feel better. When a person practices mindfulness, they notice they are irritated and address the source of irritation in a helpful, non-oppressive way. Here is a concrete example: One of our students shared with us that he had recently seen a man driving his ex-girlfriend’s car. He shared how he noticed the physiological sensations of anger, possessiveness, jealousy, and the thoughts that came along with those feelings. Once he realized he was feeling possessive and angry he took a step back to breathe and reflect that there really was no good reason for him to choose to continue to feel this way. He chose to instead feel grateful for the years they had spent together and chose to wish her well. Besides thinking differently about what it means to have authority, our students’ transformation allows them to reject authoritarian relationships.

The practice of mindfulness may be seen as an extension of Freire’s conscientização because, through the practice of mindfulness, our students become aware of the oppressive patterns they have internalized. They then choose not to act out of the oppressive pattern but in ways that bring about their own freedom and the freedom of others. Thus, we are able to trust our students while distrustful the oppressive patterns they have internalized.

According to the Mayo Clinic, a practice of mindfulness helps to decrease anxiety, depression, anger, hostility, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, physical and emotional pain, emotional reactivity, and addictive behaviors. Practicing mindfulness helps to increase and support emotion regulation, empathy, self-compassion, positive relationships, positive parenting, our ability to focus, and cognitive flexibility. Through a mindfulness practice, we develop the ability to notice the thoughts we are thinking as we are thinking them, and notice the feelings we are feeling as we are feeling them so that with practice we are able to choose thoughts and feelings that are helpful to us and thus diminish our suffering.

Many if not most of our students have a history of trauma. The trauma often goes back to childhood and often continues through adolescence when they first enter the correctional system as youth in juvenile probation. A series of factors contribute to their trauma. These include parents who are incarcerated and unable to raise them as children and abuse they experience at home or foster homes, often at the hands of uncles, older brothers, grandparents, or the mother’s boyfriend, and, once imprisoned, at the hands of other inmates or abusive correctional officers. Besides the trauma that they have personally experienced, there is also the abuse of others that they have had to witness: mothers beaten by or shot at by boyfriends, family members and friends who have gone missing or who have been stabbed, shot, or raped in front of them.

The series of traumatic experiences compound and go untreated for years. Some of us cope through traumatic experiences by becoming abusive ourselves. Growing up in abusive authoritarian environments leads many of us to believe this is just how life is, and we do to others what they have done to us. Some of us numb overwhelming emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear through the use of drugs. Some of us survive traumatic experiences through reactive patterns of behavior, such as post-traumatic stress. Unbeknown to us, our body develops triggers that activate the sympathetic nervous system and override our cognitive ability. Our bodies are hijacked by our primal need to survive and we find ourselves habitually reacting in ways that are not helpful for us or those around us.

A mindfulness practice allows us to explore different and deeper types of freedom. We come to understand that freedom is much more than not being locked up. Our students share with us how at times they seem to be held hostage by their thoughts, feelings, and impulses which compel their behavior. They also share moments of victory over their impulses and patterns of reactivity. They notice their anxiety swell as they find out that their sister has sepsis, their brother goes missing for two weeks, or their friend overdoses. They share the accomplishment of noticing where their thoughts go and of being able to observe the thoughts as thoughts: The achievement of being able to take a deep breath and go on with their day; the fulfillment of being able to walk away from a fight at work when an argument got heated and their co-worker squared off; the pride of self-mastery over their impulses after a client punched them in the mouth, and they were able to observe the physiological sensations of their heart pounding, the heat and tension in their body, and still have the presence of mind to self-regulate their emotions to deescalate situations responsibly. Together, we learn that choosing is not only whether to go back to school now or wait until the fall, but that our agency goes in every way down to the level of choosing to think one thought over another, choosing to feel one feeling over another. This awareness of ourselves is liberating because it allows us to notice when we are triggered, notice our old reactive patterns, the sometimes violent and hurtful habits we’ve had to develop to survive and instead use our thoughts and feelings as information for us to make the best decision for ourselves and those around us.

The process of transformation that takes place in our students’ lives includes the elements in the process of conscientização, namely, (1) a person recognizes their own agency, (2) the person realizes they are able to give shape to their life, to contribute to their culture, and to create knowledge and history, and, (3) through the process of conscientização, the person rejects authoritarian relationships. Through a practice of mindfulness, our students are able to embody a nuanced experience of what it means for a human being to have a choice. Often when they first sign up for our class, they are angry, impatient, and resentful. They often believe they have been dealt a bad hand, others have done them wrong, that they are a victim. Often, they justify their attitude by pointing at the unfortunate events in their life. The recognition of their agency does not happen overnight. It takes weeks or months of us earning their trust. It takes patience, love, and a good sense of humor. We are not always successful, and sometimes our students prefer to go back to prison or abscond. But, more often than not, after several months of being in our classroom, they come to realize that they can choose, and that they have in fact been choosing all along. The awareness of their decision-making abilities deepens
as they realize that they had been sleep-walking through life, unconsciously choosing but choosing nonetheless. They realize they have the choice to think differently about the events in their past, that they can choose the thoughts they think, and choose the emotions they feel. Consequently, this awareness of their agency allows them to think differently about what it means to have authority. Whereas “authority” had been a word that meant disrespect, oppression, and abuse, it slowly transforms to become a source of personal power and confidence as they realize they can choose to think differently about their past and the choices they make at the everyday level to ultimately become the authors of their life. In this way, things and experiences do not happen to them; instead, they are the creative agents that give shape to their day and their life.

Once our students realize their own agency and the power they have to give shape to their life, they also reject authoritarian relationships. Authoritarian ways of relating to people fall off like withered leaves from a growing branch. Once we understand that we give shape to our moment-to-moment experience, our lives and our well-being are no longer subject to how other people behave or how situations turn out. We realize that regardless of how others behave or how situations turn out, we are OK because we can always choose how to think and feel about everything. Hence, the need to control how situations turn out and the need to manipulate or control others stops.

I must say here that each one of our students is different. I have generalized in order to give an account of how we use mindfulness in the process of their transformation and conscientização. Many of them have come to our classroom to teach us far more than what we have shared with them. I have met some of the best and most inspiring people in this journey: Rosa, Alberto, Sofia, Bradley, Jody, Raul, Lizette, Zayra, Jacobo, Saul, you are my heroes. You are each walking proof of the value of trusting ourselves even when others doubt us.

CONCLUSION

It is a mighty heritage, it is the human heritage, and it is all there is to trust. . . . This is why one must say yes to life and embrace it wherever it is found—and it is found in terrible places; nevertheless, there it is. . . . For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and the children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

— James Baldwin

I have suggested the possibility of working with Freire’s latter definition of conscientização to include a mindfulness practice and have outlined how this combination has been liberating for our Adelante and Sendero students. The practice is to facilitate a process by which individual people, including ourselves, become aware of their own agency, emotions, thoughts, behavior, reactive patterns, and the ways in which we have become socialized to behave, think of ourselves, and react. A mindfulness practice aligns with Freire’s earlier definition of conscientização and his trust in a process of education whereby we become aware of the ways we have been conditioned to behave and break free from our internalized oppressive patterns.

In her book Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, bell hooks quotes Parker Palmer: “I am fearful. I have fear. But I don’t need to be my fear as I speak to you. I can approach you from a different place in me—a place of hope, a place of fellow feeling, of journeying together in a mystery that I know we share.”

NOTES

3. Criado mudo in Portuguese means “nightstand” in English. The literal translation of criado mudo is “mute servant.”
4. Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 44.
7. Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 222.
8. Ibid., 222.
12. Freire, Pedagogy of the Heart, 94.
14. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

23. There are many examples I can provide to illustrate how our students reject authoritarian relationships through their process of conscientização. Our student who I mentioned earlier works the graveyard shift as a security guard at a homeless shelter. His client who is a resident at the shelter, suffers from a mental illness which caused him to punch our student in the mouth. Although our student could have easily punched the resident back, he chose not to.


INTERVIEW

Where and When to Think with Paulo Freire? A Timely Conversation between Walter Omar Kohan and Jason Wozniak

Walter Omar Kohan
STATE UNIVERSITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO

Jason Wozniak
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

The following interview took place at Café Lapa, Rio de Janeiro, in the very early days of 2020, just a few days before COVID-19 exploded in Brazil and the US. Jason had translated Walter’s book, Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography. The interview is included in the appendix of the English edition of the book (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 175–87). The conversation, which is not limited to the book, touches on different concepts like life, equality, love, errantry, childhood, and time, crucial not only to Paulo Freire’s life and work but to any educational experience and practice.

Jason: We are here today, January 17, 2020, with Walter Omar Kohan, author of the new book Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography. The literal translation of the title in Portuguese, Paulo Freire mais do que nunca—Uma biografia filosófica, would be: Paulo Freire More Than Never.

Walter: Never?

Jason: Is that what we are going to say?

Walter: I thought in English it could be More Than Ever.

Jason: So, this is the first question . . .

Walter: (Chuckles)

Jason: Because when we talked at your house, I thought it was More than Ever. But you insisted on, More than Never. The best English translation would be, Paulo Freire: Now More than Ever, in which case, we would add a bit to the title. Do you want to say something about this title choice even though the English title has been changed?

Walter: Yes. I think the original title translated into English is much more interesting than in Portuguese or in Spanish, even though it is not clear enough to be used as the title of the book in English, and that is why we opted for a simpler title. More than never, literally, would be the Portuguese mais do que nunca. It is a kind of obvious time. In the sense that any time is more than never because never is no time. So, more than no time is any time. When you say that you could say in English, now more than never, it is because it seems that there is something missing if we just say more than never. It is not that more than never is incorrect, but it could be more natural and obvious if we added a word like in Portuguese we add hoje or agora.

Jason: Today or now.

Walter: Yes. So today or now more than ever would be expected. In fact, when I proposed the title Paulo Freire mais do que nunca to the Brazilian editor, Rejane Dias, she said that a word was missing. She wanted to say, today, hoje more than ever. But I responded that if we include today or now, we would be relating Paulo Freire to a dimension of time that is chronos, which is only one dimension of time, and I would say, more superficial in terms of education. It is obvious that chronos is very important in educational institutions. They are, in fact, chronological institutions. Differently, when you just say more than ever, it turns into another time. And if more than never is any time, then more than ever is no time because ever is all time. So, more than all time needs to be understood not quantitively but relating to another dimension of time that, I would say, is a qualitative, intensive, aionic dimension. I think that this is the time of true education, or the time of Paulo Freire.

Jason: Aionic time?

Walter: Yes, aionic time. This is the time that is important for Paulo Freire. For Paulo Freire this sense of time, aionic time, is recorded in the bodies and in the spirit of the Brazilian educated-educators. So, it is not about chronology or quantitative time. If the title was today more than ever, or now more than ever, it would be saying that it is just at this moment, at this chronological time, that Paulo Freire is important. And, of course this is true in the sense that today, here and in many other places, to think with someone like Paulo Freire helps us to put into question the present we are living. It is not untrue that today or now Paulo Freire is important. But the other dimension of time, aionic, is even more important or more relevant because it reminds us that, for Freire, education does not merely have to do with chronological time. For him, education has to do with inhabiting the present, a way of experiencing aion. Remember that chronos has two parts, past and future but no present other than a limit (now or today). And that aion is pure present. The aionic sense of time is not easy to experience in schools. Quite the contrary, more and more our societies do not provide the spaces to experience this kind of time, a time that suspends chronological time. So teachers are kind of like artists and magicians, offering aion as a way of offering a time that is not given in the institution. In any case, in the English edition, we do not have this complexity because we decided on a more simple and direct title.
Jason: You are suggesting, then, the need for a suspension of chronos to open up the possibility of aion, and that Freire can help us do that.

Walter: Yes. Of course, this suspension of chronos is not something that is literal in the sense that there is nothing we can do to stop chronos. Chronos happens regardless, but maybe the way we relate to it, the importance we give to it, the way it interferes in the way we live our lives, is something that we can act upon.

Jason: I wanted to follow up on this question with something we talked about beforehand, which is another Greek word for time, kairos. I remember that when we spoke before, if you did say, now more than ever, there is a certain sense of urgency. Kairos has the meaning of urgency to act, to do something in the moment, now. So, I wanted to hear your thoughts on taking kairos into consideration.

Walter: Yes, I think that, in fact, kairos is also relevant for education and more specifically for the phrase more than ever. In a sense, it is also true that at this particular moment and at this opportunity, let us say, it is precisely important to read Freire. It is an opportunity, a special moment, to read Freire because of his potential to help us rethink our now, which is really problematic. And probably, that is why the book has been received with special attention in Brazil, because of the particular historical moment and how Freire has been so undeservedly vilified.

Jason: By the Brazilian government?

Walter: Yes, as you know. The Brazilian government has adopted as part of its platform a main political goal which is to expulse the ideology of Paulo Freire from Brazilian education, as they say. Each and every week the Minister of Education says something bad about Paulo Freire. Three or four weeks ago, we received the results of the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) education worldwide study. The first thing the Minister of Education said was, “Good morning, we have had horrible results at PISA and this is because of Paulo Freire.”

Jason: He is the scapegoat.

Walter: Exactly. Everything that is wrong with Brazilian education has to do with Paulo Freire. So, in a sense, you are right, kairos is very meaningful also because of the now we are living these days. And Kairos was also very meaningful for Paulo Freire. He was trying to recover time for people from whom time has been robbed.

Jason: The oppressed?

Walter: Exactly, exactly, Freire’s attempt was something like searching for their stolen time, that time that the system took from them by excluding them from educational institutions. In a sense, I think, for Paulo Freire kairos is always now. It is trying to recover, at any moment, some lost past of the lives who have been robbed of time.

Jason: And maybe, I do not know if you would agree, the now of action would be the acting in the moment to try and give aion or maybe not give, but the opening up of the possibility of aion for the people that are constantly forced to live in chronos and oppression.

Walter: Exactly, because aion is not only the time of education, but aion is also the time of art, is also the time of love, is also the time of thinking, of philosophy, and playing. And as you said, aion cannot be given, but maybe the role of an educator has to do with creating the conditions so that aion could be experienced. Giving time, a lovely double impossibility, as we know from Derrida...something impossible and necessary for educators, I would say.

Jason: Aion is also the time of childhood, as you mention in many of your works.

Walter: Exactly, it is a time where we can play, and as a chronological child or a non-chronological child we can put into question the world we live in. And we need aion for that. We cannot put into question our world looking at the clock or worried about the calendar.

Jason: You brought up love, childhood, and play, and I want to briefly ask you a question about the five principles that you use as a framework for the book, or a way to think Freire, and as a way to think with Freire. The five principles are life, infancy, errantry, love, and equality. One thing that struck me in the epilogue is that you suggest you are not providing ready-made recipes or formulas to apply these principles, but you did have a nice idea that I think is very Freirean where you say, “What if we experimented in the classroom or in any educational setting, by bringing these principles into play, one for each day of the week?” I thought that this was appropriate also because it brings together theory and practice, something that Freire was adamant about. I am wondering if this is something you would care to add to because you only refer to it at the end of the book.

Walter: First, I want to say something about the word “principle.” While I call these terms principles, I would like these terms to be understood as principles only in the sense of beginnings, forces of beginning. I would love to think of them as engines of thinking and of living and not as something that is fixed or the base for something else. It is more in the sense of a beginning or inspiring of practices of emancipatory or liberating education that I understand the word principle.

In the case of Freire, and I think this might make the book different than others on him, usually you find people trying to interpret what Freire means in terms of a topic, a problem, a question, even a book or trying to apply his ideas. What I am trying to do is have a real dialogue with Freire about how his life and thinking might inspire our educational practices. So, in this sense, we can say that I am interested in how we can begin or re-begin to be educators, by thinking with Freire. In this sense, these principles work as starting points for education and educators. In other words, I would love readers of the book to ask questions like: from this principle (life, errantry, etc.) what new educational life can I begin? More extensively: what kind of educational life can I begin practicing by
following these five principles (beginnings)? This is also related to the idea of infancy or childhood and how we can be reborn as educators or re-begin a new life of education. I think that, while writing the last part of the book, I was trying to bring together theory and practice, because, on an unconscious level, I was probably imagining a reader saying, “This is very nice and very inspiring. It has made me think a lot of things, but what has all this to do with practice, and how can I put this into practice?” So, I decided to give a few examples of practice in the epilogue of the book, not meaning for them to be recipes, or reapplied as they are, but as a way to focus on the many times we live our lives in our educational practice in ways that are not faithful to equality, love, and errantry, especially, when we work with children. I wanted to provoke us to consider whether or not we are embodying the ideas we say we value. In other words, to put into question how we tend to inhabit some fixed spaces even when we do not agree with them or we do not realize that we are doing so. How we forget to err more often, we would think.

Jason: To err, in the sense of ...?

Walter: Wander. We usually try to bring students to our knowledge, or at least to a knowledge we think they should know: we want others to move, but we do not move at all. And finally, erring helps us ponder how we educate childhood/infancy. Childhood/infancy is the object of our educational intentions, but we do not listen to childhood/infancy in the same way we expect childhood/infancy to listen to us. More than often, we are not sensitive to the strength of childhood/infancy. Because of all this, I suggest in a very concrete way a practice of these principles so that they might really be practical beginnings and put our own practice into question. This is something Paulo Freire was very sensitive too. He makes it clear elsewhere that questioning should not be a mere intellectual game, but the beginning of actual transformation.

Jason: I also thought, because of the way you play with time, one way to translate the word inícios in Portuguese which in English means “beginnings”, would be “initiative” or “initiate.” We often say that we initiate a project, or adventure, and with this in mind, it is compelling that at the end of your book you suggest some ways to initiate some new forms of thinking and practicing education. So really, the end of your book is only the beginning, maybe of erring, and I think that this fits well with the way that you want to rupture chronos.

Walter: Yes, and I think this is also why childhood or infancy is the last principle I discuss in the book, because it is a way of realizing that at the end we might also be at the beginning. In a sense, it is a metaphor for what it means to think. I believe that we begin to think when we have a question, which is why I also end the book with questions, because in doing so we might experience the end of the book as a beginning. In a way, there is no real end. We are always beginning (while initiating or finishing), because when we think we are in aion’s temporality. In this sense, I would like the reader, when she finishes the book, to experience that she has not finished anything, and that in fact she is beginning or initiating something.

Jason: Which is appropriate if we think back to the Portuguese title where it is not now, and now only, that we need Freire, but always.

Walter: Exactly, because in a sense, if you have to imagine a representation of this kind of time, I would say that chronos is a line where there is no way to repeat one moment. Chronos just passes: once you have experienced one moment in chronos there is no way to live it again. Differently, aion is a circle. You are experiencing a moment or a present that is recurring. It comes again and again. Repetition, free and complex, from which difference emerges, as Deleuze would say.

Jason: We have been talking about time and temporality, but I want to ask you a question about place. Or, you could say, we have discussed: why Freire today?—which is a time question. But I also want to ask, especially for English readers or people living in the English-speaking world, a place question of: where and why? I think you have pointed to one response to this question, and it is quite clear in the book why at this current moment in Brazil it is so important to resurrect Freire, to defend him, and to let him inspire again. But as we know, unfortunately, Brazil is not the only place where authoritarian tendencies like those exhibited by the Bolsonaro government exist. Part of what you highlight, and it is done beautifully in the book, is Freire as a wanderer, as a journeyer, traveling all his life to so many different places. Maybe, you could say something about where and why we might find Freire useful, helpful, or inspiring today.

Walter: It occurs to me now that something that might be interesting to think about in regards to your question is that there are several Greek words for time. We have named them above: chronos, aion, and kairos. But there are also more than one word for space. We have the most commonly used topos, but we also have, for example, the word khora, which is a word that Plato uses in the Timaeus when he is describing the birth of the world. It is a kind of intensive space. In a sense, I am thinking now that there is a kind of parallel. Topos is a kind of more superficial or extensional way to answer the question of “where Freire?”. We could say that the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, and Latin America, in general, are particular places where Paulo Freire is important to dialogue with today because of the neoliberal public policies that dominate, especially in public education. We all suffer from policies that are completely sensitive to big private corporations, and insensitive to the public and the excluded from the system. So, wherever the public system is suffering, and wherever teachers are forced to live a more effective, productive, and unthoughtful life, this book has a place. But we could also speculate that, possibly, these principles are not just about a given topos. Perhaps, they are not related to just this or that space, but instead, they are tied to a more intensive space, like khora would suggest: they might be meaningful anywhere, or everywhere, for any teacher desiring a new beginning for her educational life. In this sense, Paulo Freire might be meaningful everywhere an educator wants to deepen her relationship with what she is doing and how she is living. Doing so, she puts into question what it means to be an educator, or to live an
educational life, and what kind of practice and relationship between education and the outside world should be cultivated. So, we might say that Freire is everywhere where Freire inspires an intensity of inhabiting the space of being an educator, or living an educational life.

Jason: Then, would you maybe say, and this is just me thinking out loud, that Freire as an educator, or someone who educates with these principles that you mentioned, can open up khora, a place to inhabit in a certain nurturing way, khora?

Walter: What you are saying is interesting because, thought of in this way, khora is a condition but, in another sense, it is like a result or a consequence. We might say the same of aion, because if we think of ourselves as capable of producing beginnings, we are also capable of producing aion. It might be very meaningful to say that khora is a kind of condition, but, at the same time, it might emerge as a new form of inhabiting space if we relate to our practice through these beginnings or principles.

Jason: One of my friends (Derek Ford) in our field, philosophy of education, writes a lot about Henri Lefebvre and space. He taught me something that I think is helpful in this case. For Lefebvre, space is produced and produces. So maybe, in that sense too, Freirean ideas and way of living, traveling, and loving are both produced, and produce.

Walter: Precisely. And I think it is also possible to experience education like that. The more you experience an intensive time and intensive space, the more this kind of practice produces new spaces and new relationships to spaces and to time. You might also say new rhythms, in the way we experience time, and maybe new rhythms in the way we experience space also.

Jason: It seems, too, that it is always a process. Again, we go back to it not being linear, but it is always something constantly in motion being produced and producing, and we do not always know what. What is nice about the khora idea, too, is that it is hospitable to that which will come.

Walter: Exactly.

Jason: I think you suggest that Freire was very much open to in his travels and his teaching. Whoever and whatever would come, hospitality was granted.

Walter: Yes. And something just came to my mind that I do not want to lose, because I think it is nice. Freire speaks about experiencing three exiles. The first one was from his mother’s uterus, when she was pregnant with him, and he was exiled to the world. This is literally khora, which is powerful. Also, I was thinking about your comment just now, and perhaps it is how I am phrasing it that gives the impression of an either/or, but it is not.

Jason: Rather than an either/or, we are dealing with a both/ and....

Walter: Right. You are both produced and producing, rather than an either/or.

Jason: I want to ask you one more question that leads us, I think, into the book. It has to do with hope and struggle. Freire has a very famous book translated as Pedagogy of Hope. He is obviously known for his continuous and never-ending struggle. There is a phrase that you and I have talked about on many occasions from Pedagogy of the Oppressed that I cannot exactly translate, but rather rephrase and make plural instead of singular, which is in Portuguese se temos esperança, precisamos lutar e se lutarmos com esperança, podemos esperar. In Portuguese, there is a nice wordplay with esperar, which can mean hope and wait. One way to translate this would be, “If we have hope, then we must fight, and if we fight with hope, then we can wait.” I want to ask you about this because I think it is important to keep in mind when considering both Freire and education. We are facing so much, not you and I per se, but the world is in so much danger, and there exists so much oppression, that people become cynical and want to give up. Or, there are people that say, “We can’t wait. We need an immediate response.” And this makes perfect sense, because there are so many people suffering through injustices that need to end immediately. But it seems to me that Freire is teaching us something different here. He seems to be teaching us that we always have to fight if hope exists, and hope dies last. But also, that we have to commit to the long-term struggle, and understand that we will not change things right away. Emancipation does not come in one second. We have to wait, and we have to cultivate and do education work. I think, too, that that is also very important. Especially, with the world that we live in with technology, and how we want everything right away. So, I wonder what you think about this line.

Walter: Yes, I agree. Your quote makes me remember a quote from another prominent Latin-American, Ernesto “Che” Guevara: “The only defeat is not to continue fighting.” What both Freire and Guevara seem to be saying is that what is important is not the result, or the achievements of our lives, but the way we commit ourselves in fighting for our ideals, a fairer, beautiful, and joyful world for every human being and not for just a few. And there is no term for this. If we commit ourselves to such solidarity, in such a coherent, and inventive way, then we should not be as concerned about the results. We can expect with hope. There is also another expression close to the one that you mentioned, where Freire teaches us, inspired by Amilcar Cabral, “to impatiently be patient.”

Jason: What would that be in Portuguese?

Walter: It could be ser pacientemente impacientes o a paciência da impaciência.

Jason: The impatience of patience. What would that mean in terms of the prior phrase I mentioned?

Walter: I could place patience and esperar on the same side, no? We need to be impatient, to not passively accept things as they are, but we also need to be patient if we confront the order of things accordingly.

Jason: Patience and waiting.
Walter: And on the other side, we could place impatience and fighting. In this sense, if you say we need to be patient, or we need to wait, then it might be imagined that we do not need to do anything, and that it is just about expecting another time to arrive through patience or waiting. But, when Freire adds the impatience or the fighting, he is saying, as you said, we should not displace many expectations onto another time, but we can be patient under some conditions. It has to do with not just sitting here to let the time pass. It is more of an active attitude, to intervene and take an active position so that this other time can emerge. And this is related, I think, to many other thinkers in Latin America. So, it is not about expecting something, and it is not about gaining something, but it is about how we relate to the fighting that we need to do. So, it is about how we experience time. Again, I think, it is not about chronos and it is not about results, but it is about how we live our lives. In the case of Freire, how we live our educational lives. This, for me as an educator, is very inspiring. The educational reality sometimes looks so desperate, so difficult to transform, so hard to overcome that lack of hope is very close on the road. But it seems to me that the philosophical life of Paulo inspires us to never give up! And maybe today, in such a difficult global situation, this is meaningful here in Brazil, and elsewhere. Finally, I would add someone very different, and from another context, Heraclitus, said, "If we do not expect what should not be expected (what it is impossible to be expected), we are not going to reach it, for it is hard to be sought out and with no path" (fragment 18). The word he uses to say "with no path" is aporos, related to aporia.

Jason: Without place.

Walter: Without place, exactly. With no path, no way.

Jason: With no way, yeah.

Walter: No path. And this is very interesting because it seems like a contradiction. He doesn’t say, “If we don’t expect the unexpected.” It is not that. He is saying, if we don’t expect the unexpectable, what we shouldn’t expect, what seems impossible to be expected. This is connected with Freire, because these days people say that politics is the realm of the possible. And I would say that Freire would say that politics is the realm of the impossible, of utopia, no place. So that we expect what should not be expected, and we turn an impossibility into a need.

Jason: Would you say that about education, too?

Walter: Yes, precisely. The educator is not someone who looks for the possible. The possible is in chronos. The transformative educator, the Freirean educator, is someone who expects the impossible because this is what we need, at least, in Latin America. The impossible lives in aion. It is not the possible. It is the impossible. Some people say that transformation is impossible, or it seems to be impossible, but it is the only life, an educational life worth living.

Jason: And that is why we have to keep fighting.
BOOK REVIEW

Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography


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WHY TRANSLATE A BOOK?

This is a question that would seem to have been answered long ago, from the time books first started being translated. Perhaps it is a question that disappeared as a question, for we (almost) never ask it anymore. We assume that translation should be carried out whenever possible. After all, when books are made to speak other languages, their geographical reach grows, they are sent on flights to distant lands, to encounter the world. So why return to the question? It is not to categorically reject any of its possible answers. We return to the question as a question, as an opening act. We return because, at the start of this critical review, we hear in this question a model of the act of reading that allows us to perceive some important strengths of the text discussed here.

This book is a translation.

In 2019 Walter Kohan published in Brazil, with Editora Vestígio, the first edition of Paulo Freire, mais do que nunca: Uma Biografia Filosófica. In this book, the author rereads the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian thinker, by problematizing the political role of the person who educates. Kohan advances a philosophical theme that has been present in his research throughout the last few decades, coming from his encounters with other educators such as Socrates, Jacotot, and Rodríguez. In light of the global reach of Paulo Freire’s work, the educational relevance of Kohan’s own studies, and the positive reception of his book by Portuguese-speaking readers, in 2020 the Latin American Council of Social Science (Conselho Latinoamericano de Ciências Sociais) published the first translation of the work into Spanish with a similar title: Paulo Freire, más que nunca: Una Biografía Filosófica. By this point the English edition was already being prepared. It would come out one year later, in 2021, published by Bloomsbury with the title Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography—the edition which we are reviewing.

In addition, this book turns its gaze upon itself as a translated book, taking the translation itself as a philosophical resumption of the experience of thought that Kohan proposes throughout the work. The author—who has published innumerable works in various languages, such as Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Italian—now takes up translation as a problematic field, where Freire’s political approach also finds an echo. What can a translation tell us as a place from which the world is perceived? What questions are born of the possibility (or impossibility) of saying something in different linguistic codes? What epistemological cleavages will remain silenced in the idiomatic gaps? As Antonia Darder reminds us in her excellent preface, from the beginning, Kohan acknowledges some of the challenges and complexities when translation is done as a profoundly political issue. On this basis, it becomes clear just how much can be lost from a given conceptualization of the world when no connections are made to other linguistic filters. After all, the difficulty of translating from Portuguese to English is a problem that begins with Freire’s own books and that, according to Darder, reveals old and deep political tensions between colonizer and colonized.

But we also began this review with the question “Why translate a book?” because this book is one of questionings. Not because Kohan tells the reader what should be asked, or what the important questions are about Paulo Freire’s educational thought (or that of any of the innumerable other authors who he carefully cites). Rather, the question must be asked because the text presents itself as a philosophical biography of Paulo Freire whose focus resides in the idea that education is a constant battle for the rights of all—children and adults, educators and those who are educated. Kohan thus organizes the book on the basis of five principles that he calls “life,” “equality,” “love,” “errantry,” and “childhood.” These words give the chapters their titles and represent opportunities to restore educational relations as their own sites of questioning. They are principles not in the sense of axioms or necessary postulates; rather, they reproduce another meaning of the Portuguese word principio: beginnings. Kohan proposes these five words as points of departure, or triggers for a different experience of education, precisely as points of questioning about the value and meaning of what is done politically when someone educates. Kohan avoids prescribing any formulas that would once again make educators fall into the trap of a way of thinking that has been prepared in advance, paths already marked. Instead, he opts for, what Freire calls in one of his books, the pedagogy of the question.

In this review of a translated book, we also invoked the question “Why translate a book?” because of the exercise in questioning that Freire proposes. A Philosophical Biography is an invitation to permanently return to oneself. It is a practice of questioning as questioning oneself (in the reflexive), of a return to the questions with which we confront ourselves. It is a practice that asks us to find our own questions: the ones that inhabit conscious thought, that comprise the decisions of our present desire, but that also accumulate layers of forgetting. The questions that, after much use, lost their disruptive power and removed the question marks from our speech. These are nonetheless questions, and thus they must be repeated, re-spoken, redone. Notes of thought will never become music unless they are played. Thus, Kohan states in the introduction that his desire is that his writing provoke in his readers the possibility that each of them question their own certainties, so that they might be infected by the same questioning that the writing of the book brought him to as the author. The question, then, is Freire’s privileged connection to Kohan and Kohan’s to us, his readers, as though he had tried to do to us what Freire did to him. After all, what better way is there to pay tribute to a thinker than to do what he did?
In fact, this is the secret that allows life and thought to remain indistinguishable in this book, and it is necessary that we arrive at this point to understand what Kohan means by the subtitle “A philosophical biography.” The narratives about Paulo Freire, the person, and the chronological accounts of his existence are there to situate the reader in the greatness of this journey. An example of the importance of these accounts is the long interview that Kohan conducted in November of 2018 with one of Freire’s children, Lutgardes Costa Freire. Transcribed in Appendix II, this conversation plays an important role in helping reconstruct, in very direct speech, the importance of certain historical moments in Paulo Freire’s journey, such as prison, political exiles, the writing of his books, and the presence of his family. But this same interview also sparks the inspiration that is present throughout the entire book—and perhaps this is why it was placed at the beginning of the Portuguese edition—that ideas don’t fall from the sky onto your head, that they are connected to life. A philosophical biography, then, assumes that there is no philosophy outside of a life that is committed to the gesture, that an individual’s gestures are the word translated into action, and that this action is the very life of thought. Above all, when we are dealing with education.

And the first gesture here is always the question. Our questions, Kohan’s questions, Freire’s questions. The questions in the reading, the questions in the writing, the questions in education. The politics of the question. This persistent return of the pedagogy of the question to itself inevitably calls into question questioning itself, thus inviting us to ask what its place is in the life of education: A pedagogical resource? A cognitive exercise? An informal game of learning? The gamification of pedagogical relations? Kohan helps his readers discover that when considered on the basis of Paulo Freire, education is the life of the question just as the question is the life of education. The political power of both education and the question cannot be separated, since their conjoining produces one of the most powerful (and even dangerous) ideas for anyone who wants to change the world: everything can always be different. Nothing portrays the world like it really is better than a question. Just as there is nothing like a question to show what this world might come to be like.

WORDS TO TRANSLATE A POLITICAL EDUCATION?

The discovery of the intimate and constitutive rapport between philosophy and life places a responsibility upon the readers of Paulo Freire, A Philosophical Biography. It makes us feel like runners that hand over the baton, who have received a message to deliver and can’t remain where we are.

And in fact, Walter Kohan, Jason Wozniak, and Sam Rocha—the author and translators—state in the “Note on the English Translation” that the book offers its readers a gift, an antidote to political authoritarianism’s domination of the education of life: the power of questioning. It is the boldness to think after the periods that generates the rebellious daring of “a people who ask and wonder.” At the end of the book, Kohan confirms this idea and spells out how this message might endure in the hands, ideas, words, and gestures of others. He writes:

“I would love readers of the book to ask questions like: ‘From this principle (life, errantry, etc.), what new educational life can I begin?’ More extensively: ‘What kind of educational life can I begin practicing by following these five principles (beginnings)?’ This is also related to the idea of infancy or childhood and how we can be reborn as educators or re-begin a new life of education.

As readers, we have received the urgency of a gift and, above all, a challenge. Educating demands that we start anew as though we had never learned or taught anything before. This is the true political gesture. This is why we seek to accept Kohan’s call—and, through his writing, that of Freire himself—to keep asking questions and not simply repeat what they both say. For this task, we return to the question we started with: ‘Why translate a book?’

After unraveling the roll of yarn that Kohan’s book presented us with through this first question, we decided to return to it and, moreover, to ask: ‘What does it mean to translate?’ Beyond the exercise of transporting meanings between the words of different languages, the verb “translate” has other meanings, such as searching for words or actions to say a certain thing, to make concrete or embody ideas in words, gestures, and actions. The exercise of translating contains an attempt to make something concrete, a search for the ways of saying and doing that, in their difference, open up into a common space. If in translating meanings we seek equivalencies, we also know that we will always leave out a good portion of the interreferential web of a given word. But when translation is understood as the elucidation or concretization of an idea, perhaps it is most characterized by the structural inability to finish the task. To search for words, behaviors, or actions that mean a particular thing is an exercise that always resembles a hesitant stutter. It is never completely satisfied or ready. And for this reason, it returns upon itself.

“I would love [for] readers of the book to ask questions like: ‘From this principle, what new educational life can I begin?’” The author’s call echoes within us. And thus, we return to our questions: Why translate a book? What does it mean to translate? What can a political education translate? Or with what words shall we be able to translate this same education? Might the five principles—life, equality, love, errantry, and childhood—just be another way of saying something about the political education that Kohan proposes to us through Freire?

The question implies that these words themselves can serve as translations, five entryways or access points that embody a place from which we can experience a certain type of education. Understood in this way, they work as a constellation, a broad and interconnected set of gestures whose confluence simply indicates a way forward: hesitant translations that simply await the questions that each person might want or be able to pose. None of them, however, would be sufficient by themselves to describe this way of inhabiting education. Neither do the
five of them claim to exhaust its full meaning. Perhaps only through playing with the meanings that these words establish between themselves, activated when and how we position ourselves, is it possible to find suggestions for what a political education might look like.

All these words are concepts with a vast philosophical resume, as Kohan shows through the references he cites in each chapter. Beyond the profound and rigorous knowledge of both the apologetic and critical literature surrounding Paulo Freire’s work, along with the reception his books have received in a variety of geographical and cultural contexts, Kohan returns to thinkers who have long influenced his writing. To name only a few: Foucault, to speak about life; Jacotot, to discuss equality; Socrates, to speak of love; and Rodriguez, to analyze errancy. (Curiously, the chapter about childhood is the only one where Kohan cites only Freire. He certainly did not lack reasons to cite the philosophers who have informed his understanding of childhood, but perhaps he was trying to discover childhood in the writing of Freire himself… or maybe Kohan might have wanted to always start anew, above all, when thinking about childhood. More than just exterior interpretations of childhood that fit with Paulo Freire’s writings, or even readings from Paulo Freire about the notion of childhood, was Kohan perhaps searching for his own childlike writing about Freire?)

Having come this far with the invitation to consider the five words that can translate a political education, we couldn’t resist carrying out a translation exercise of our own. Although the result will of course be precarious and tentative, we give it here as a witness that we have passed onto our readers here everything that we were not able to say, so that they might be able to do so, under more favorable conditions.

So if we translate a certain experience of education in the tension between life, equality, love, errantry, and childhood, what might we find? The rejection of a dualistic and reductive position between thought and action, as well as of an aseptic and decontextualized view of the educator’s work. An education that can only be maintained as an opportunity to create relations that never diminish anyone or cast anyone as superior. An encounter in spaces and times that can lead to even their transformation, places where one loves so much that one allows others to find their own way through unexpected thoughts and words. An education that wanders and only lets itself speak through the movement its verbs are allowed. An education that lives, that equalizes, that loves, that erases, that becomes childhood or that “childizes” (to borrow the Portuguese verb meninizar that Freire himself invented). The education that, at each moment, affirms itself as an elusive and whistling child. A child who is within us all, who leaves its restlessness hanging in the air but who does not allow itself be caught, learned, or sometimes even understood.

IT’S JUST A MATTER OF…?
It is not easy to write about the most well-known Latin American educator in the world and one of the most cited authors of all time in the social sciences. Amidst the innumerable appropriations to which his work has repeatedly been subjected, it becomes necessary to pass over the impoverishment of the interpretations, the banalization of the citations, the lacks of care with the text, and even the politicized twisting and instrumentalization of his thought. Paulo Freire: A Philosophical Biography pays attention to all these difficulties and seeks to turn them into some of the book’s strengths. We could continue to offer other reasons to justify this book’s importance, to convince readers that it is worth reading. We end with a reference to a conversation between Jason Wozniak and Walter Kohan in Rio de Janeiro on January 17, 2020, only a few days before the world would shut down due to a pandemic. The title of the conversation is, “Where and When to Think with Paulo Freire? A Timely Conversation,” and it postdates the Portuguese edition. In it, the author offers some interesting reflections on the title, the book’s internal organization, and his readings of Freire. It is a dialogue that retakes the book, once again, as an exercise in questioning itself. Or perhaps it is the book that, near the end, retakes, requests, (re)thinks. As Kohan states in his final words, “The new always might begin in education. It’s just a matter of being sensitive to life, equality, love, errantry, and childhood.”

We can always start anew. That is the secret of this book. What Kohan leaves to each of his readers are the paths they can take to do so. “The new always might begin in education. It’s just a matter of…?” Each of us might continue after the ellipsis and fill in the blank spaces. Or to put it another way: to each, the challenge of his or her own translation.

ANNOUNCEMENT
Deadline Change APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

The author of the best unpublished, English-language, philosophical essay in Latin American thought will win $500. Eligible essays must contain original arguments and broach philosophical topics clearly related to the experiences of Hispanic Americans and Latinxs. The winning essay will be published in the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy.

New deadline: April 25, 2022

For more information on this essay, including details on criteria and eligibility, visit the Essay Prize in Latin American Thought page on the APA website.

To submit your essay for the prize, fill out the Essay Prize in Latin American Thought submission form on the APA website. For questions, contact prizes@apaonline.org.

We look forward to receiving your submissions.
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FROM THE EDITOR

Grayson Hunt
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy began publication twenty years ago in 2001, the same year that other newsletters got started, including Native American and Indigenous Philosophy, Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy, Philosophy and the Black Experience, Feminism and Philosophy, and Asian and Asian American Philosophy. This cluster of newsletters has in the past twenty years contributed to the diversification of ideas and voices to the discipline of philosophy. This latest issue of the Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy continues that tradition with a book symposium on Perry Zurn’s first monograph, Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), and a review of Hil Malatino’s Trans Care by Brooklyn Leo.

Brooklyn Leo’s beautiful and lovingly written review of Hil Malatino’s Trans Care offers an overview of and engagement with the central themes of this short but nuanced five-chapter book. These themes include “trans archival care,” an ethic developed by Malatino out of Indigenous trans, queer, and TwoSpirit critiques of “white trans folks for claiming gender-deviant Indigenous bodies in the archive as evidence to either absolve one of their settler status or to appropriate such lineage directly or indirectly.” Trans Care, Leo concludes, makes an important transgender contribution to care ethics.

The book symposium, a cluster of essays engaging Perry Zurn’s book, Curiosity and Power, include philosophers Andrea Pitts, Amy Marvin, Syd Hanson, and Zurn himself. These authors all engage in Zurn’s central claim that while the Ancient Greeks tended to pathologize curiosity, and the twentieth century psychologists naturalized it, curiosity is in reality political. For Zurn, curiosity is “a series of investigative practices that are informed by and constructive of political architectures.” The three original engagements with Zurn’s work each offer different directions that Curiosity and Power and curiosity more generally can take: queer Chicana/o borderland curiosities, transdisciplinary curiosities and crossings, and transecological curiosity. This was an exciting cluster to read, and I am proud to share it in this issue of the newsletter.

In their commentary, “Tracing Genealogical Ambiguities through Zurn’s Curiosity and Power,” Andrea Pitts maintains that having removed the concept from its affective-epistemic dichotomy, Zurn can tend to curiosity’s individual and collective power. Pitts’ analysis turns to Chicana/x feminisms and borderland curiosities, offering a beautiful engagement with Zurn’s work and, similarly to Malatino’s ancestral care critique sketched in Leo’s review, Pitts names the “limitations of colonial archives, including the confrontation with the manner in which many extant dictionaries of pre-conquest Indigenous Mesoamerican languages were produced through the violence of Spanish conquest and Christian missionizing practices.”

Sid Hansen’s essay, “Curiosity, Afield,” begins and ends with Foucault’s critique of the “ludicrous” sovereign attempt, “from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them what their truth is and how to find it.” Hansen sees in Zurn’s work the Foucaultian invitation to scheme about how philosophy might get free of itself, how resistant lineages, practices, and communities of questioning build space and power to move against sedimented systems and to move just because.“ Hansen’s work invites philosophy, especially depressed and despairing trans and genderqueer/non-binary philosophers, to explore the coalitional power of curiosity as Zurn proposes.

Amy Marvin’s engagement with Zurn’s work is called “Transecological Curiosity” and is perhaps the most novel of the book symposium. In it, Marvin delves into the environmental inflections and implications of Zurn’s work. Marvin calls our attention to transecological artists and poets, saying that while “these texts do not explicitly reference curiosity, but they connect with Zurn’s emphasis on trans curiosity naming experience, experimenting, introspecting, and investigating beyond a narrowly prescribed vision of life that brackets out trans experience. They also begin responding to Zurn’s question about the coalitional potential for trans curiosity as it extends beyond an exclusively human and unmalleable world.”

It feels worth mentioning that last fall, just as the 2020 issue of the newsletter was released online, the third biennial Trans Thinking/Thinking Trans conference took place virtually. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trans Philosophy Project co-hosted its signature event with LGBTQ Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where I am the associate director. This was the first time this trans philosophy event has been held virtually, and the first time it has been hosted outside a philosophy department. First hosted in person in 2016 at the University of Oregon, and then again in person at American University in Washington, DC, for many, this conference was a chance for trans philosophers to come together to share ideas and community. Hosting this conference virtually in 2020
was a boon for transgender communities. The conference became global, with people Zooming in and participating without the prohibitive and unsustainable requirement for conference travel. Over one thousand people registered for the conference, which was unheard of in its pre-pandemic iterations. Money that would have been spent on hotels and flights was redistributed as stipends to nearly all participants in need (students, independent scholars and activists, and underemployed people). While we were sad that we couldn’t all convene in person and develop those life-sustaining conference friendships, we enjoyed the cyber community that we hope will sustain us until the next in-person conference.

On a final note, after serving for four years as the editor of the Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy, it’s time for me to pass the editor baton to the next editor (to be determined). This has been a wonderful opportunity, and during my time as editor I am proud to have helped publish original philosophy essays and book reviews by queer and trans philosophers about queer and trans issues. I hope you enjoy this latest issue.

BOOK REVIEW

The Hard Work of Gender: A Review of Hil Malantino’s Trans Care


Reviewed by Brooklyn Leo

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

“Surely there have always been bodies that move in the way ours do.”

—Hil Malantino, Trans Care

(University of Minnesota Press, 2020)

Hil Malantino’s Trans Care pays witness to the networks of care that trans folks weave by way of survival. Maintained through the everyday mundanity of trans life, these care webs act as support when institutions inevitably continue to fail trans needs, reproduce trauma, and, then, force trans folks to wade through its aftermath. In five nuanced, accessible, and brief chapters, this book challenges ableist, racist, and heteronormative notions of care and labor work in the field of care ethics, offering trans practices of care as integral to trans survival and world-building. Drawing from personal, archival, and cultural history, Malantino highlights how trans lifeworlds are more than the “gaps” that institutions left us; they are worlds which can finally hold the complexities and diversity of expressions in trans joy, melancholy, longing, anger, and, even, our communal hauntings.

Perhaps, one of the central contributions of Trans Care to care ethics—among many others—is its introduction of the concept, “voluntary gender work.” Coined by Ruper Raj, a trans activist and elder, Malantino expands this term to stand-
idea of these archival ghosts as among a “spectrum of specters that undo and exceed it” and we, ourselves, exist on the continuum of this spectrum (59). While the concept of “transcestors” will remain central to Black, Indigenous trans and TwoSpirit wisdoms, Trans Care begins to grapple with the ethics of caring for the trans lives we encounter in archives, especially since the visibilization of trans folks in the archive may coincide with violence. As more trans of color, especially TwoSpirit Black, Afro-Indigenous, and Native folks take up this book, I hope that more discussion is had to the concept of “transcestors” as specific to animating and sustaining trans of color care networks and worlds.

Trans Care is a testament to the arts of survival that trans folks craft, weaving webs that are sustained by the everyday care trans folks enact. Abandoned, often, by conventional family structures and institutions meant to help trans folks, trans worlds continue to persist because of care ethics. One that tasks the field to reconceptualize its reliance on cis-centric and normative modes of care. In search of trans worlds, Trans Care begins from “a different set of location” and ends with the opening of a trans spectrum, a constellation of trans relations.

BOOK SYMPOSIUM: CURIOSITY AND POWER

Curiosity, Power, and the Forms They Take

Perry Zurn

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

In 1942, Virginia Woolf published an essay entitled simply, “Why?” In it, she deftly dismantles the ill-fated airs of academics who assume their sort of inquiries are of the greatest import, despite their lackluster hue and faint pulse. Why the trappings of stone and lectern, of weighty minutiae and groundless prestige? Why the university, at all? Woolf throws down the gauntlet. As an institution of curiosity—perhaps even the paradigmatic instance of curiosity—the university is, nevertheless, precisely lacking its most basic component: questions. She writes:

Questions, being sensitive, impulsive and often foolish, have a way of picking their asking place with care. They shrink up in an atmosphere of power, prosperity, and time-worn stone. They die by the dozen on the threshold of great newspaper offices. They slink away to less favored offices. They slink away to less favored, less flourishing quarters where people are poor and therefore have nothing to give, where they have no power and therefore have nothing to lose.¹

The university is a place of statements and of positions, of contributions and of questions with always already hypothesized (or proselytized) answers. One goes to learn what others have learned and how others have learned. There is, then, a certain form of curiosity that dies on its steps, Woolf suggests. Perhaps an untrained, de-disciplined curiosity, an existential curiosity, even a fugitive curiosity.

Woolf is of course writing from outside of the university, having been excluded from it by reason of her sex. And yet, she consistently found her way onto the green or into the library or the lecture hall. She dramatizes a regrettable moment in which she attended a dull lecture on the French Revolution. Surrounded by people who gaze on “with the vacancy and placidity of bullfrogs,” Woolf poses, by way of counterpart, a series of questions about flies, one of whom (curiously having only three legs) she’s spied overhead. How do they survive? Especially an English winter? And what do they think, after securing a hard-earned new lease on life, of being trapped in a lecture hall, with some self-important man of letters droning on about nothing? These are curious questions indeed. The sort of whirring, scuttle-hopping questions so easily squashed in academic contexts. But here they are! In the hallowed halls! How did they survive? How did they live on (sur-vivre) after dying on the steps? Are they vampiric questions, wraith questions, ghost questions, or the walking dead? Or perhaps these diaphanous questions are signals of a different ecology. A kind of curiosity buzzing at the edge of the university. A kind of questioning within it that nevertheless works against it.

That same year, 1942, Zora Neale Hurston published her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road. In it, she reflects on her anthropological work and muses, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.”² Buried in these words are a number of descriptive claims. If research is formalized curiosity, then it must be the case that curiosity takes form, takes shape. And that curiosity can be formalized, or in fact that curiosity can become formulaic. But if it is formed, by what force is it formed? According to what logic and by what poetics? That is, what ways of making things and making one another lend curiosity its shape?³ These questions then prompt a cascade of normative counterparts. What forms ought curiosity to take? And what shapes? What oppressions might those forms support or resist? Are formulas of curiosity the problem themselves or can they be liberatory? Hurston is talking here about research, but might her characterization have other applications? Is university education formalized curiosity? What about journalism or fiction? Or the abutments of stone to begin with?

In context, Hurston is remembering her own failed beginnings in anthropological investigation. Traipsing around the Black South, with her scholarly airs and “carefully accented Barnardese”⁴ (hailing from Barnard College), she found herself alone; no one would talk to her, let alone share the folk songs and folklore she came to study. Demoralized, “with my heart below my knees and my knees in some lonesome valley,”⁵ she went back to the drawing board and took a new tack. Hanging about town, she became integrated within it in order to learn from it. Whether folks were logging, mining, or philandering
The patterning of curiosity, we have to ask not simply what is being asked, but by whom, when and where, and how? Whither do those questions go and from whence do they come? It is not just that certain things are questionable, but certain questions are posed and promulgated while others are not, in ways others are not. There is a thick grammar here to the formation of curiosity, a rhetoric and a poetics.

What forms, then, does curiosity take? And what are the curiosity formations of our time? Of our universities? Of our disciplines? Of our material lives beyond the discursive? Where one asks these questions—and who it is that asks—matters. When I ask these questions—from within the purview of Western intellectual history always already disrupted by feminist theory, critical race theory, disability studies, and trans studies—certain contours of curiosity become salient, even insistently. In sketching those contours elsewhere, I have aimed to offer not statements or positions, contributions or already answered questions, at least not in any simplistic sense. Rather, I have aimed to offer lines of flight, charting out directions within which future questions about questions, future curiosities about curiosity, might take shape. Those contours are as follows:

1. Curiosity is formed in and through politics. Curiosity cannot be thought apart from the social values and political investments that in-form it. Sediments of power relations constrain in advance the shape curiosity takes and the work curiosity does. Curiosity is not individual, ahistorical, or universal. It is placed.

2. Curiosity formations are always at war. Curiosity appears on the scene of struggle. This means that questions, questioners, and methods of questioning are irrevocably pitted against one another. These struggles are dramatized in moments of political resistance, where transformations of curiosity propel advancements in social equity.

3. Curiosity is formed in community. This is a fact of the matter, but also an opportunity. It is a fact that we learn who is curious, how to be curious, and what to be curious about from our social milieu and context. It is an opportunity to join our curiosities, as we join our worlds, and sign up for being done and undone alongside others with whom we craft our futures.

4. There are two curiosity formations common to social marginalization. They are the spectacle-erasure formation (by which someone spectacularizes an object, but simultaneously erases its history, multiplicity, and relational depth) and the access-disclosure formation (by which someone assumes total access to the other but simultaneously demands the other’s disclosure).

5. Curiosity’s form can be re-formed via companionate practices. Western colonial forms of curiosity demand transparency, clean distinctions, and an independence of knower from known. Long
traditions of anti-colonial resistance insist that if curiosity is to be practiced, it must accept opacity, acknowledge ambiguity, and move only on the precondition of intimacy.

These vectors of analysis are indebted to and importantly constrained by the archives I have consulted. As such, the project’s limitations are also invitations. More work needs to be done to investigate curiosity formations through poetry and outside the confines of the university (à la Woolf). And through oral traditions and unofficial records (à la Hurston). And outside of Western intellectual history (even if roundly disrupted from within) so that assessments of curiosity formations do not simply extend to but start from the Global South and the East. I am also sure my work has failed in ways I cannot see or appreciate. But I trust this project has failed in the way every good project must: to achieve systematic completeness and universal reach and hubristic self-conceit. If it succeeds, it will have succeeded in inviting further unfurling, in the directions I follow and many others besides. It will have invited other rivers and rivulets, other ways of following inquisitive formations.

This project is precisely not a project I can complete, however much I can contribute. It is a project for all of us. And it is perhaps especially a project for those of us who bear the brunt of oppressive curiosity formations—and nurture the capacity to resist. It is a project, then, for scholars and poets, artists and writers everywhere, especially those thinking on the edge of the academy—women creators, doers and dreamers of color, queer and trans rabble-rousers, world-builders with disabilities and without pedigree. It takes all of us to name the curiosity formations in which we function—and to dare to love some and to change others.

NOTES
5. Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 144.
6. Hurston, 144.
8. Foucault, 74.

Tracing Genealogical Ambiguities through Zurn’s Curiosity and Power

Andrea J. Pitts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE

Perry Zurn’s Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry is a welcoming invitation to the breadth and depth of the emerging field of curiosity studies. As a central scholar and curator of this interdisciplinary field, Zurn offers a careful exploration of the deeply political features of curiosity in his recent book, including the concept’s etymology, attendant genealogy across strands of German and Francophone philosophy, and the role of curiosity within forms of political organizing and resistance movements. Moreover, Curiosity and Power, as the author underscores, aims to address several historical and contemporary misconceptions about curiosity. Rather than viewing curiosity as a meddlesome, undisciplined “malady of the mind,” as ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plutarch considered it, or as a merely natural facet of human cognitive development, as psychologists in the late twentieth century explored the concept, Zurn argues that curiosity is itself political. He thus defines curiosity, in order to cover the vastly distinct and diffracted modulations of the concept, as “a series of investigative practices that are informed by and constructive of political architectures.”

In this sense, Zurn wrests the concept from any simple affective-epistemic dichotomy, and seeks to unravel how curiosity functions both individually and collectively as a practice across differing historical and cultural sites of enactment.

Accordingly, the scope of the book is immense—traversing the racializing, ableist, and objectifying practices of circuses and traveling sideshows of the early nineteenth century, Medieval Christian condemnations of Eve and the serpent, and “shit-ins” (along with other forms of restroom resistance demonstrations) calling attention to the lack of accessible restrooms for disabled, trans, and nonbinary students on college campuses in the 2000s-2010s. In this way, as the book’s final chapter attests, there are “unique genealogies and geographies of curiosity,” each with differing permutations and shaping relations to forms of inquiry, knowledge production, financial and affective investments, institutional momentum, and embodied trajectories of influence. Thus, while the book’s first half, “Episodes from Political Theory,” focuses on the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, three prominent figures within contemporary European philosophy, Zurn readily admits that “a more expansive history [of curiosity] would extend the investigation beyond the Western philosophical canon.” Such an extended analysis, he writes, would also “track not only the word curiosity but also synonyms for curiosity, as well as the use of interrogative sentences.” In this way, Zurn concedes that the political history of curiosity that he provides inevitably confronts limitations with respect to the cultural and historical breadth of questions regarding curiosity and its associated concepts. He notes that the second half of the book, “Archives of Political Experience,” which
offers chapter-length examinations of political resistance movements in the US and France, practices of curiosity within disability studies, transgender theory’s engagement with forms of curiosity, and responses to the colonial dimensions of curiosity from outside the Eurocentric canon, seeks to “overcome this limitation.” Given the differing foci and emphasis between these two main sections of the book, the reason Zurn offers for an admittedly Eurocentric genealogy in the first half is that he seeks to identify the “the reigning interpretations of curiosity and politics” in order to “unsettle” them later in the book. As such, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, from within their own European philosophical enclaves, critique conceptions of curiosity as a touchstone of civilization/modernity (Nietzsche), as a institutional and institutionalizing force (Foucault), and as a sovereign display of the power to dissect and confine (Derrida). Against these forces each author develops liberatory (Nietzsche), resistant (Foucault), and deconstructive (Derrida) practices of curiosity, which, in turn, shape Zurn’s framing of curiosity’s political dimensions in the latter half of the book.

As the second half of the book demonstrates, these three important philosophical framings of the politics of curiosity nonetheless depict the insubordinate and liberatory aspects of curiosity as confined to individual action and self-transformation. Building from these frameworks but extending beyond their parameters, Zurn presents liberatory, resistant, and deconstructive formations of curiosity as collective praxes that exist within antiracist, disability activist, trans-affirming, and decolonial movements. For example, he demonstrates the ways in which authors within disability studies and activism, such as Eli Clare, Mia Mingus, and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, “crip curiosity” by disrupting the compulsory able-bodied norms of the “spectacle-erasure” formulation of curiosity. Such a formulation objectifies disabled people while simultaneously abandoning, confining, or otherwise erasing their “affective, intellectual, and social lives.” To “crip curiosity,” then, he notes is a threefold process: 1) to interrogate where and when the ableist construction of curiosity is reinforced,” 2) [to investigate] how the reign of ableist curiosity . . . has ultimately failed,” and 3) to reimagine “a curiosity whose strength and power lies not in its sanitation but in its multiplicity.”

This fundamental commitment to the multiplicity of curiosity found within disability critique then shapes the contours of the remainder of the book, including Zurn’s analysis of trans memoirs and autobiographical writings in Chapter 7 and the final chapter of the book in which he turns directly to questions of intimacy, opacity, and ambiguity, and their relationships with the anticolonial potentialities of curiosity. This final chapter focuses on political engagements with curiosity from the writings of Édouard Glissant, Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Anzaldúa, and a number of Indigenous authors such as Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō), Doug Anderson (Métis), Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), and Brian Burkhart (Cherokee). Here, Zurn seeks to explore how these authors have sought to “unsettle” the sedimented forms of colonial formations of curiosity, and to point toward worlds otherwise that exist beyond the objectifying, exploitative, and “hungry” curiosity of colonial desires for land and labor. In this sense, the last chapter returns readers to the ongoing formation of curiosity studies, presenting the authors, movements, and historical events discussed in the book “with an open hand,” as Zurn phrases it early on. The book is thus an invitation to expand the multiplicitous sites, sinews, and sensuous relations of curiosity and associated concepts that might likewise call to or brush alongside the terminological center of the Latin root word *curiositas*. Taking up Zurn’s “open hand” and invitation to explore further genealogies of curiosity, in the remainder of this commentary, I turn more directly to some attendant concepts related to curiosity within Chicana/x feminisms in an effort to enrich some of the questions that Zurn poses in the final chapter of the book. There, he dedicates a few pages to the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, drawing largely on her notions of new mestiza consciousness and the borderlands, which Zurn reinscribes into a framing of “borderland curiosity.” From this, I would like to respond to Zurn’s call for further “genealogies and geographies of curiosity” by teasing out a related concept that may pose additional questions regarding the book’s framing through the Latin root *curiositas*.

To begin my comments on Chicana/x relations with curiosity studies, I want to turn to Cristina León’s insights in her chapter published in Zurn and Arjun Shankar’s edited volume *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020). In the chapter titled “Curious Entanglements: Opacity and Ethical Relation in Latina/o Aesthetics,” León writes that “One of the major representative burdens outlined by contemporary Latina/o scholars is the interpellative demand for minoritarian subjects to be either transparent signifiers of culture or evidence of some demographic generalization.” León thereby points to the demands for authors and activists labeled or considered to be “Latina/o” to “present themselves as whole and transparent,” and that such demands actually “reduce and deaden” the complexity of “an otherwise diverse, fragmented, and contestatory set of subjects.” Drawing from Cristina Beltrán’s pivotal work *The Trouble with Unity* and Édouard Glissant’s writings on opacity, León argues that curiosity plays a significant role within such representational demands, demands that seek to render Latinidad a homogenized, marketable, and bureaucratically neat category of analysis. Thus, against such demands, León poses opacity as an ethical relation to the probing demands of such a curiosity that desires coherence and unity for minoritarian subjects. Moreover, the aesthetic, she proposes, is one potential place to “curiously cultivate questions rather than seek static, demographically minded answers.”

In this vein, while Zurn’s engagement with Anzaldúa’s work is brief in the book, he turns to the author’s work as exemplary of the kind of opacity that León describes. Such opacity, he states, “honors the fact of difference and different forms of knowing,” which is a central tactic of Latina and Chicana feminisms. Accordingly, to elaborate how such processes have been operationalized by the plurality of writers and activists categorized under Latina/x and Chicana/x feminist labels, we can note other terms that resonate with León’s call for an aesthetically-attuned project within curiosity studies. For example, within Chicana/o aesthetics, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto framed the notion of *rasquachismo*, but
noted that “to name this sensibility, to draw its contours and suggest its historical continuity is risking its betrayal.”

The reason for this, as Ybarra-Frausto notes, is because rasquachismo, although “alive within Chicano communities . . . is something of an insider private code.”

Noting the exposure and vulnerability present through rendering visible this Chicana/o sensibility, Ybarra-Frausto describes rasquachismo as “an underdog perspective—a view from los de abajo. An attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style.”

He continues:

In the realm of taste, to be rasquache is to be unfettered and unrestrained, to favor the elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe. Bright colors (chillantes) are preferred to somber, high intensity to low, the shimmering and sparkling over the muted and subdued. . . . Paradoxically, while elaboration is preferred to understatement, high value is placed on making do—hacer rendir las cosas. Limited resources means mending, refixing, and reusing everything. Things are not thrown away but saved and recycled, often in different context (e.g., automobile tires used as plant containers, plastic bleach bottles becoming garden ornaments, or discarded coffee cans reelaborated as flower pots). This constant making do, the grit and obstinacy of survival played out against a relish for surface display and flash, creates a florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations.

Ybarra-Frausto locates this aesthetic sensibility within Chicano artists and art collectives of the 1960s and 1970s that turned “signs and symbols that those in power manipulated to signal unworthiness and deficiencies [into] markers of pride and affirmation.” Accordingly, we could read rasquachismo, a textured, flamboyant, and innovative practice of los de abajo embodied in and through Chicana/o art and communities, as perhaps akin to curiosity studies. However, etymologically, the terms rasquache or rascuache are not traced to the Latin roots of Castilian Spanish. Rather, the term emerges specifically from Mesoamerican dialects of the Spanish language found in Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, with potential origins in Nahuatl. Notably, the term retains derogatory connotations much like terms such as polvagramosuné and periergia, the Greek terms that were translated into the Latin curiositas, and the terms through which Zurn traces his genealogy of curiosity. More directly, rascuache is colloquially used as an adjective to describe people or objects of poor quality and little value, and while this shares in the negative connotations of the "meddlesome" origins of curiosity in the ancient Greek tradition, it also suggests a different set of relational valuations, including derogatory connotations attributed to or found within Indigenous Mesoamerican lifeworlds. In this sense, to trace the genealogy of rasquachismo confronts the limitations of colonial archives, including the confrontation with the manner in which many extant dictionaries of pre-conquest Indigenous Mesoamerican languages were produced through the violence of Spanish conquest and Christian missionizing practices.

Moreover, building on Ybarra-Frausto, Chicana artist and art theorist Amalia Mesa-Bains notes that alongside the working-class aesthetics of survival that characterize rasquachismo, Chicana variations of this sensibility are often found through relations with the domestic sphere, finding both meaning and constraint within lifeworlds of creating home spaces. Mesa-Bains notes that such domestica artists “use pop culture discards, remnants of party materials, jewelry, kitchenware, toiletries, saints, holy cards, and milagros in combined and recombined arrangements that reflect a shattered glamour” of domestic space. This Chicana sensibility of rasquachismo offers “Cherished moments . . . side by side with examinations of self, culture, and history in visions of the domestic chamber that is both paradise and prison.” These constraints of Chicana femininity presented through domestica aesthetic production, as both “paradise and prison,” thereby shape the aesthetic contours of rasquachismo as simultaneously beautiful yet profane forms of reinvention.

Also in this vein, the work of queer Chicana artist Alma López has been read as embodying the queer potentiality of rasquachismo, as a particularly “nonnormative,” “tresplendent,” and “unrestrained” aesthetic sensibility. This includes, for example, works like Encuentro (1999) and Lupe and Sirena in Love (1999), in which López depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe in erotic poses with the mythical Sirena, the siren or mermaid from Mexican folklore. As Luz Calvo notes, rather than “starting from something completely ‘new,’ López’ art reworks (and reveals) the political-sexual desire that is latent in the omnipresent image of the suffering virgin.”

These queer potentialities of rasquachismo and domestica (as seen through familiar home altars and dedications to the Virgin of Guadalupe and the iconic image of la sirena found in the popular Mexican game of chance lotería) are perhaps a formation that diverges from the Latin root word curiositas but that nonetheless demonstrate a desire to interrogate and to reenvision the worlds within which one finds oneself among los de abajo.

Accordingly, I pose the question of a genealogy of rasquachismo as part of what Chicana author and archivist María Cotera might consider a constellation of “Chicana memory praxes,” or what Cherokee-Thai Two-spirit scholar-activist and oral historian Maylei Blackwell might consider among the “retrofitted memory” practices found within Chicana feminist political organizing. As such, we can return here to the writings of Anzaldúa, considering her from within the cracks of these divergent genealogies of desire and knowledge. By moving through this specifically Chicana genealogy—this world-otherwise of “underdogs,” queer saints, and the discarded remains of conquest—we can reread Anzaldúa’s invocations of feminine figures within Mexico (Aztec) origin stories and the venerated saints of Catholicism as narratological practices that likewise characterize her relations to mestizaje. In this register, Anzaldúa’s writings become illustrative of both curiosity and rasquachismo—of their entwinement and divergences within the lifeworld and aesthetics of the author. Following León’s call for an attunement to the multiplicity of minoritarian subjects and Zurn’s open-handed offering of an emerging field of study, we can then perhaps enliven Anzaldúa’s relations to curiosity studies by creating tensions with it, and thus maintain the ambiguities
of her work that slip past, beyond, and underneath the field's own scope of inquiry.

NOTES


4. Zurn, 12.

5. Zurn, 219.


7. Zurn, 25.

8. Zurn, 25.


12. Zurn, Curiosity and Power, 16.


15. León, 170.

16. León, 184.

17. León, 184.

18. Zurn, Curiosity and Power, 208.


22. Ybarra-Frausto, 86.


24. Laura G. Gutiérrez, “Rasquachismo,” in Keywords for Latina/o Studies, eds. Deborah R. Vargas, Lawrence Le Fountain-Stokes, and Nancy Raquel Mirabal (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 184. These origins are debatable, however, because classical Nahuatl contains no words beginning with r- and other Mesoamerican Indigenous languages likewise share some orthographic conventions with the term rascuache. Many thanks to Jim Maffie for the email exchange on this etymological question.


26. Mesa-Bains, 95.


31. For discussions of these narratological practices, see, for example, Anthony Lioi, “The Best-Loved Bones: Spirit and History in Anzaldúa’s ‘Entering into the Serpent,’” Feminist Studies 34, no. 1/2 (2008): 73-98; and Andrea Pitts, “Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Crip Futurity in the Americas,” in Disability and American Philosophies, eds. Daniel Brunson and Nate Jackson (New York: Routledge, in press), 1-22.

Curiosity, Afield

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Whenever I’m depressed or despairing about the state of academic philosophy, or my position within it, I find myself returning to the introduction of Foucault’s The Use of Pleasure, the second volume of The History of Sexuality. In those prefatory pages, Foucault sets out to explain why the second volume is so different than the first, and why it is being published later than he had planned. The answer is simple. He was curious, and his curiosity led him on a long detour that changed himself and the project.

After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of himself? [...] In what does [philosophical activity] consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

“Straying afield” is an apt description of the upheaval of passionate exploration. The way that a question or text, some twist or turn of the labyrinth, can rejuvenate things or offer a new vantage point. Of course, this is not always the result. In pushing against or skirting norms or logics, you might nevertheless be swallowed by them; in straying beyond boundaries, on another course or itinerary, you might get lost. As Perry Zurn puts it, “if curiosity can stir up, it can also sediment; if it is a technique of freedom, it must also have the capacity to serve as a technique of domination.” Like so much else, curiosity is dangerous.

In Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry, Zurn argues that curiosity is political, a practice that always exists in a “network of relations.” While there is important inspiration to be found in the individual upheaval of thinking differently, Zurn insists that we not underestimate collective forms of curiosity, especially their resistant possibilities for LGBTQ people. Amidst surges of racist and capitalist violence, transphobia is becoming increasingly mainstream in US media and politics as well as US philosophy departments. For trans and genderqueer/nonbinary philosophers, in and beyond the academy, moments of depression and despair are more frequent. In this context, Zurn’s vision of curiosities...
that unsettle and connect is absolutely necessary. It is an invitation to scheme about how philosophy might get free of itself, how resistant lineages, practices, and communities of questioning build space and power to move against sedimented systems and to move just because.

In foregrounding philosophy a bit here, I mean to emphasize the ways that Zurn transforms field and afield, rejecting any division of theory and practice and resisting more streamlined or institutional modes of interdisciplinarity. In “Why the Politics of Curiosity?” and “A Political History of Curiosity,” Zurn argues that curiosity and politics are co-constitutive. The history of curiosity is not a story of curiosity becoming political, of theory becoming practical. Instead, Zurn shows that curiosity is political and has been “wrapped up in political exclusions all along.” In the ancient and medieval periods, it appears as a disordering and then a destructive force, associated with women, slaves, and animals. In the modern period, curiosity links with projects of colonial expansion and nation building, as an ordering and constructive natural impulse for some and a vector of subordination and dispossession for dehumanized others. By illustrating how “curiosity and politics ultimately define the forms and functions of one another,” Zurn’s history requires that we approach curious practices as embedded, social, and relational. When later chapters turn to marginalized curiosities in political resistance movements, disability studies, and trans theory, his analysis is attuned to the complexity and subtlety of these curiosity-formations.

The archives here are multifarious—from the many shapes of trans memoir and the interrogative styles of Eli Clare, to the activism of the Prison Information Group and PISSAR (People in Search of Safe Restrooms). Bringing these texts and practices into conversation, Zurn cuts across and challenges disciplinary lines (and empty interdisciplinary initiatives) that target non-normative bodies for isolation, confinement, and objectification.

An ethos of intimacy, opacity, and ambiguity emerges, informed by disabled and trans curiosity practices and the common phenomenon of transphobic and ableist curiosity. As Zurn recounts, there is a long history of disabled people being “displayed as novelties in hospitals, surgical theaters, medical journals and other research institutions.” Today disabled folks continue to be treated as spectacles only to be abandoned, isolated, or eliminated when the show is over. Describing this as the “spectacle-erasure formation” of curiosity, Zurn observes how it intersects with trans experiences. There is widespread fascination with trans bodies, surgeries, femininity, and sexuality as well as a general obsession with debating the validity of trans identity. In conceptualized contexts, Taína Mae Bettcher and Amy Marvin have explored how trans people are reduced to “curious,” “objects,” puzzles, tropes and discursive levers on the way to somebody else’s agenda. Isolating trans thinking as non-philosophical or ignoring it as non-existent, the philosophical mode of spectacle-erasure treats questions about trans identity as if they were questions about “whether tables exist.” But when philosophical debates include trans people, and when trans people are embraced as curious subjects of philosophy and of their own lives, the questions deepen with transformative possibilities. There are opportunities to reclaim philosophical curiosity from ableist and transphobic gazes and query through more complex and personal worlds. To be sure, Zurn warns against the illusion that “any savoir can be a savior.” We should not underestimate how opacity, intimacy, and ambiguity can offend sedimented systems and elicit reactionary formations. Opacity might set off the uncertainty of un-trackable movements, intimacy might provoke the vulnerability of feeling something a little too close, and ambiguity might stir paranoia about what resists control and containment.

In contemporary contests over trans identity, scientific discourses often proceed in these reactionary ways. Entrenched in the methods of sovereign and institutional curiosities, scientists like to insist that opacity is best investigated (or ignored) by the professionals. When trans people forge scientific discourses of their own, the knowledge is discounted by their intimate (read: unprofessional) connection to the area of study. From this perspective, ambiguous dimensions of trans experience deepen literature and art but only weaken scientific questions, hypotheses, and results. Scientific dismissals like these are now leveraged in wholesale attacks on trans rights in popular discourse, state legislatures, and the philosophy blogosphere. But resistant scientific curiosities exist and flourish, often at margins where Zurn encourages us to observe the mingling of opacity, intimacy, and ambiguity. Consider micha cárdenas’ “Pregnancy,” a poetry/bioart project exploring cárdenas’ exploration with sperm banking after having been on hormones for many years. Inspired by Anzaldúa’s descriptions of being “an alien in new territory,” cárdenas experiments alongside other trans women. Her curiosity contributes to what she calls the “science of the oppressed,” a reimagining science in the interest of oppressed people. Consider also historian Jules Gill-Peterson’s archival work on “Trans DIY,” the many ways that trans folks forge “inventive access to hormones, alternate routes to affirming transness, and spiritual and magical care for others.” A trans “science of the oppressed” or “trans DIY” connect powerfully with Zurn’s discussion of the “rarely remarked or theorized fact that curiosity is practiced within trans communities—in rich, multivariant, and perhaps unexpected ways—in the shadows of spectacular erasure.” Although he does not focus on it specifically, Zurn’s analysis of curiosity as relational and embedded moves afield of philosophy in ways that challenge these highly sedimented and deeply reactionary scientific curiosities. Both philosophers and scientists are guilty of that “naïve positivity” that Foucault mocks in the introduction to The Use of Pleasure. The “ludicrous” sovereign attempt, “from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them what their truth is and how to find it.” In a Foucauldian spirit, Zurn emphasizes that it is not just individuals but also collectives and fields that might “get free of themselves” and “stray afield” in curiosity.

NOTES
3. Zurn, 12.
Zurn’s project of focusing on the collective potential of curiosity for social transformation coincides with his move towards a collective vision of curiosity as it links humans, animals, other organisms, and the environment as a connected whole. In an earlier chapter titled “A Political History of Curiosity,” Zurn links the disparagement of curiosity in the history of philosophy to the disparagement of women, colonized people, disabled people, and poor people as linked with animality and nature. Zurn points out that one of the most maligned figures in the history of curiosity is the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve, a contagious and dangerous force linked to the curiosity of women while also evoking anxieties about disability. With the redemption of curiosity across modern philosophy, Zurn finds that animals were now largely denied the capacity for curiosity while curiosity itself came to be seen as “crucial to expanding sovereignty, dominating the natural world, and ordering human life.” This included not only Hobbes but also Rousseau, who conceptualized colonized people as incapable of curiosity in contrast with Europeans. Zurn thus traces the history of curiosity as a history of the use of curiosity against collectivity, nature, the environment, and people associated with these.

Refusing such a limited understanding of curiosity, the concluding chapter draws from decolonial and indigenous philosophies to argue for a more expansive use of curiosity as ecological curiosity. Echoing the forbidden serpent, one of the aspects of curiosity that Zurn draws out is its opacity, capable of complicating and opening up new passages “between organisms, entities, languages, and worlds.” This curiosity not only brings opacity to inquiry but also ambiguity, emphasizing “the bothness and betweenness of knowers and knowns.” Finally, the intimacy of curiosity refuses to isolate but instead emphasizes interconnection and entanglement within environments, likened to curiosity’s breathable air, swimmable water, and pollinatable plants. Zurn fittingly concludes the book with a passage on curiosity and ecological connection, writing:

I hope for a curiosity alive to the things I do not know and perhaps cannot know. A curiosity attuned to the oscillations within and between things. And a curiosity conscious of its own stickiness, its embedded presence.

The arc of Zurn’s work on curiosity thus marks him as an environmental philosopher and eco philosopher, attentive to a broader practice of curiosity that is collective, enmeshed, and complicated by a teeming world. In the rest of this essay, I connect Perry Zurn’s work on curiosity with trans history, activism, and art to bridge his attentiveness to both trans curiosity and eco curiosity, emphasizing the prevalence of a rich transecological curiosity.

**TRANS ECO-CURIOSITY**

Drawn out together, I find Zurn’s call for a richer topography of trans curiosity and the arc of his book towards an environmental philosophy of curiosity to be intriguingly interdigitated. Looking at trans history, activism, and writing suggests both a longstanding and contemporary engagement with curiosity as it is practiced with Zurn’s vision of an alive, oscillating, and embedded curiosity.

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**Transecological Curiosity**

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**PERRY ZURN AS ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHER**

In *Curiosity and Power* Perry Zurn draws out the historical, political, and collective dimensions of curiosity, adding texture to a widespread mode of engagement that has required more attention and care. Though he begins by discussing curiosity in its fetishizing and colonial mode, he soon moves towards a reparative practice of curiosity that seeks to undo spectacularization and objectification. Zurn thus calls our attention to the bivalence of curiosity, aligned with both “the side of conquest, sovereignty, patriarchy, and marginalization” and “dissent, counterinformation, resistance movements, and social justice.”

Despite this acknowledgment of its bivalence, Zurn’s book aims to create more space for curiosity as a collective political practice aimed at amelioration and a more open engagement with the world. In his chapter on trans curiosity, Zurn gives substantial attention to curiosity as it is used against trans people to reduce and ostracize. He also looks at trans people engaging in a different kind of curiosity that “opens up the possibility of nuance, change, and transformation coincident with their who-ness.” By drawing attention to this, Zurn intervenes in the existing literature by calling for an increased focus on trans curiosity as a source for embodied subjugated knowledge. Such a focus “challenges trans theory’s almost exclusive concern with the curiotization—and the Frankensteinian spectacle—of trans people.” While the bivalence of curiosity remains in operation, Zurn reveals his goal to weaken the sway of objectifying curiosity by looking at how curiosity is practiced differently.

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4. Zurn, 44.
5. Zurn, 42.
7. Zurn, 150.
12. cardenas, 56.
In his essay for the anthology Trap Door, Abram J. Lewis looks at archives of trans activism in the 1970s as a resource for thinking contemporary trans politics differently, describing them as “at once expansive, unruly, and at times (perhaps at its best) downright strange.”13 While acknowledging the distinctness of 1970s trans activism, Lewis emphasizes the connection between this past and the present as trans people responded to unprecedented and unpredictable attention to trans lives much like during the “tipping point” of the 2010s.14 In addition to the abolitionist and intersectional coalitional visions of organizations such as STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) and TAO (Transsexual Action Organization), Lewis notes an affinity between 1970s trans organizations, terrestrial life, extraterrestrial visitors, and the expansion of consciousness through psychedelics.15 One image he shares produced by the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) features a painting of a large grasshopper being ridden by frogs and small mammals with the text, “DON’T SACRIFICE COMPASSION FOR SCIENCE, WE ARE ONE.”16 Another image titled “UFOs, TSs, and Extra-Ts” and illustrated by Suzun David describes the advantages of an alliance between marginalized people and extraterrestrial visitors.17 By looking through archives, Lewis thus draws out the historical richness of trans curiosities as they forge radical connections with the earth, the sky, and the malleable world of perception while eluding demands for mainstream trans intelligibility.

In an interview from the Trap Door anthology artist Juliana Huxtable adds further nuance to this collective practice of trans curiosity through enhanced perception by discussing spaces of intoxication and her work deejaying. Describing the “states of intoxication” she discovered while getting into deejaying, Huxtable explains,

I think intoxication is a space where desire is able to operate in a way that’s much more liminal. I started deejaying at my own parties, so I was both creating the sound and throwing the party. It was a really intentional way to engender a dynamic. And it felt possible. So many things felt possible.18

Huxtable explains how the “experiment” of deejaying guided her from unfufilling a job as a legal assistant to her life-long dream of becoming an artist who could “create a world.”19 Through her musical curiosity and participation in nightlife through deejaying, Huxtable found a way into a creative and collective space of altered perceptions and transgressive world-making. Huxtable’s engagement with nightlife scenes of collective intoxication is also temporary and tempered, as she asserts, “At a certain point, I want the option of operating during the day.”20 Referring to the limits and traps of nightlife scenes, Huxtable emphasizes that making connections with older trans women and Black trans women who have navigated nightlife scenes was key for avoiding these pitfalls,21 care and collectivity becoming a means to both enter intoxication and set limits when needed.

Connections between trans curiosity, environments, and altered collective perception persist in trans literature. In 2019 writer Callum Angus founded the journal Smoke and Mold that publishes writing by trans and two-spirit people on nature, the environment, and climate crisis. When describing the most recent issue published April 2021, guest editor Charles Theonia unpacks its theme of fungi as a means of thinking through enmeshment between selves and their environments, writing,

In these pieces, rock-eating lichens generate poems from debris. The singular plurality of a slime mold undoes our edges. An interstellar mycelial network offers a model for accepting that the capacity for being apart is a necessary condition for coming together. Spore dispersals trace lines of inheritance and germination: one teaches us to forage, one creates the environment for our impossibility, one shows us how to metabolize our surroundings to remake ourselves.22

Joss Barton’s poem “THREE SHROOMS ON PAINTED WOOD” in this issue exemplifies an engagement with the environment and collective intoxication, including references to “THE PSYCHOTROPIC REALM A COSMIC / WILDERNESS,” “CHewing THE BLUE VEIN STEMS AND BLACK BELLIES OF PSILOCYBIN / CAPS,” and “AUTOEROtIC EGO-ASPHYXIATION / AS THE WALLS BEGIN TO BREATHE AND THE SOUL MELTS INTO SPORES OF / TRANSEXUAL GERMINATION.”23 Barton’s erotic and intoxicating ecopoetics exemplifies the characteristics of fungi described by Theonia, fruiting from debris in a dizzying plurality that includes self-fashioning from within and without.

Barton’s poem is also political, interweaving the erotic, psychedelic, and dizzying transsexual fungisphere with visions of racism, homophobia, and transphobia permeating the meaning of home. The psychedelic descriptions of a transsexual environment are prefaced by warnings from Grandma of a poisonous otherworld that will “MAKE YOU GO PLUM OUT YOUR / MIND.” This warning galvanizes curiosity by marking a space for enticing departure, leading “CLOSER TO THAT PERFECT STATE OF TRANSGENDER / NATURE” even while the multivariance of “HOME” continues to echo as a series of “SPORES.” As Katie Hogan argues, environmental thinking in trans literature can include both an ambivalence and affection for home.24

In an essay for the recent trans | fem | endurance section of the Brooklyn Rail, Barton reflects on trans knowledge and loss, citing the negative spiral through which the endurance of growing up also involves “hiding away so much of the inherent joy of being a transgender little child.” In addition to the “displacement of life” caused by poverty, racism, abuse, and survivor’s guilt, Barton writes, “I mourn because my childhood was trans as fuck and I wasn’t allowed to name it for what it was.” While reflecting on the complexities of endurance, loss, and movement into the forbidden fungal woods, the poem also references moments of freedom, including “CUTTING THRU THE FUNGAL BODIES OF FACISM AND SELF-DESTRUCTION.”25 At its conclusion her poem packs these complexities into a condensed image with the line, “HER / HEART AS SIMPLE AND FULL AS THREE SHROOMS ON PAINTED WOOD.”
Isobel Bess’s poem from an earlier issue of Smoke and Mold titled “Idyll 7 / A History Of The St. Johns River” similarly links environmental thought with reflections on history and home. Describing her experience on the waters of the St. Johns River, Bess connects this with liturgy, the theft of land and memory from indigenous people, climate change, and her experience of getting ejected from the academy, emphasizing “there are no pristine landscapes.” She ends with a reflection on home understood through the mode of the river, writing,

> When I first touch the waters of the St. Johns River I have not been home in years. I would not recognize the people who live there and I do not think they would recognize me. It is the nature of rivers to separate one bank from the other.

Environmental experience is thus marked as historical, complex, and opaque, the river standing as more than a river with each of Bess’s refrains of “When I first touch the waters of the St. Johns River. . .”

These texts do not explicitly reference curiosity, but they connect with Zurn’s emphasis on trans curiosity naming experience, experimenting, introspecting, and investigating beyond a narrowly prescribed vision of life that brackets out trans experience. They also begin responding to Zurn’s question about the coalitional potential for trans curiosity as it extends beyond an exclusively human and unmalleable world. Though more can be asked about transecological curiosity, Curiosity and Power begins this conversation by centering transecological experience as it ranges from river reflections to collecting mushrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Thanks to Perry Zurn for making curiosity more viable for me, and for his guidance on where to track an environmental philosophy reading of his work.

NOTES
2. Zurn, 3.
4. Zurn, 190.
5. Zurn, 196.
8. Zurn, 41.
9. Zurn, 201.
10. Zurn, 210-11.
11. Zurn, 217.
12. Zurn, 220.
14. Lewis, 60.
15. Lewis, 64-65.
16. Lewis, 79.
17. Lewis, 66.
20. Huxtable, 52.
27. Zum, Curiosity and Power, 188, 190.
28. Zum, 192.
29. Zum, viii.

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 2022 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 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.

DEADLINE
The deadline for submission of manuscripts for the fall edition is May 1, 2022.

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, graysonhunt@austin.utexas.edu.
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Perry Zurn is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at American University. A political philosopher, Zurn studies forces and histories of change, focusing on the power of curiosity, political resistance, and transgender life. He is the author of Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry (2021) and the co-author of Curious Minds (MIT Press, forthcoming 2022). He is also the co-editor of Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition (2016), Carceral Notebooks 12 (2017), Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge (2020), and Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group, 1970–1980 (2021). He is currently at work on two new monographs: one on the poetics of transgender activism and another on the philosophy of movement.

Sid Hansen is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at California State University Northridge. They received their PhD from Vanderbilt University. They specialize in Feminist Theory, Bioethics, and Continental Philosophy.

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Brooklyn Leo is a dual-title Philosophy and WGSS PhD candidate at Pennsylvania State University. Brooklyn’s research sits at the intersections of phenomenology, decolonial theory, and trans philosophy. Currently, they are a Holocaust, Human Rights, and Genocide Education Initiative fellow where they are designing a trauma-informed and anti-racist training module for Pennsylvania K-12 teachers. When they are not in the college classroom, Brooklyn is a teaching-artist-in-residence for Ridgelines, a local-non-for-profit that works to uplift queer rural voices. Here, Brooklyn leads queer and trans poetry workshops for youth in rural Centre County, where they are exploring the idea of dysphoria as diaspora.

Amy Marvin is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Philosophy at Gettysburg College. She received her PhD from University of Oregon after writing a dissertation on feminist philosophy. Her work can be found in Transgender Studies Quarterly, Hypatia, Feminist Philosophy Quarterly, Curiosity Studies: Towards a New Ecology of Knowledge, We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics, and Contingent Magazine.

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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry
UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH

RECKONING

As I assemble the articles in this newsletter in late June, the temperatures at my current home in Connecticut are much more like Kansas in late July than the early days of a breezy New England summer. The Pacific Northwest has just endured a heatwave unprecedented in its temperature spikes and resultant patterns of death for both humans and non-humans. In the weeks and months since the previous newsletter was published, parts of the US and Canada have been venturing into more post-pandemic conditions—while in Mexico, as of June 27, only 15 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. Some of us who teach have been told to plan for on-ground teaching in an ostensible "return to normal" while others have been informed that Hy-Flex is the new normal for their foreseeable futures. We mourn the toll of the Delta variant as it shatters the healthcare infrastructure in India and wonder about the impact of its spread closer to home, particularly among those younger and/or more resistant to vaccination. And we mourn the approximately one thousand Indigenous children—a fraction of the estimated six thousand children Velden Cobern (Anishinaabe) of the University of Ottawa rightly calls “the disappeared” who “died a political death”—whose unmarked graves near residential schools in Canada have been located in recent weeks. The situation is arguably worse in the US, which, unlike Canada, has never officially attempted even to determine the number of children torn from their families and sent to schools where they were subject to hunger, illness, and abuse.

Mourning bends our experience of time in any circumstance, but the looped repetition of mournful events denied recognition is especially draining. Living without relationship is a contradiction of terms in Indigenous philosophical thinking, and living in relationship with others on earth is ultimately unsustainable without genuine attempts at honest admission of damages as at least a first step. Anything else is a species of what Elena Ruiz of Michigan State University terms cultural gaslighting.

This newsletter contains three articles and a report. In addition to the Welcome and Committee Chair Report that immediately follows, Dr. Andrea Sullivan-Clarke of the University of Windsor provides a reflection on an event at her university that demonstrates how negligence on the part of the more powerful often works to undermine the epistemic credibility of the less powerful. What responsibilities and opportunities do institutions, particularly universities, have to help prevent and repair the conditions of epistemic injustice and the frayed trust of those victimized? Sullivan-Clarke’s inquiry is purposely tentative, meant to raise an issue rather than articulate a resolution, but we can see myriad implications.

In “Truth, Rootedness, and the Good Life in Aztec Ethical Philosophy,” Dr. Sebastian Purcell of SUNY Cortland intervenes in an interpretative dispute regarding the meaning of nelli, a key term for understanding the Aztec conception of the good life. Most succinctly, is the good life for Aztec thought a true life, or is it a rooted life? And given the paucity and indeterminacy of linguistic evidence, to what other, additional sources should we turn for answers? Utilizing several diverse strands of evidence to build his case, Dr. Purcell argues that metaphors of rootedness are more illuminative of Aztec philosophy of the good life, though an action-oriented concern with truth also plays a role. And, pertinently, the constellation of concerns with truth as pragmatically oriented, and with rootedness as grounded stability, issue in a conception of the good life that does not seek to deny or escape the risks and fragility of life, but rather to respond more wisely to the reality of our situation. As Purcell notes, “The Nahua response to our evidenced failures is to learn how to lead a true life, how to take root on our slippery earth so that we do not fall.” One might suggest that to pretend otherwise would seem a patent case of personal or cultural immaturity.

Maturity and the path of maturation as only through recognition of the ubiquity of moral relationship to all beings and powers is discussed by Dr. Anne Schulherr Waters in the article that closes the newsletter, “Sacred Metaphysics and Core Philosophical Tenets of Native American Thought: Identity (Place, Space), Share History (Place, Time), and Personality (Sacred Emergence of Relations).” From her vantage point of longtime involvement in the field, Dr. Waters articulates eight tenets of Native American philosophy she sees in its current unfolding. As summarized in the abstract she has supplied,

We experience the world in cycles of energy (powers) and identity (place) that produces particular personality (behavior, for example, of corn). There results relationships of personal, particular, sacred, and moral behavior. Relationships make the world a moral world. We experience time in a world of cycles of power (energy) and place (identity), wherein relationships of being to one
another are made as we mature. This is how we develop a personality (metaphysic) of how things are in the world (by completion of relationship) and this is how we mature, like the corn ripens and like others respond by fulfilling our relations.

Again, maturation is only within relationship to others and to the slippery earth. Let us hope we grow up soon.

NOTES

APA COMMITTEE CHAIR'S REPORT
Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Hensci! (Greetings in Muskogee!) As of the first of July 2021, we have approximately eleven members in our group. Although we are a small committee, we undertook a few projects in 2020-2021.

A statement of solidarity with Black Lives Matter for the fall 2020 issue of the newsletter.

An Author Meets Critics Session at the Central Division meeting featuring Shay Welch (Spelman College) and her book, The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology. Shay’s critics were Alejandro Santana (University of Portland) and Sebastian Purcell (SUNY Cortland).

A Book Symposium at the Pacific Division meeting featuring Brian Burkhart (University of Oklahoma) and his book, Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land. The session was chaired by Alex Guerrero (Rutgers University) with comments from Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner (Georgetown University) and Andrea Sullivan-Clarke (University of Windsor).

An APA Committee Session at the Pacific Division meeting on Indigenous Philosophy: Land, Relations, and Obligations. The session was chaired by Andrew Smith (Drexel University) with papers from the following:

- Christopher Kavelin (Macquarie University), “Dreaming Law: Transdimensional Relational Jurisprudence”
- Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner (Georgetown University), “So You Want to Decolonize the Discipline?: Land Back and Academic Philosophy”

Andrew Smith (Drexel University) has agreed to represent our committee in the APA Virtual Programming Slack Group. Our session is in the works.

Establishing a monthly social via Zoom. Committee members can check their e-mail for information.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such a great bunch of people. Mvto! (Thank you!)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations.

Editors do not 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, references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations.

For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website. Please submit material electronically to Agnes Curry (acurry@usj.edu). For consideration for the Spring 2022 newsletter, please submit your work by January 15, 2022.
ARTICLES

A Case of Epistemic Injustice

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Over the past academic year, part of my service to my university included sitting on a committee that considered the name change of one of the residence halls on campus. The building in question was named after the first prime minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald. In recent years Macdonald has come under scrutiny with respect to his role regarding the cultural genocide of Indigenous people in Canada. As a result, his name and likeness have been removed from Canada’s currency as well as several statues and buildings across the country.

At the end of the academic term, our committee presented its recommendations to the University of Windsor’s Board of Governors. Ultimately, the board decided to remove Macdonald’s name from the residence hall, to install a plaque explaining the history of the building and the reason for changing the building’s name, and, lastly, the board created a new committee to proactively examine the names of other campus buildings. For a junior professor like myself, it was the first taste of enacting change at the university. There was only one issue: the announcement regarding the removal of the name was not made immediately to the general public; it did not come before the news of a mass grave of 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School shook the country.

Macdonald’s legacy was one that endorsed the complete assimilation of Indigenous people in Canada. He was a proponent of the residential school system, so when my university issued a formal statement about the events at Kamloops, the Indigenous community was quick to point out the inconsistency of issuing such a statement while also honoring one of the people responsible for not only the genocide of Indigenous culture, but for the actual genocide of Indigenous children. It did not look good for the university: some individuals suggested that the name change was suspiciously close to the revelation at Kamloops—perhaps the university was responding to misdirect their own issues?

Although I can assure everyone that our committee did indeed put forth recommendations to the board of governors and that these recommendations were accepted, I cannot articulate the emotional toll the recent events had on the local Indigenous communities, faculty, staff, and students. There is a lack of faith in Indian Country that institutions will do the right thing. I think that lack of faith has developed as a result of years of disappointment. Indigenous people have expectations that treaties will be honored, promises will be kept, and that they will actually have a seat at the table. Time and again, they are disappointed. Thus, I do not think that their mistrust is misplaced. And therefore I do not blame those questioning the motives of the university.

As a social epistemologist, however, I also think that the government and institutions of higher learning could do better; they could improve their relationship with Indigenous people by actively listening to and accepting the testimony of Indigenous people regarding their firsthand experience of oppression. In addition, universities should recognize the likelihood of their actions resulting in epistemic injustice, especially given that institutions of higher learning are steeped in the behaviors connected with settler colonial society. What I mean by epistemic injustice is the discounting of testimony by individuals and communities as a result of their social identity.

As an example, we might ask, “Why was the response to the news of Kamloops so profound?” Why were non-Indigenous Canadians shocked by the revelation? Indigenous students, families, and communities have shared stories of children disappearing from residential schools for years. Some of this testimony was provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which resulted in a report and calls to action. Regarding those who were surprised by the identification of a mass grave at Kamloops Indian Residential School, I think we should ask ourselves, “Why is the firsthand testimony of Indigenous people discounted?” Is there some identifiable feature or set of features that prevents the uptake of information when that information is tendered by an Indigenous person or community? It would seem having experienced the oppression firsthand, Indigenous people would be in the best position to provide information.

It is not only the stories of the mistreatment and abuse at residential schools of which Canadians should be aware. What about firsthand accounts of missing and murdered Indigenous women, historical accounts of relationships with land, stories of how the people came to be on Turtle Island (and so much more)? In my research, I often come across articles in the news that confirm what Indigenous families, and communities have shared stories of children disappearing from residential schools for years. So what is it about Indigenous testimony that prevents its uptake? I think the question needs to be reframed: What is it about settler society that it rejects testimony from Indigenous people?

One point that I wish to consider regards the day-to-day interactions with Indigenous communities and how the government and institutions of higher learning can prevent a further erosion of trust. The events at my university speak to a lack of communication, which can be easily resolved when we respect the relationship we have with others. The Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and those in the local community look to the university to respond to their concerns, worries, and even demands. In the case concerning the name of the residence hall, they expected a response to their call for changing its name.

The university’s failure to inform those concerned can be seen as a feature of epistemic injustice. (Arguably, it seems to be a weird genus of gaslighting because it creates an illusion of the university acting in bad faith when it hadn’t.) Why is this important? I mean, doesn’t that depict the university in a bad light? I contend that there is more damage done to the reputation of the Indigenous people and communities involved than that done to the university.
Here’s the rub: the university appears to fail to address the concern when it actually has responded; the board had voted to remove the name. In the example, the failure to inform the public caused the Indigenous group to spend their energy and resources on an issue that had been resolved. The university’s failure to inform also serves to diminish the future claims of the Indigenous individuals and communities. For example, individuals calling the university’s actions into question are told they are mistaken (when they have been given no evidence that is the case). In turn, the Indigenous communities and individuals are set up to look as though they are misinformed or do not know what they are talking about. I suggest that the putative lack of knowledge affects assessments of reliability; those who have been wrong in the past are assessed as unreliable. In order to prevent the silencing of Indigenous people as a result of denying their credibility as testifiers, governments and institutions should respond in a timely manner to the individuals and communities who present their concerns. It may be the case that the building of trust and the strengthening of the relationship trumps the need to develop a public statement. In such circumstances, the institution should take the initiative, provide the needed information, and contribute to the development of trust in the relationship. As regards changing the name of the residence hall, the university’s failure to inform the Indigenous students and alumni who had created a petition to remove the name put the stakeholders in an awkward position—the Indigenous students and alumni were seen as mistaken at a time when their energies could have been used elsewhere given the gravity of the recent incident at Kamloops.

NOTES
2. See the site for the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, http://www.trc.ca.

Truth, Rootedness, and the Good Life in Aztec Ethical Philosophy

Sebastian Purcell
SUNY Cortland

Consider the following two translations of the same flower song, the same xochicuicatl, recorded in the Romances de los señores de la Nueva España.

The Nahuatl Text

Ça totecneliây / acá çáltahucocay / ynpalnemohuñáy / yn cuix nellí / cuix no amo nellí / qní contohua y / maoc onetlamati yn toyolo / yehuã ohuaya ohuaya

qxquich i ye nellí quilihuiya / yn amo nello / çán omonenequín ipalnemohuani / maoc onetlamati y toyolo / yehuã ohuaya ohuaya

Miguel León-Portilla

Are You real, are You rooted?
Is it only as to come inebriated?
The Giver of Life: Is this true?
Perhaps, as they say, it is not true?
May our hearts be not tormented!
All that is real, all that is rooted, they say that it is not real, it is not rooted.
The Giver of life only appears absolute.
May our hearts not be tormented because He is the Giver of Life.

John Bierhorst


How many does he “yes” and “no”! This Life Giver is intractable. [But] let our hearts keep sorrowing.

One might be forgiven for thinking that the translations derive from separate texts. They do not, but the interpretive difficulties are such that translations of the Aztec “flower songs” (xochicuicatl) tend to be holistic in character.

To give one a sense of the difficulties involved, consider the following points. The ‘*’ in the original marks a letter that has been blotted out and cannot be distinguished. The frequent superscripts, for example with “á” or “ð,” are part of the original transcriber’s shorthand and mean that either an “n” or “m” follows. Unfortunately, these superscripts are not used with much consistency and appear to be used sometimes unnecessarily. Different words may in fact be recorded, as a result, without any way to be certain apart from contextual clues. The xochicuicatl poetic structure, finally, has untranslated vocables, “yehuã ohuaya ohuaya” in this case, and these sometimes include “y” or “i,” which may be the grammatical particles “yn” and “in,” or mere vocalic song. These are but a few of the transcription difficulties involved and they prove, unfortunately, to be the most tractable.

The more worrisome difficulties are conceptual in character. Miguel León-Portilla understands these verses, attributed to the legend of Nezahualcoyotl, to turn on a quest for truth and rootedness.

On his understanding, this xochicuicatl is a philosophical poem. He uses both “real-true” and “rooted” as a sort of heredity for the Nahuatl term nelli. The core view guiding his translation, then, holds that the singer is on a quest, at once epistemic and ethical, to find truth in our human circumstances on earth.
Bierhorst’s translation, by contrast, is patently anti-philosophical. For him, the Nahua were not a philosophical people, but a religious one. Moreover, their religion was shamanistic, not doxastic, and relatively unsophisticated. While the quoted translation reflects a moderated form of Bierhorst’s “ghost song” thesis, which he advanced in his earlier work, it remains broadly in that line. The discussion of truth and the search for a good life, unsurprisingly, vanishes from view. The term “neli” in Nahuatl is sometimes used adverbially for emphasis, just as in colloquial English expressions such as, “I really need to go.” This emphatic interpretation, then, is how Bierhorst chooses to render the term. What is at stake in these two verses, as he sees it, is whether and how the singer can please Life Giver using the xochicuicati as a sort of mystical incantation.

Because textual interpretation poses such difficulties, evidence from the texts themselves tends not to settle these larger disagreements. Evidence instead must appeal to broader forms of fitness and coherence among multiple types of evidence among multiple texts, histories, worldviews, and recorded archeological findings.

In the present case, one bit of linguistic evidence might count against Miguel León-Portilla’s philosophical interpretation. In his translation the term neli is treated as related to nelhuayotl, which is the word for a root or base. Recent considerations circulating among Nahuatl language specialists, however, cast this connection into doubt. If true, the result would not relativize Bierhorst’s ghost song thesis, but it would threaten to undermine much of the philosophical interest in these poetic songs. Rootedness is thought to function as a basic metaphor among the Nahua for the good life, and their sense of truth is thought to be way-seeking, i.e., oriented towards action, more than proposition verifying. León-Portilla’s interpretation helpfully spelled out this connection, but it would stand largely unsupported without the linguistic connection between neli and nelhuayotl.

In light of this challenge, my purpose is to defend León-Portilla’s philosophical thesis in a broad way. I shall not defend the linguistic connection, both because the philosophical point can sidestep the discussion, and because the linguistic dispute may never have enough evidence for a definitive resolution. My strategy is rather to support the philosophical view by drawing on a family of related evidentiary items. I hold, in brief, to a constellation view about the Nahua’s expressions of truth and the good life.

To explain, a little, what I have in mind, it proves helpful to recall that the Aztecs, or better the Nahua, who were the Mesoamerican people who spoke Nahuatl, often employ a constellation of metaphors to indicate a main idea. One may witness this in the poetical expressions called difrasismos in Spanish, which use two main terms to indicate one idea. The terms ixtli, yollotl, for “face and heart,” for example, are meant to describe the core of a person, especially in their capacity as an ethical agent. Yet, one witnesses that these terms are often compounded with related bodily terms. In one of the discourses in the Discourses of the Elders that Andrés de Olmos records, one reads “tlayenmach quinequi immixtzin, moyollotzin, immonacayotzin . . . / Much does your face, your heart, your body reclaim. . . .” Even longer compounds are recorded, but they all express the essence of a human person.

Something similar has happened elsewhere in Nahua scholarship with respect to the symbolic expressions recorded in codices. Eduard Seler’s 1904 commentary on the Codex Borgia forwarded the view that the many gods were all expressions of a single main god, a sort of first principle. Miguel León-Portilla developed this claim by showing evidence for Ometeotl as that one god. Both claims were disputed, but Henry B. Nicholson later worked out a schema—or symbolic constellation—for all the gods with ometeotl as the basic entity of existence. I think that much the same type of constellation is at work in the Nahua’s expressions of the good life. Because the discussion is complex, it might be simplest to begin with a review of the basic linguistic objection.

1. ON NELLI AND NEHUAYOTL

In his dictionary entry for nelhuayotl, Remi Siméon writes that the term means a “principle, foundation, base, root, and genealogical origin.” He also puts the following down: “R. nelli (?)” This is the dictionary’s abbreviated method for indicating that the root of the term might be nelli, though Siméon is uncertain. If accurate, then it suggests that there is a linguistic connection between the word for truth, nelli, and the word for a root or base, nelhuayotl. This is the connection that Miguel León-Portilla’s translation takes to be accurate.

The linguistic difficulty with this approach may be stated in two prongs. The first concerns the recorded semantic coverage between the terms. Much of the semantic space covered by nelhuayotl and related terms, notably nelhuatl, appears to be devoted to physical roots and bases, not abstract terms like truth. Even the reference to principle, which is the primary meaning in the dictionary, is not quite truth.

There is further dictionary support for the connection between the nelhuayotl and truth in extended cases. Siméon does record that when used with “-c” or “-can,” as in inelhuayoc or inelhuayocan, the term means “at its root” or “at its base.” When further used with the verb aci, it means “he or she verified, examined to the root.” It is this notion, verification as going to the roots, that makes sense of the compound nelhuayotoca as “searching for the origin, the principle of something, searching for the truth.” Still, truth tends to emerge in these cases only in conjunction with other verbs. It would be helpful if there were some discernible morphological connections to support the semantic evidence.

A first thought might follow from the apparently strange way in which the “-yo-” in nelhuayotl doesn’t appear to give the term the abstract sense one would expect. Rather, just like nelhuatl, it can be used to indicate a physical root. This physicalizing sense, as opposed to the more typical abstracting sense one would expect, is closer in function to what one witnesses with intransitive state nouns, which sometimes use the “-yo-” affix to indicate the physical manifestation of a more abstract phenomenon. The verb tona, for example, means “to prosper and bear fruit.”
When made into a state noun, totonacayotl, it means “a crop,” totonacayo means “our crop,” and totonaca, notably without the “-yo-,” means “our prosperity.” The difficulty that follows from this line of analysis, however, is patent: these intransitive state nouns use “-ca-“ to nominalize a verb, while in the present case one must explain how the “-hua-“ is removed from nelhua-yotl to arrive at the root nelli. There may be something else at play in these cases, but it is not clear what that would be.

The linguistic challenge has thus already moved onto its second prong. The first prong, which is semantic in character, might be strengthened if a suitable morphological connection is discovered. Thus far, the problem that has emerged is that nelli, the stem of nelli, looks manifestly nominal in character. If this is right, then it becomes unclear how the -huayotl elements are related to it. If one takes the view that nelli and nelhuayotl are two unconnected words, then there is no need for an explanandum. If they are related, then it looks as though one must take the -huayotl portion as part of a verbal element. In that case, the nelli might be embedded in it. Perhaps, in the broader family of Uto-Aztecan languages, there is some such connection. At present, there are no studies which confirm it.

These points suggest that while there is some semantic support for Miguel León-Portilla’s translation and Siméon’s hypothesis, it is not as strong as one might wish. Nelhuayotl only appears to mean getting at the truth when an additional verb is introduced, whether aci, “to reach,” or toca, “to accompany.” The morphological evidence would appear to require further research into Uto-Aztecan languages, and it is not clear that such evidence will ever be forthcoming.

Since the possibility for a connection between nelhuayotl and nelli is present but uncertain, it might prove more fruitful to look for alternative sources of support beyond the linguistic. What I propose is that there is a constellation of prevalent metaphors in Nahua philosophical literature that supports the view that the good life is what, in English, we might call the rooted life. I hold that it is this view which makes the most sense of what the Nahua said was the basic problem of the human condition, namely, that we are beings who slip up, who fall.

DO NOT FALL
León-Portilla’s analysis was originally developed from a philosophic interest. In book six of the Florentine Codex, the earliest of the volumes Sahagún and his team recorded, one finds the following common sayings accompanied by their glosses.

Tlaalauj, tlapezcauj in tlaticpac.
Çan ie no iuhquj in omjto: aço quin jzqujnpa qualli nemjiliz; çategan intla ipan vetzí tlacacalli, in ma iuhquj omalañu çogtítlan. 12

“The earth is slippery, slick.”
This saying is just like the one mentioned above: perhaps, at one time, a person was leading a good life, but later one fell into harm’s way, as if one had fallen into the mud.

The term for “good,” in the phrase “leading a good life,” is qualli, also spelled cualli, and it is an object noun derived from cuá, to eat. The idea of goodness at work in the passage, then, is close to what we in contemporary English might call “wholesomeness.” The reversal at stake, then, is from a wholesome life into a harmful one.

Since the gloss references the passage just above in the codex, it makes sense to look at that one too. The saying just above in the codex reads as follows.

Quen vel xijmaña in titeocujtlamjchin.
Quen vel xijmaña titeocujtlamjchin.17

“How goes it? Look to yourself well, golden fish.”
It is said when, if someone at some time was leading a good life, but later fell—perhaps he took a paramour, or perhaps he knocked someone down and that person became sick, or even died, and because of this the one who knocked him down had to go to jail—then it is said “How goes it? Look to yourself well, golden fish.”

For most the puzzling portion of the passage concerns the phrase “golden fish.” Some evidence suggests that certain animals were treated as possessing divine qualities, and color terms sometimes indicate the same point.18 In this case, “gold,” teocuicatl, literally means the excrement or deposit of gods, so the interpretation is not implausible. If any of that analysis is accurate, then the phrase is sarcastic. It means something along the lines of “How’s it going, Mr. Perfect? Take care of yourself now.” Even if this is not a sarcastic statement, so that perhaps the golden fish is something both prized and fragile, what is at stake is the sense that anyone can fall on hard times. These hard times, moreover, include cases that in contemporary philosophy are classed as cases of moral luck. Slipping up thus introduces the inescapability of moral luck as a permanent feature of the human condition.

León-Portilla’s translation and analysis of the xochicuicatl “poems” attributed to Nezahualcoyotl, including the one that opened this essay, develop an answer to this problem. Their point is not to extirpate the fragility that is constitutive of our condition, but to find wiser ways to manage it. The Nahua response to our evidenced failures is to learn how to lead a true life, how to take root on our slippery earth so that we do not fall. The connection León-Portilla proposes, then, is philosophically sensible, even if it does not have the linguistic support one might wish. There are other passages, moreover, which link falling down to a lack of prudence in the moral sense.

In the Primeros Memoriales, which were an initial collection of statements that later became polished portions of the Florentine Codex, one can read various discourses of the elders. This is a genre of writing unique to Nahua culture, as a Platonic “dialogue” is unique to the “West.” In one
articulated it, one might look to a pair of statements in discourses by elders to younger people. The first is from the sixth volume of the Florentine Codex. A newly appointed king, having been instructed by elders, now takes his turn as a speaker and addresses his new subjects, teaching them how to live. A little more than halfway through his long speech, the king begins to describe ideal lives of men and women. They are descriptions that are conceptually similar to what philosophers in the “West” have called the great-souled person, or the magnanimous individual.24 The king speaks as follows:

Auh in acovic, in tlalchivic itto, in nelli nammacho, tâmacho: in pochtol, in avevetl muchioa, in jtloc inaoac ximixtili camo tonemiliz.19

And he is esteemed. In truth, he is known as a defender, sustainer. He becomes the ceiba, the ahuehuete, next to and beside which one takes refuge.

Listen still my younger brother.25 What you say, your word, is sightless, as if you were blind. You are precipitous. Lead your life with wisdom. Don’t be stupid. Be prudent.21 Your proposal is not how one lives.

The term for precipitous in this passage is taacti-uetzi, which is related to the verb uetzî, to fall. The notion at work, then, is that one is acting too quickly, in the way that a fruit falls from a tree, without forethought. When noble women admonish each other, they similarly say “ma ça no ximovetziti, noconetzin ma ça no ximotlachatitinemi! I don’t fall! My child, live reflectively.”22

León-Portilla’s basic insight, that a life well-lived for the Nahuas is one that at least seeks some way to avoid falling so often, is both sensible and well-supported. For the Nahuas, one means for doing so was to live prudently. In contemporary philosophical jargon, one might put the matter this way: the performance of a good life is enacted through virtuous living. Rootedness would appear to be a tantalizing metaphor to express a life well-lived in this manner. It receives further confirmation in Nahua tree metaphors.

THE CEIBA AND THE AHUEHUETE

The Nahuas specifically identified two sorts of trees that metaphorically represented ideal human beings. The first was the ahuehuete tree, or as it is also called, the Montezuma cypress (taxodium mucronatum).

It is unsurprising that the Montezuma cypress is Mexico’s national tree. If you have ever stood in the presence of a great ahuehuete, or any similarly large tree, then you will have experienced the sense of calm and awe that surrounds them. Their size, sometimes that of a full city block, is arresting. Their thick trunks exemplify what it means to be sturdy, to stand firmly rooted in the earth. And while children play in the shade the tree provides, adults often use that same shade to take a moment of repose.

The second paired tree is the great silk cotton tree (ceiba pentandra), also called the great ceiba.23

The great ceiba, though somewhat smaller in size, is no less arresting, since it often stands above the canopy forest below it. Tall and firm, the tree prominently displays its massive root structure, which anchors it to the earth. Among the Maya, who shared the broader Mesoamerican culture with the Aztecs, the ceiba served as the image of the mythical world tree, which united the heavens and the underworld to our own middle earth.

The ethical sense of these great trees emerges from our experience before them. To understand how the Nahuas

In the discourses that Fr. Andrés de Olmos compiled, one reads a similar description when one nobleman teaches another about the good life.
Excellence requires that you take care of worldly things. Work, labor, collect firewood, plow the fields, plant nopales and magueys. It is from that that you will drink, that you will eat, that you will be dressed. It is with that that you will stand on your feet and live.

What I am here translating as excellence is the disfrasismo, qualli, yectli, the good and the straight. The context for the discussion, then, is clearly one that concerns ethical philosophy. The goal for a life led in this way, standing on one's feet, thus quite naturally serves the function of what contemporary philosophers call the good.

The father later reinforces this notion by detailing what will happen if his son does not learn to stand on his feet. He states that "Ca yc tixamaniz, ca yc tipoztequiz in tlalticpac / you will come to ruin, you will break on the earth." And in the next paragraph he tells his son the consequences of not living well, "Ca intla yuh ticchiuazin, ca ahmo yc titlacaquizaz / Because if you act thus, you will not emerge as a human being."

The end envisaged, then, is not like John Stuart Mill’s conception of happiness. While teleological in character, the highest good for a Utilitarian is external to the actions of the agent. It is an average of mental states, as a pot is a product external to the actions of the potter. The Nahua's understanding of the good life, by contrast, is internal to the action itself. It is like a dance on the world's stage. There is nothing left over, external to, the dance itself. The doing exhausts the activity. The father makes clear that this is how he understands the good life. Not acting thus not only means that one is not virtuous, but that one will fail to be a human being. These are the conditions for a good human life on the slippery earth.

Thus, three separate metaphors about the good life—falling on the slippery earth, strongly rooted trees that provide shelter, and weather the storm of disasters that are likely to assail any leader’s tenure.

A person who can learn to take root as the ceiba and the Montezuma cypress is thus the ideal for anyone who will lead a life successfully on the slippery earth. This person will also, in another metaphor, learn “to stand on their feet.”

**STAND ON YOUR FEET**
The opening discourse that Andrés de Olmos records is a long speech from a father delivered to his son. He seeks to teach his young son how to live well. The metaphor the father chooses to express a life well-lived is to learn to stand on one’s feet. He states the following.

In both passages, the charge of rulership is likened to the activity of the ceiba and the ahuehuete. The ideal nobleman and ruler is one who is rooted firmly in the earth so that he or she can act as a shelter for others, and weather the storm of disasters that are likely to assail any leader’s tenure.

**THE WAY**
One possible objection to the foregoing analysis might try to reconceive the Nahua's conception of the good life not as one where one learns to stand on one's feet or takes root on the slippery earth. It might instead be conceptualized as the way.
Having recalled that there is both a general conception of justice among virtue ethicists and that justice is, even in the “West,” a metaphorical notion drawn from following the path, it becomes clearer that in their discussion of the path, the Nahuas had something similar in mind. In fact, in just the next paragraph after the one quote on the path, the father develops his ideas in this direction explicitly. He states that by living well, “ic huel tetioc, tenahuac timonemitz / thus you will live next to and beside people.”31 The path in Nahuas ethics, then, is not the goal of a life well led, but a virtue for living well with others generally. Although it is not exactly what Aristotle and Plato recover from early Greek thought, it is recognizably understood as an articulation of justice in its general sense.

**RECONSIDERING NELTILIZTLI**

This essay began with a worry which stemmed from a rather obscure discussion among linguistic experts on Nahuatl, namely, whether nelli has any etymological connection with terms for roots nelhuatl and nelhuayoti. This specialized discussion has generalized implications. For if there is no linguistic connection between these terms, then not only is Miguel León-Portilla’s translation of the xochicuicatl inaccurate, but there is no firm foundation for the view that the Nahuas had a view of the good life as a rooted life. It may, of course, that the Nahuas conceived of the good life as only a true life. This might tilt their ethics to one centered primarily on enlightenment.

In response, I have argued that the metaphorical space surrounding terms used for the good life still fit the sense of rootedness. A more careful analysis of the semantic terms related to nelhuayoti reveals that there is a recorded sense of “going to the roots” as truth.38 This is also consistent with James Maffie’s claim that Nahuas epistemology is more way-seeking than proposition-verifying. The semantic connection is not weak, then, even if it is not overwhelmingly strong. The main difficulty is that the morphological connection between the terms is mysterious. It is also unclear if the evidence needed to clarify that mystery will ever be forthcoming.

My approach, then, has been to shift evidentiary registers. For philosophical purposes, I have argued, there is substantial evidence that the Nahuas conceived of the good life as one where a human being learns to take root so as not to fall on our slippery earth—or at least not to fall so often. The constellation of metaphors that supports this view link falling to imprudence and standing to prudence. Additionally, they speak of an ideal human being as a strongly rooted tree, the ceiba and the ahuehuetl, that can provide shelter for others. Finally, fathers instruct their sons, mothers their daughters, that they must learn to stand on their feet and that this involves learning to live well with others. Even if rootedness is not explicitly designated in these discussions, the metaphor is nonetheless apt.

I would like, now, to take a step further and bolster the semantic connection between these metaphors and truth in the following way. In Nahuatl, the term nelli is principally translated as “truth” or “true.” Abstract terms, however, are unlikely to emerge from nothing. They tend to be metaphors derived from homier and more tangible...
contexts." In English one might say "I am feeling up," using a directional metaphor to express a positive emotion. The expression "time flies" uses motion as metaphor to express the experience of the passage of time. Similarly, one might claim "I've never been able to grasp transfinite numbers," and so use an experience of object manipulation as a metaphor for intellectual comprehension. Might nelii, then, have a similar homier context? It seems likely. And I think that semantic evidence is found in the extended cases where nelhuayotl is linked to truth as verification, as the activity of going to the roots.

If any of the foregoing proves reasonably accurate, then the abstract verbal sense of acting to find the truth, neiltitzli, might still be the best single term for the good life among the Nahua. One great difficulty, in this regard, is that the Nahua resisted using single terms to express important notions. It is our contemporary desire for one term, a cultural bias, that pushes us in this direction. Having noted this caveat, the term neiltitzli is consistent with the Nezahualcoyotl passages about the good life. This life is, at least in part, the true life. Yet, the term might also act as a placeholder for the larger metaphorical universe about standing on one's feet, guarding against falling down, and growing roots to provide shelter. It proves no terrible stretch, as a result, to suppose that neiltitzli might carry an additional ethical sense: taking root on the slippery earth. This is the true life, the best performance of our lives, danced on the world's stage.

NOTES

3. These may be different for an author, as one may serve as a subordinator and another a demonstrative pronoun. Most commonly, however, they are both written "in."
4. As far as understand his position, León-Portilla died defending the view that these were Nezahualcoyotl's actual poems, remembered over centuries and eventually recorded. Interestingly, Lee's The Allure of Nezahualcoyotl: Pre-Hispanic History, Religion, and Nahu Poetry (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008) presented substantial evidence undermining that claim. James Lockhart presented the more moderate view, and did much earlier, that they could not be attributed to a single individual with certainty in The Nahua After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 392-401. Camilla Townsend defends the use of a variety of historical sources that Lee had argued were entirely compromised, including Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's history, in Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 223-24. And in the "introduction" to his more recent reconsideration of Nezahualcoyotl and his historical sources, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and His Legacy, edited by Galen Brokaw and Jongsoo Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3-28, Lee appears to have moderated his view.
6. I ask my fellow nahuatl speakers some latitude on these terms, for the moment. While it is true that "nelhuatl" is the standardly conceived nominal form, for the sake of simplicity in the presentation, I have preferred to use the term which Remi Simeon records. For those who do not have a good understanding of Nahua, this will prove easier to navigate, and those of you who do will not be troubled by my shifting between "nelhuatl" and "nelhuayotl."
7. None of this has appeared in publication, but it has emerged as a point of discussion among James Maffie, Joe R. Campbell, and me over email and in person. David Bowles also expressed a concern like Campbell's in another email discussion. The community is small, so that this essay is, in part, my attempt to get this matter into broader circulation.
9. Miguel León-Portilla, of course, makes his case for the philosophical character of the Nahua in his La filosofía nahuahtl: Estudiada en sus fuentes (Mexico City: Instituto de investigaciones antropológicas UNAM, 1993 [1965]). He develops point further in chapter eleven, devoted to education, in Aztecas-Mexicas: Desarrollo de una civilización originaria (Madrid: Algaba, 2005).
10. Huehuehtlalholtli: Testimonios de la antigua palabra, Recogidos por fray Andrés de Olmos hacia 1535, Introduction by Miguel León-Portilla, translated and transcribed into Spanish by Librado Silva Galeana (Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 1991), paragraph 55, page 330. Hereafter abbreviated as Huehuehtlalholtli followed by the paragraph number and page number. The translation accepts Silva Galeana's correction of "limmitzint" for "limmitzin." Note also that the author of this text often elided "in" with the following word as "im."
12. This is the main thesis of the second chapter of Miguel León-Portilla's La filosofía nahuahtl.
14. Rémi Siméon, Diccionario de la lengua Nahua o mexicana, translation by Josefina Olivia De Coll (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Press, 1981). Translations into English are my own. Although Siméon's entry is largely like Molina's, his additional wondering about the root term makes it a useful starting point for discussion.
15. Notably, Karttunen puzzles over this use in her entry for "nelhuayō-tl."
17. Florentine Codex, 6.41, 228.
20. This is a form of address that is polite and common when nobles address each other. There may be no actual familial relationships at work.
21. This is a disfasismo used in explicitly ethical contexts that closely approximates what is intended by the virtue of practical wisdom.
xi-mimati xi-mixtili. The first term concerns wisdom derived from experienced practice—deftness. The second concerns the awareness of adjusting one’s sensibilities to one’s surroundings.

22. Primeros Memoriales, 10, 295, fol. 70r.

23. I would like to thank Steven Broyles for helping me in identifying excellent specimens of these trees, and for lending me his knowledge as a tree biologist.

24. See, for example, where Aristotle speaks of magnanimity as the crown of the virtues, Nicomachean Ethics IV.3, 1124a1-2. Notably, and like Aristotle’s description, the Aztec description ties the conception to nobility. The difference is that the connection is even more direct for the Aztecs, as the man described is one who wears all the ornaments of a king. For the present ethical reconstruction, I will be careful to develop the framework in a way that does not commit it logically to this aristocratic outlook.


26. Olmos, Huehuehtlahtoli, 100, 386.

27. Olmos, Huhuehtlahtoli, 25, 300.


33. Olmos, Huhuehtlahtoli, 100, 386.


37. Olmos, Huhuehtlahtoli, 33, 308.

38. Perhaps Joe R. Campbell and I disagree on this point. I do not think he considered the way in which nelhuayotl, when connected with specific verbs, does mean something very much like truth.

39. This is, of course, the whole point of the now well-regarded literature of embodied cognition. Most of the examples that follow are taken from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 49-54.

Sacred Metaphysics and Core Philosophical Tenets of Native American Thought: Identity (Place, Space), Shared History (Place, Time), and Personality (Sacred Emergence of Relations)

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What might a Native American trained at the highest levels of academic philosophy in the USA say about Native American Philosophy in 2021? I respond to this query in the context of what I, a Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole woman, and a woman of Jewish descent, ponder from my experience.

1. Experience learning tells us learning, being, and knowledge are transformative, dynamic, and living.

Experiential learning of our experiential world tells us our world is a dynamic and living place, and the being and knowledge of this experiential world are dynamic and living. Knowledge of our living relations transform with geography and seasons. This creates an ongoing history of emergent and always emerging relational knowledge transformations. For example, if I am going to go hunt, I will need my geographic and seasonal hunting knowledge to be predictable and relate to that particular natural world. I want my experience with the world to be of that world as a metaphysically unified practical experience. I want this so that my hunt will be predictable and successful. Each living being, both myself as hunter, as well as the hunted, experience in a place, and that place is embodied with a history of relations and relational being(s). Both the hunter and hunted, as well as all other living beings in that place, share relationship responsibility of respectful action. To know this place, as predictable, I need to show proper respect for self and all my relations in this place. I must have the best knowledge I can of what maintains balance, or harmony of relations in this place. I want this in order for a continuity of relations to remain without harm to that living world, for life is sacred. In this sense this dynamic and interactive worldview is at the core of my individual and communal identity. This Native American identity and its incumbent dynamic and living knowledge, frequently metaphorical, is a sacred issue for Native American and Mother Earth survival. This would be so for all physical and metaphysical relations in this place, in our cosmos.

Suppose I see the hunted move into a dark area of the valley forest where our hunters seldom visit. If I as hunter wish to follow it there, then I will need to be guided by a metaphysical principle that all sacred life is related. As such it is within a context of dynamic and emergent natural law received and developed by and for survival means. For success, sustainability, and survival of my community and myself, I will need to know my relations with being of this place. To know this place, as hunter, for me, is to have experiential knowledge of practical and sacred hunting relations in this particular place (environment). It is to know the dynamic and emergent forces of life in this place. Such knowledge is sacred to personal and community survival as it preserves being. Now let us consider the philosopher as hunter, and the doing of philosophy, by analogy.

If I am hunting knowledge of academic philosophy, and I plan to enter a predominantly European American worldview-oriented academic institution to study philosophy, I will need to know about the relations of being in that place. I will need to know whether and how I will be able to search for and find sacred living philosophical knowledge of being that I seek in that place. If I do not understand the experiential relations of being and time in that environmental place, then I must want to seek to learn them, or not go there, lest I fall prey to become the hunted. Importantly, I will need to understand whether what passes
as knowledge in this place is not static, but lives in and through the living being (and beings) of the academic institution. This is because I believe that all knowledge is emergent and dynamic. So I want to remember that all this that passes as knowledge therein is dynamic and living. And what counts as sacred, life, in this place, arises from interaction of worldview and relations as lived over much time and space. I want my learning, being, and knowledge to be transformative, dynamic, and living.

2. Knowledge is not value-free.

Knowledge cannot be value-free, nor can any Native American science, for they are both produced toward the survival purpose of need-to-know relations in a place or galaxy (environment or cosmos), across linear or meaning time (historic or cyclical), or among particular personalities (all my relations). Understanding identity of particular relations, for me, results from experiential knowledge of living personality as it continually comes to be, and manifests itself to me, over place and time. Native American knowledge and action within the context of living relations is pragmatic first in place and time. Pragmatic because its purpose is of survival meaning.

My communal environmental survival relations maintain and sustain an ever-transforming world. Importantly, that world must remain in balance or harmony for myself and my people to survive. I am because we are, and if my sacred knowledge of life does not maintain the balance or harmony of our world, I understand that we, the human people, will not be able to continue. Because I value life as sacred, I understand the purposeful aspect of knowledge. I understand this world to be ecological (in located place), practical (pragmatically effective), and moral (valuing of respectful cyclical relations). Such knowing need not be unchanging and can carry a variety of different pragmatic observations over time and place, such as: “The sun comes up and we get warm,” or “The moon appears larger and women have bodily reproductive changes,” or “The deer go into the darkness and they escape our arrows.”

My knowledge and understanding of these metaphysical facts come from my family and community, from my own valued experience of hunting (in academe), as well as my lifetime of accumulated literal and metaphorical learning in this time and place. This knowledge is gleaned over time via experience and experiential metaphor, as that metaphor (story, ritual, dance) operates in my life over time. My belief that I ought to follow the deer will not alone bring me the pragmatic practical success of my survival. I must have metaphysical knowledge of relations in this place and time to survive, and over time, to survive well.

Climate changes or galactic changes may affect the warmth of the sun; a violent war may affect the reproductive cycles of women; and a violent danger or disease may affect our knowledge of whether it is good to follow the deer into the valley of the dark forest. In this way Native American metaphysics is intimately born from, tied to, connected with, or related to the sun and moon, to pragmatics of deer in dark places, to reproductive activity, and to survival information. In this way my experiential learning and metaphorical learning in this time and place lead my way and provide insight into my actions. This knowledge as knowing sacred, sometimes metaphorical survival metaphysics, is sacred to me, for without it, I and others may not exist. Nor is it value-free, for it is the most valuable knowledge toward my, and my community’s, survival. We see here how the metaphorical knowledge of hunting, as manifested in perhaps song, dance, or other ritual, is sacred and malleable (and yes, ever emergent) through time and space. Thus, my need to act upon shared knowledge makes my worldview of the universe I/we live in a moral acting. I do what is right, or correct, according to my emergent communal survival pragmatic and metaphorical meaning worldview. This is a pragmatic respect of moral relations. It is a metaphysics ecological, sacred of place and time.

3. Metaphysics is ecological, sacred of place and time.

Such knowledge is ecological because the sun coming up or warming me is so only in some places at some times, and sacred because women respond sometimes differently to moon cycles over long stretches of time and place, because our bodies are by practice and spirit attuned over time and experience to the pull of galactic forces. This bringing to us warmth, and pulling of our bodies, experientially, tells us we are related to (in relations with) other being(s) in this place, and in our cosmos. Before we follow a deer into the darkness we must already know, by experience (and her sister, intuition), whether it is good to retreat from the valley following the deer tracks in this way. Alternatively, we may stand back and respect the being that follows the emergent natural law of survival. Whether I follow or not may depend upon my intent and need for reciprocity with the deer. Respectful action, in this way, may lead me to success in my hunt IF I know the cyclical and practical relations within the forest (and my relationship needs to those relations at a given time). My success is not dependent upon my beliefs, but upon my knowledge of relations in that place and space over time, understanding that what is true of place though retained in memory may change over time. This knowledge is gleaned over time via experience and experiential metaphor, as that metaphor (story, ritual, dance) operates in my life over time. My belief that I ought to follow the deer will not alone bring me the pragmatic practical success of my survival. I must have metaphysical knowledge of relations in this place and time to survive, and over time, to survive well.

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4. Metaphysics takes on belief practices and suspended judgment toward balance.

Over time this metaphysical (allegorical and metaphorical) information takes on some belief practices in our bodies and memory as they successfully predict for us survival activity. This metaphysical understanding of all relations is the glue of our communities, families, kinship, minds (all our relations); they hold us together. And because they present pragmatically successful beliefs for us (pragmatically true), they become good metaphysical beliefs for us so long as place and relations remain connected and affecting all our relations in our universe in respectful ways over time. They are sacred beliefs because they protect life. They are moral beliefs because we act upon information that will bring about our value of sacred balance, a good in our universe. Aside from heat, dinner, children, elders, all things assisting in the survival of our species, including maintenance of balanced relations among living beings, our actions, intimately connected to our metaphysical beliefs,
need to show respectful understanding of our kinship, of an interconnected universe. This analysis suggests it is important to act upon the good of relations that maintain a balance of life and species preservation, or harmonic relations, within the universe. A good hunt is a sacred hunt because it is balanced by respect and knowledge, and it continues life. This metaphysical balance of being located in our place, a place of knowing and feeling predictability of respectful interactions and relations over time, is a Native American good. This balance leads us to the good red road, a place Native Americans talk about.

A Native American metaphysics is one of place (ecology), complexity (anomalies count and may show a new way), emergence (things change in places), aliveness (seasonal), and morality (changes toward purpose and respect for and in balanced accord with all things in the universe changing). Such a metaphysics respects all relations in our universe. It is a pragmatic metaphysics, able to transform over time and place. Its depth and organization show our complex metaphysical moral realm of respect for life. It presents to us a possibility of survival at times in a suspended judgment understanding that all knowledge is emergent and interpretive over time and place. In this way Native American metaphysics takes on belief practices and suspended judgment toward balance.

5. Morality is pragmatic among dependent human beings.

Pragmatic truths of Native American metaphysics are born out of observation and experience alongside a moral (sacred) sense of being in the world, simply because we are all related to all being of the universe, and being and life are sacred, as active agents. Dan Wildcat puts it this way: “we human beings, in all our rich diversity, are intimately connected and related to, in fact dependent on, the other living beings, land, air, and water of the earth’s biosphere. Our continued existence as part of the biology of the planet is inextricably bound up with the existence and welfare of the other living beings and places of the earth: beings and places, understood as persons possessing power, not objects.” Hence, morality is pragmatic among dependent human beings.

6. Experience of relations becomes sacred knowledge.

This sense of being and emergent reality in the world arises from our experience—in awe and wonder we observe creation’s ongoing power and how we are related in this metaphysic, in what we might call a spiritual, or sacred way. This view of the lifeworld stands in contrast to inspired mechanistic views, and various religious views, that sometimes describe or bemoan our species as the output of an abstract master builder. A Native American religion is one of sacred knowledge and practice, experience, and respect for all our relations in the cosmos, one of a metaphysical and cosmological balance (harmony); it is particular, it is personal, it is sacred, and it is related to all.

In a Native American worldview, a metaphysical relation becomes sacred by human experience rather than human proclamation, declaration, or precept. In the process of a lived experiential relationship something as simple as corn, and the tending to corn, is sacred because of an inherent power (living energy of our universe), place (environment, sacred balanced relations of things to each other), and personality (personal purpose properties). Vine Deloria tells us that power and place equals personality, and personality is about properties and personal moral relations. It is about completing (maturing) purpose within the universe. “The broader Indian idea of relationship, in a universe that is very personal and particular, suggests that all relationships have a moral content.” Completing our particular relationships in experience as we mature matters to our community, family, and personal survival. Completions of maturity matter.

It is sacred knowledge that brings us (unifies our intimate understanding) to recognize metaphysical properties that feed life, community, and self. In this way we make survival sense of the world we live in. Our understanding becomes unified through our experience, through maturity. As humans tend the corn, it thereby enriches (sustains) our life and that of our environment as it is carefully sown in a sacred cyclical manner. These interactions create consistent balanced patterns of relations of power (energy), in particular places and times, under particular conditions. Humans are required to cultivate and create the corn’s emergence into the physical world (place), yet the corn is also required by its purpose (personality) upon maturity, to strengthen our bodies, thereby enriching and fulfilling our lives and our relations with corn. Similarly do we understand the hunting of deer, other activities, and human relations, and harmony of being(s).

Currently, most academic Native American philosophers have been at least in some ways culturally assimilated into the dominant philosophical academic societies, culture’s influence, and colonial education institutions. They have studied alleged colonial “universal truths” as though they were their own (or the only) history of ideas, yet knowing differently. Our own tribal knowledges teach us to respect our own traditions of personal experiential learning and seemingly anomalous information. Vine Deloria explains the nature of how concepts of “power” and “place” help to define for Native American philosophers principles of Native American forms of knowledge:

Keeping the particular in mind as the ultimate reference point of Indian knowledge, we can pass into a discussion of some of the principles of the Indian forms of knowledge. Here power and place are dominant concepts—power being the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe, and place being the relationship of things to each other. . . . Power and place produce personality . . . the universe is personal and, therefore, must be approached in a personal manner. . . . The broader Indian idea of relationship, in a universe that is very personal and particular, suggests that all relationships have a moral content.

This sense of sharing personal relationships suggests for Deloria that all relationships have a moral content, and that “knowledge of our universe cannot be separated from other sacred knowledge about ultimate spiritual relations.” Oral traditions of Native American stories explain about
these relations and the human role in helping to mature and complete relationships of our world and the universe. To act in consonance with the nature/personality of the universe and all things in it, the Native American moral personality considers all possible known and intuited effects of our actions in that moral universe. This is sacred metaphysics in action, and may be metaphorical in learning and practice. It is pragmatic. Relationships are personal, particular, and sacred; they are moral. Places create relationship, and these relationships make for morality in the Native American worldview. Experience of relations becomes sacred knowledge.

7. Sacred metaphysics requires completion/maturity.

When Deloria tells us that “power” and “place” produce personality, he means for us to understand that because we must seek out and sustain personal relationship in nature, in our universe, as we move through and interact within that universe, our universe for us is a personal one that exhibits a particular personality of moral content, or a sense of duty. This duty is simply to do our fair share to maintain the universe in balance as best we can. We do this in order to complete relationships necessitated by attention to the effects of our actions upon those harmonic relations of sustainability. Thus the need for a healthy “suspended judgment” in our thoughts about the world lest we lose balance of relations.

Thus, if we are respecting those affected by our actions, and their personalities’ completion, we cooperatively create and maintain our personal relationships throughout time (on a continuum of cyclical growth experience) and of place (environmental source of knowledge). Time in this sense can be measured by our actual experiences in and with the world, in cycles of power (universe energy) and place (relationships of being to one another) as we mature. In this way we develop a personality (metaphysic) of how things function in the world based upon the completion of relationships, for example, the time for the corn to ripen and how the squash and beans might respond to that power (energy) and place (effects of relationships one upon another), and our nourishment made possible by fulfilling our relations with the corn. The growing corn ripens, and its attendant squash and beans may be understood as a metaphor of nature’s balance and sustainability. Time is cycles of power and energy in places, bearing out relationships to being; as we mature we develop a personality (metaphysic) of how things are in the world, and as we complete relationships we mature. So just as the corn ripens, so also particular relations and relationships are fulfilled as the cycles of life continue.

This means that when ‘a’ happens and then ‘b’ happens, the sequential relationship is not a set of cause-and-effect principles, but a guide to the psychological behavior (open predictability) of plants, or animals, or other living being. This Native American philosophy seeks to understand how power (energy) and place (relations) produce personality (personal moral context of relations), such that a bear may embody relations of medicine, an owl relations of death, and snakes as anticipating thunderstorms. Power and place produce personality because our natural world is personal (because of relations), and our perceived relationships are ethical (because they participate to create or fulfill purpose-maturity). Sacred metaphysics requires completion/maturity.

8. To be human is to participate in and complete sacred metaphysical relations.

Humans are involved in these relations and all have a role to play in the functioning of our natural world. In this context of relations and being, time becomes the growth and fruition of all things toward their maturity as they fulfill personal particular moral relations in the universe. In this way alongside the physical form of our universe (matter) as it appears to us, lies a spiritual universe of personality comprising ethical relationships. And in this way bear, owl, and snake learning knowledge and relations become for us sacred knowledge and relations. And they maintain their metaphorical power in story. Importantly, knowledge of such relations requires experiential verification, not logical proof. Experience and verification is but one way of learning. Our universe is not merely a universe of matter, but one that is ever-changing to us and spiritually lives within us over time and maturity, and in this way has come to exert certain physical forms we observe as it moves toward an ever-changing maturity.

Put simply, “the energy described by quantum physics appears to be identical to the mysterious power that almost all tribes accepted as the primary constituent of the universe.” For Native Americans, what is, in our world we live in, requires a sense of suspended judgment, for all things seemingly change in our universe over time and place. In this way our metaphors remain open and malleable, able to express our sacred knowledge as it emerges over time and our knowledge of the universe. Metaphysically, then, the universe shares in spiritual likeness of the world we live in: personal; particular; complex; emerging; of experience; relational; moral; pragmatic; and changing. Because for us our universe is seemingly ever-changing, and for us we retain our suspended judgments of science, hold fast to our particular experience, and stand in awe and wonder, as we bask in the metaphysics of wonder, respect, and hope for sustainable tools of survival at our disposal. While at the same time, we remain attuned to our metaphysical relationships and obligations of our ever-situated family of moral relations in the universe. We understand that life being changes in sacred and pragmatic ways, over time and place, while we remain among all our particular relations in our galaxies. To be human is to participate in and complete sacred metaphysical relations. Mitakuye Oyasin.

NOTES

2. Deloria and Wildcat, 23.
3. Deloria and Wildcat, 22-23.
4. Deloria and Wildcat, 23.
5. Deloria and Wildcat, 23.
6. Deloria and Wildcat, 27.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


FROM THE EDITOR

Dwayne Tunstall
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION
This issue of the newsletter begins with the "Footnotes to History" section. In it, Stephen C. Ferguson II (NC State University) shines a spotlight on the life and legacy of George Jackson (1941–1971). Ferguson claims that "Jackson's writings, largely ignored in political philosophy and theory, place him as one of the most significant proletarian intellectuals—behind Hubert Harrison and Malcolm X—of the twentieth century." I hope that reading about Jackson will motivate readers to learn more about his political philosophy and his place in African American political thought.

I am excited to publish Anwar Uhuru’s contribution to this issue of the newsletter. In “The Polemical as Non-Violent Protest: James Baldwin and the ‘Gendered,’ Black Body,” Uhuru invites us to consider James Baldwin’s work beyond its contributions to queer theory. Uhuru contends that Baldwin’s work can be better understood on its own terms if we think of him as a gender/genre theorist rather than as a queer theorist. That way, we can appreciate how Baldwin’s work is a non-violent contestation of whiteness and the erasure of Black Male existence within and outside of heteronormative spaces.

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. 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.

DEADLINES
Fall issues: May 1
Spring issues: December 1

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FORMATTING GUIDELINES
• The APA Newsletters adhere to The Chicago Manual of Style.
• Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use italics instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (–).
• Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

FOOTNOTES TO HISTORY

George Jackson (1941–1971)

Stephen C. Ferguson II
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

... there is some considerable awareness that ever since the days of slavery the USA is nothing but a vast prison as far as African descendants are concerned. Within this prison, black life is cheap, so it should be no surprise that George Jackson was murdered by the San Quentin prison authorities who are responsible to America’s chief prison warder, Richard Nixon.

— Walter Rodney, “George Jackson: Black Revolutionary” [November 1971]
It is quite obvious that where [W. E. B.] DuBois and myself were observing a situation, taking part, organizationally in our various ways, but guided by theoretically, that is to say intellectual development, the generation to which Jackson belonged has arrived at the profound conclusion that the only way of life possible to them is the complete intellectual, physical, moral commitment to the revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

– C. L. R. James

Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.

– Mao Tse-Tung

People who come out of prison can build up the country. Misfortune is a test of people's fidelity. Those who protest injustice are people of true merit. When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out.

– Ho Chi Minh

George Lester Jackson (September 23, 1941–August 21, 1971)

There are probably five major theorists associated with the Black Panther Party: (1) Huey Newton, (2) Eldridge Cleaver, (3) Angela Davis, (4) Fred Hampton, and—last but not least—(5) George Jackson. While some prominent Black Panther figures at the time dabbled in Marxism-Leninism and the ideal of a socialist government, Jackson was heads and heels above everyone. Jackson's writings, largely ignored in political philosophy and theory, place him as one of the most significant proletarian intellectuals—behind Hubert Harrison and Malcolm X—of the twentieth century.

The life and legacy of George Jackson has to be seen in the context of the penal institutions in the United States. Punishment under capitalism "must be viewed not as a social response to criminality of individuals, but, above all, as a mechanism which is deeply implicated within the class struggle between rich and poor, bourgeoisie and proletariat." Penal institutions play a significant role in strategies of class rule. It is an expression of State power.

Born September 23, 1941, on the West Side of Chicago, George Lester Jackson was murdered on August 21, 1971, at the age of twenty-nine. While serving an indeterminate sentence for armed robbery in 1961, the young criminal Jackson was transformed into a Black liberation philosopher.

Jackson grew up in a working-class family in Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California. He was the second of five children of Lester and Georgia Jackson; his sisters Delora, Frances, and Penelope in addition to his brother Jonathan. His father, Lester, was a postal worker. Lester Jackson obtained a transfer from the post office and moved his family to Los Angeles, California, in 1956.

On September 18, 1960, Jackson allegedly drove the getaway car after his friend robbed a Bakersfield, California, gas station of $70.20. Jackson was offered a plea bargain in exchange for a lighter sentence. On February 1, 1961, less than one year later, Jackson was tried and convicted of second-degree armed robbery and accessory after-the-fact. However, the judge sentenced Jackson to an indefinite imprisonment despite the initial offer of a plea bargain. Jackson was imprisoned at the California Training Facility in Soledad, California, in 1961 at the age of eighteen.

Jackson's one-year sentence became life imprisonment. Bourgeois penal law effectively made the parole board, not the judge or jury, the sentencing body; it alone decided when and under what criteria people had proven themselves sufficiently "reformed" to be released from prison. He spent the rest of his life—eleven years—in the California prison system, seven in solitary confinement. Jackson's accomplice, who confessed to having played the lead role in the gas station robbery, was released from prison after two and a half years. In prison Jackson read widely and transformed himself from "pure prison gangsterism" into an activist and political theoretician who defined himself as a Marxist revolutionary. He self-described himself—at one point—as a "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Fanonist." Jackson was committed to transforming the "black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality." David Johnson observes: "Comrade [George] was an exceptional individual and driven by his passion for revolution. The immense amount of knowledge he had acquired prior to our meeting he had honed to be as sharp as a samurai sword. While in prison, he studied economics, history and philosophy, transforming himself into a political theoretician and strategist."*4

San Quentin's prison boxing champion W. L. Nolen, a major figure in the developing prison-based political movement, was the first to introduce Jackson to radical philosophy. As Jackson's disciplinary record grew, he was forced to spend up to twenty-three hours a day in solitary confinement. There he read Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Friedrich Engels, Mao Tse-tung (Ze-Dong), Che Guevara, Kwame Nkrumah and other political theorists. In 1968, Jackson, Nolen, David Johnson, James Carr, and other revolutionary convicts began leading "ethnic awareness classes"—which were essentially study groups on radical philosophy.

In January of 1969, Jackson—along with Nolan—was sent to Soledad Prison (California). On January 13, 1970, W. L. Nolan, Cleveland Edwards, and Alvin "Jug" Miller were shot on a prison exercise yard, during an altercation with white prisoners. Three days after the killings were ruled justifiable homicide, a guard named John V. Mills was killed. Despite a lack of evidence, Jackson and two other prisoners—Fleeta Drumgo and John Wesley Clutchette—were charged with Miller's death. The three of them became known as the "Soledad Brothers."

The same year, Bantam Books published Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson, a political manifesto of sorts. Through personal letters, written between 1964 and 1970, we witness the personal and political transformation of Jackson into a Marxist theorist. From Jackson's early anti-authoritarianism, we witness the emergence of the red dragon.
Jackson's inner thoughts, observations, and cogitations offer insights into the impact of imprisonment on an individual. Jackson embodied the discontent of many prisoners within the penal system. As Jackson observes, confinement is "the closest to being dead that one is likely to experience in this life." Reading and studying was the only way Jackson survived imprisonment. "I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me," he wrote. Jackson was constantly teaching, learning, and organizing.

Historically, prisons have transformed criminals into "proletarian intellectuals" such as Malcolm X. Jackson reflects: "There are still some blacks here who consider themselves criminals—but not many. Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study, and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate, or dedicated to the ultimate remedy—revolution. The most dedicated, the best of our kind—you'll find them in the Folsoms, San Quentins, and Soledads. They live like there was no tomorrow. And for most of them there isn't."  

Two months before the publication of Soledad Brothers, Jackson's seventeen-year-old brother, Jonathan, entered the Marin County Courthouse with automatic weapons. (Several of these weapons were registered in the name of Angela Davis. Reportedly, a .38 caliber pistol, a .30 caliber rifle, a .30 caliber M-1 carbine, and a 12-gauge shotgun were registered to Davis.) Jonathan Jackson entered the courtroom in which Judge Haley was presiding over the trial of San Quentin prisoner James McClain, who was charged with the attempted stabbing of a Soledad guard. Jonathan Jackson armed McClain and, with prisoner witnesses Ruchell Magee and William Christmas, herded the assistant district attorney, Judge Harold Haley, and three jurors into a van parked outside. Law enforcement officers fired upon the parked van without regard for the hostages, as was prison policy, killing Christmas, McClain, and Jackson; wounding Magee; and killing Haley and wounding other hostages.

In the summer of 1971, Jackson, Drumgo, and Clutchette were transferred from Soledad to the "adjustment center" at San Quentin. In his cell, 1-AC-6, on the first floor of the adjustment center, George spent long hours working on his second book, Blood In My Eye—a political treatise on urban guerilla warfare and fascism. It was published posthumously in 1972. Blood In My Eye is one of the most significant books in Black political philosophy.

While in prison, Jackson met Huey Newton. Subsequently, Jackson was appointed "field marshal" of the Black Panther Party, and was tasked with recruiting more prisoners to join the Black Panther Party.

Jackson's initial political awakening came through the critique of religion. Jackson's militant atheism is evident in the following passage:

> Forget the Westernized backward stuff about god. I curse god, the whole idea of a benevolent supreme being is the product of a tortured, demented mind. It is a labored, mindless attempt to explain away ignorance, a tool to keep people of low mentality and no means of production in line. How could there be a benevolent superman controlling a world like this. He would have to be malevolent, not benevolent. Look around you, evil rules supreme. God would be my enemy. The theory of a good, just god is a false idea, a thing for imbeciles and old women and, of course, Negroes. It's a relic of the past when men made words and mindless defenses for such things as seas serpents, magic, and flat earths.

Jackson spent most of his prison sentence shuffled between San Quentin and Soledad Prison. Jackson presaged: "Anyone who passed the civil service examination yesterday can kill me today with complete immunity. I've lived with repression every moment of my life, a repression so formidable that any movement on my part can only bring relief, the respite of a small victory or the release of death. In every sense of the term, in every sense that's real, I'm a slave to, and of, property."

Jackson, prisoner A63837, was killed at the hands of San Quentin prison guards during an alleged attempted prison escape on August 21, 1971, a month shy of his thirtieth birthday. The exact circumstances of Jackson's death still trouble historians.

Three days before his murder, Jackson rewrote his will, leaving all royalties as well as control of his legal defense fund to the Black Panther Party. At the time of his death, Jackson had spent eleven of his twenty-nine years—and almost all of his time as an adult—behind bars; a good portion of that time was spent in solitary confinement.

In the aftermath of Jackson's murder, there were chants throughout the prison: "The dragon is free!" And "Funerals on both sides!"

Blood In My Eye was completed only days before Jackson was killed. It is composed of letters and essays dealing with fascism, urban guerilla strategy, and Marxist political theory. It is a significant contribution to the philosophy of revolution. And it should be required reading for political philosophy courses.

Jackson's writings about political consciousness, fascism, the sociology of racism, and Marxist-Leninist political philosophy served as a central counter-argument to Richard Nixon's "law and order" politics.

Jackson's funeral was held at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland, California, on August 28, 1971, nearly one year after his younger brother Jonathan's funeral. Thousands of Panthers and sympathizers raised their fists at Jackson's funeral, where Huey Newton gave a deeply emotional eulogy, emphasizing Jackson's "love for the people."

A month after Jackson's assassination, the largest prison revolt in US history occurred at Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York.
In 1972 George’s mother—Georgia Jackson—petitioned the United Nations to investigate the circumstances of his death.1

The murder of Jackson sent Archie Shepp, Bob Dylan, and Steel Pulse into the studio to record tributes to him. Jackson was eulogized in the jazz, pop, and reggae idioms. The jazz saxophonist Shepp released “Blues for Brother George Jackson” on his 1972 Attica Blues album. Dylan did a single, “George Jackson,” and the British reggae band Steel Pulse recorded two songs, “George Jackson,” a cover of Dylan’s song, and “Uncle George,” on their 1979 album Tribute to the Martyrs. The group actually re-recorded “George Jackson” and “Uncle George” on the 2004 album African Holocaust. Jackson’s impact was so great that Warner Bros. attempted to cash in on his image by producing a 1977 film Brothers starring Bernie Casey, Vonetta McGee, and Ron O’Neal. The soundtrack was performed by Taj Mahal. The 2007 film Black August directed by Samm Styles and starring Gary Dourdan (based largely on Gregory Armstrong’s 1974 book The Dragon Has Come) covers the last fourteen months of George Jackson’s life.

NOTES
2. Jackson, Blood In My Eye, 139.
3. Ibid., xi.
6. Ibid., 16.
8. Ibid., 204-05.
10. Ferguson, “Another World is Possible.”

REFERENCES

ARTICLE
The Polemical as Non-Violent Protest: James Baldwin and the ‘Gendered,’ Black Body

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How does an individual go from being a subject of grief to being a subject of grievance? What political and psychical gains or losses transpire in the process?

— Anne Anlin Cheng

The Black male body is polemical. It is a site of public and private contestation.

— Bryant Keith Alexander
James Baldwin’s writings, speeches, and interviews are in a moment of resurgence in both the public and academic sphere. The release of Raoul Peck’s documentary I Am Not Your Negro and subsequently the cinematic release of Barry Jenkins’s film adaptation of Baldwin’s novel If Beale Street Could Talk has centered Baldwin as a cultural icon. The publication of Eddie S. Glaude’s book Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own is another recent instance of the resurgence of Baldwin in the public and academic sphere. Yet, Baldwin’s work must be read without the risk of an ahistorical interpretation because of the implicit bias of centering a twenty-first-century intersectional reading of his work. Instead, readers of Baldwin should take the context in which Baldwin wrote into consideration. By reading his work fully, and not with the intention of looking for mere slippage as a way to insert a post-theory application, it will situate Baldwin as an authoritative thinker. Despite his clear articulation in his speeches, writings, interviews, and conversations that constantly pushes against a neo-liberal apologist mode of appeasing white guilt and anti-Black and anti-Black misandrist methodologies, his work is still read in the form of fragmentation. What I mean by fragmentation is a watered-down post-structuralist approach to reading that does not see texts and thought as a whole. Because the general approach to reading Baldwin’s writings, his personal life, and legacy are articulated in a now canonical and rhetorical methodology that adheres to identity politics and inclusivity.

The purpose of this essay is to argue that Baldwin’s intellectual property is a contestation against whiteness and the methods of Black erasure in general and Black male annihilation in particular. In pushing against traditional, or what has become traditional, ways of analyzing Black thought, it will highlight why figures like Baldwin are read in fragmentation. Rarely, if ever, does that mode of reading see texts as a critique and contestation of systems of power and oppression. Instead, it fragments the already fragmented form of critique. Hence, if a critique of a system or systems of power appears in the written critique, it is only at the benefit and exercise of the loss of white power.

Fragmentation involves only looking at texts through lenses that only reify the displacement and non-being of those who are oppressed and marginalized. Fragmentation is another method of incorporating intersectionality that at best only sees parts of people and their writings. A fragmented reading of Baldwin’s writings will view his writings as protests of the displacement of Black beings in terms of “the negro problem.” He would argue that Negroes or Black people are not problematic; the problem is whiteness.

Another aspect of a fragmented reading of Baldwin’s writings is to have Baldwin’s sexuality and his use of bisexual and queer-affirming characters in his novels only serve as discourse on Black marginalization. Yet, Baldwin’s articulation of sexuality in his writings goes beyond heteronormativity. He does not and refuses to privilege sexual difference as adhering to a model minority status. Instead, what is consistent is Baldwin’s articulation of a Black male body. His articulation of a Black male body pushes against the strictures of how the system of whiteness works without ceasing to annihilate the Black male body.

During an interview on the Dick Cavett show in 1968, the Yale Philosopher Paul Weiss, in an attempt at policing and silencing Black rage, asks Baldwin, “Why must we always concentrate on color?” Baldwin knows that Weiss’s question is a way to appease white guilt. He replies to Weiss’s question by explaining why he left the United States in 1948 and even mentions Malcolm X’s saying that Sunday is the most segregated day in America. Baldwin does not stop with quoting Malcolm X. He concludes his reply to Weiss with this eloquent, and dare I say mic drop, response:

I can’t afford to trust most white Christians, and I certainly cannot trust the Christian church. I don’t know whether the labor unions and their bosses really hate me—that doesn’t matter—but I know I’m not in their union. I don’t know whether the real estate lobby has anything against Black people, but I know the real estate lobby is keeping me in the ghetto. I don’t know if the board of education hates Black people, but I know the textbooks they give my children to read and the schools we have to go to. Now this is the evidence, you want me to make an act of faith, risking myself, my wife, my woman, my sister, my children on some idealism which you assure me exists in America, which I have never seen.

Baldwin’s response to Weiss has to be given a bit of context. Baldwin is reacting to the state of Black life in 1968. It is three years after the release of the Moynihan report and the assassinations of Malcom X and John F. Kennedy. This dialogue takes place one month after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and it is a month before the assassination of Bobby Kennedy. The importance of retaining the oppression of Black people and Black manhood is met with death. It is not just death of the Black body, but also those who recognize and uplift Black people. By daring to not only speak, but fully articulate the humanity of Black males and working to end their annihilation, the one daring to speak may be greeted with death.

On the eve of the Early Modern period of Western Modernity, Leonardo Davinci sketched his Vitruvian man. The repurposing of Ancient-Greco Roman male-centrism as complete human and non-male as incomplete human doesn’t just centralize the male body, but the white male body. Not only does the Vitruvian man center white maleness, it centers white males as complete and white females as incomplete bodies. Bodies that are outside of whiteness are seen as devoid of a body. Bodies outside of the lens of whiteness are seen as nonhuman/nonbeing. The only body outside of the ideal body that may obtain secondary status is the body of white women. The bodies of non-white men and women may obtain tertiary status if white people designated them as belonging to a group that is categorized as the model minority. In the world of whiteness, if you do not fall in one of those categories, then you are rendered and seen as just flesh.
In thinking of Black being in general and Black queer beings in particular, how does grief transform into grievance when Black being is erased in the discourse? Black corporeality is in a constant configuration of the anagrammatic. It is, as Amir Jaima argues in “On the Discursive Orientation toward Whiteness,” that whether it is an encounter of Blackness or how Blackness appears within a text the articulation of Black being in American thought rearranges itself for white reading and un-reading. In thinking of Black being and “gendered” being, the anagrammar articulates “Blackness as a/ temporal, in and out of place and time putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made.” I understand Christina Sharpe’s intimations of anagrammatic, but what I push back against is that if the Black body is a/temporal than that erasure of being erases gender. However, if you want to include gender/genre, then the basis of Black being cannot be seen by the Western (whiteness) definition of male/female. Yet, as Jaima notes, the writing of Black being and “gendered” being is “the epistemological import of this narrative posture is that subjective experiences contribute to the author/narrator’s authority as a knower.” In the argument of centering whiteness, the knower is whiteness whereas the unknown/ non-knower is Black being. Consequently, the lasting effect of the Vetruvian man is white male/white being as centrism. Secondly, white male-being and white centrism allows whiteness to insert/import the epistemological definition of being.

Where do we go from here? How do we attempt to go from the reading and to unreading from an antitemporal to the temporal and epistemological notion of Blackness? The state of Blackness is, as Jaima argues, an act of unreading or, as Sharpe and Hortense Spillers claim, as grammar.

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Twenty-one years before Baldwin’s birth, Booker T. Washington edited a collection of essays titled The Negro Problem. The collection features seven prominent thinkers addressing “the negro problem.” In his essay, “The Talented Tenth,” W. E. B. DuBois argues,

I am an earnest advocate of manual training and trade teaching for Black boys, and for white boys, too. I believe that next to the founding of Negro colleges the most valuable addition to Negro education since the war, has been industrial training for Black boys. Nevertheless, I insist that the object of all true education is not to make men carpenters, it is to make carpenters men.”

Consider DuBois’s argument that training to be a man and not a carpenter is an articulation of Black manhood. Considering his intellectual forefathers, Baldwin’s definition of manhood is a result of the intellectual capital of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B DuBois. Yet, there is nothing accommodationist about Baldwin’s perspective on Black life and the threat of whiteness. This is evident in what Baldwin said during a conversation François Bondy that was published in 1964 in the magazine Transition. In that conversation, Bondy stated, “One element which you have very much stressed in your own books is the erotic. I don’t think we should ignore it when talking now.” Baldwin’s responded by saying,

Well, we can’t ignore it, but we can’t do much about clarifying it either. It is very strange. Black men represent a personal, emotional, sexual, psychological threat for an American. I think it is one of the penalties for the power that the American white man has had over Black flesh for so long. That kind of license is always brutal; it does terrible things to the object, and it does ghastly things to the perpetrator.

The license of brutality in thinking through the social dominance of Black lives, which is falsely justified through the psychological, sexual, emotional, and personal attack on whiteness, is what articulates Baldwin’s Black masculinity. Baldwin’s essays, dialogues, and debates are discourses on gender. However, he is narrowly theorized by many contemporary theorists as being a mere writ of the protest polemic or on sexuality. That is not to ignore the importance of reading him that way, but only reading him that way creates a closed dialectic. Instead, I argue that Baldwin uses polemical prose to constantly articulate the role that whiteness has on the discourse of American power and how white manhood is the source of that power.

Baldwin’s exploration of white American power in his work is evident in his articulation of the dynamics between Black men and women. He does this articulation by focusing on the roles of responsibility and “place,” or displacement, of Black men in the world of whiteness. His articulation of Black Manhood in his writings, ranging from his essays “Stranger in the Village,” “Letter to My Nephew,” and “Freaks and American Ideal of Manhood” to his lectures in Europe and his novel Giovanni’s Room, go beyond a single monolithic narrative. Yet, Baldwin shows in fiction, non-fiction books, and lectures that you cannot escape whiteness, no matter where the Black fleshy being resides. What is even more important is that Black masculinity, or at least constructions of Black masculinity as hypersexual and beastly or palatable and eunuch-like, is what is branded onto the fleshy being. Baldwin does not abandon this project in his work, especially his fiction, which is often read as an exploration of sexuality, family, and class. However, his writings go beyond those rhetorical tropes because they are explorations of Black manhood. I would even make the claim that his true project, which is threaded throughout
all of his texts, is the task of thinking of the complexity and plurality of Black Malehood.

Baldwin’s articulation of Black gender dynamics with particular attention to Black Manhood is how he works between the duality of the human body and Black flesh. As Calvin Warren argues in *Ontological Terror*, “‘colored people’ are nothing precisely because they are not viewed as men in the ‘true and proper sense’” instead of being free in the sense that one resists being swallowed up in non-being, “free Black does not restore ontological resistance”; therefore, “the flesh[y] Black [body] is relegated to the abyss.” Re-routing Black flesh from the abyss is Baldwin’s project. Flesh for Baldwin is how Black male-ness is not only sent to the abyss but rendered absent of life.

Baldwin’s essay “We Be Dragons or Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” is his most deliberate discourse on gender. He begins with the concept of androgyne. He states, “to be androgyne is to have both male and female characteristics. This means that there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man.” Yet, that duality is not acknowledged until “the chips are brutally down.” It is only when Black men are murdered, incarcerated, or exiled that Black women’s duality becomes visible. However, if the reverse occurs, Black men will hold or are beholden to “the lady of the races.” Whether there is an absence or presence of Black women to be desired for white consumption, the Black male is thingified. His flesh is malleable; he is not allowed to occupy the duality of both provider and protector or nurturer and warrior. Instead, the androgyne of Black men is transformed into both beast of burden and disposable object. Baldwin argues that the notion of the displacement of Black bodies is what Wynter and Tommy J. Curry call “genre” or what Spillers and Sharpe calls “grammar.” The abyss is the a/temporality of Black flesh in a white world and imagination. Baldwin’s articulation of malehood is from the abyss and embodiment of Black flesh.

From the perspective of Black flesh from the abyss in *Essence* magazine published a conversation between Audre Lorde and James Baldwin in 1984 titled, “Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde.” In that conversation, Baldwin stated, “it is assumed that it is safer to be white than to be Black. And it’s assumed that it is safer to be a man than to be a woman. These are both masculine assumptions. But those are the assumptions that we’re trying to overcome or to confront.” Yet, the engagement of Black flesh and the abyss is ignored when scholars engage with this text, largely because of the ways in which intersectionality adheres to a lens of whiteness and respectability politics.

Respectability politics is to appear as liberatory while relieving whiteness of any guilt and simultaneously promoting anti-Blackness. Currently, there is a wall between Black cis-gendered men and women in the discourse on gender, despite the shared history of slavery, colonization, and institutional racism. It forces people to think and face the fact that not just Black people in general but Black males specifically are exploited for their intellectual and coalition building labor. Yet, because of this exploitation it marks Black women as the spot of absolute suffering and annihilation and Black men as the perpetrators of that violence. The result is that it absolves whiteness and anti-Blackness from being the root cause of annihilation of Black people. Therefore, Blackness remains in the abyss as in all of its fleshy identifiers. In my reading of Baldwin, I see him as setting the groundwork for contemporary scholars who work within what Saidiya Hartman calls “the after-life” or what Wynter calls the “demonic grounds” and how those two terms inform what Spillers calls “grammar” and Sharpe defines as “ana-grammatical Blackness.”

The connection of shared struggle for moving beyond Black flesh to human wholeness is nonexistent due to sociopolitical narratives of Black men as predatory, vile, and fragmented. Feminist and Womanist critiques privilege libidinal capital without considering the complexity of enslaved and emancipated Black men. Nor does it take it in the betwixt and between-ness that are the existence of Black men in the twenty-first century. The betwixt/between exists because the Western world has not dealt with the legacy of slavery, colonization, and Jim Crow. Instead, it ends with new versions of oppressive regimes. At the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century, more Black men are incarcerated and are killed by state-sanctioned violence than when the laws condoned overt discrimination on the basis of race and biological sex. One argument is that it is the result of a backlash of having a Black man as president for eight years. I will not spend time arguing President Barack Hussein Obama’s Blackness, but I will argue his policing of Black male bodies. In response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, Obama instituted “My Brother’s Keeper,” which is an initiative to mentor Black males. The result is that it taught Black male respectability, which is how to appear and present as “less threatening” to those who inherently see Black males as a threat. His policing of Black males does not stop there. In a commencement speech addressed to the graduates of Morehouse College (a historically Black college for men), he told the graduates to not hold on to past narratives of oppression. Obama also told them:

“We’ve got no time for excuses—not because the bitter legacies of slavery and segregation have vanished entirely; they have not. Not because racism and discrimination no longer exist; we know those are still out there. It’s just that in today’s hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil—many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did—all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned.”

That is a false equivalence. Those who are given a fiscal or racial inheritance are granted things that they have not earned. They are given those things because they exist despite previous labor and legislative powers that grants them their privileges. Yet, Black men are not allowed to be given opportunities for being because they are flesh in the abyss. Obama’s speech erases this reality, and instead whitewashes their flesh by saying that they are to pull themselves up and make a way for themselves.
Despite educational and fiscal upward mobility, cis-gendered heteronormative and cis-gendered queer/quare Black men are reduced to fetishistic images of either white consumability and respectability or hypersexualized predators. Discourses that acknowledge and include Black men are reduced to being misogynistic, homophobic, privileged, and reverse racist. How is it that a gender that is not only historically, but also in current society a state-sanctioned target of death and dying privileged? Are they privileged because of brute strength, which is hypersensationalized to articulate their monstrous beastly characteristics? Perhaps privilege for Black men and boys is to be seen as the bull’s-eye on a target that is marked for death. Being marked for death is not just the abyss but beyond the abyss. It is being marked for annihilation. In the case of Black males, it is to be subjected to suffering until they become extinct.

In an essay titled “5 Signs Your Idea of ‘Intersectionality’ Is Anti-Black Racism in Disguise” Hari Ziyad states, “I thought being free was to walk without the cares and burdens I was forced to carry, and that Liberation became synonymous with whiteness [because] within whiteness, being free means taking up space with no regard for whom you are taking it from.” For example, white people can highlight an opioid problem without decriminalizing those who went to jail for possession of crack cocaine and legalize marijuana without decriminalizing those who were in possession of it. I will not only list but explicate each one of Ziyad’s five signs of anti-Black racism in disguise. The first sign is, “You Emphasize Similarities to Gloss Over Differences by stating things like: ‘at the end of the day, we are all the same!’” This call for sameness is similar to the abovementioned speech given by Obama. By telling Black men and boys to not expect things but only work for them is a neo-liberal narrative of exploitive labor. Replacing forced labor by paid labor is not only a hypercapitalist discourse, but is also a neoliberal narrative of enslavement and being in the abyss. It merely sees Black men and boys as flesh that can be purchased and exploited. The second sign is, “You want ‘Everyone to be Treated Equally.’” However, “the ‘equality’ that we desire is usually a stand in for ‘how white people are treated.’” Being treated that way always comes at the detriment of others, especially Black folks.”

As stated previously, it denotes inheritance and systemic privileges that are not afforded to Black people in general and Black males in particular. Conversations on Black suffering have to be followed by appeasing white guilt. White guilt is not just for those who identify as white or those who benefit from white privilege; it also appeases the guilt of those who exemplify anti-Blackness. The third sign is that those who benefit from white privilege may seek to elicit empathy, but ultimately “empathy will always benefit those who are in the position to best be empathized with over those who need care the most.” The third sign of anti-Blackness in disguise is similar to the second one, but it is more expansive in that it argues why intersectionality is not the ideological trope for an anti-racist and anti-Black misandrist discourse. At best, however, intersectionality makes members of marginalized communities recognizable to others in dominant communities. It never addresses systems and tools of oppression used against marginalized communities. If they are recognized at all, they are recognized because it is currently a moment of political correctness. Wrongs committed against them are excused, and the ones who wrong them yet empathize with them can apologize before actual issues are brought to the table. Those who articulate their systemic oppression are corrected or silenced because it makes someone feel bad. They are also subjected to the retraumatization of reliving their experiences of violence by telling their stories to empathetic white people. Secondly, the reliving/reftell can only be done by using language of inclusivity and padding it with the phrase trigger warning. It would also mean acknowledging who can and does experience violence from those who are said to not be capable of such violence.

The fourth sign of anti-Blackness in disguise is, “It upsets you when people don’t celebrate ‘progress’ or incremental change. Because incremental change always and only benefits those closest to the people in power in the first place, those farthest away will likely never benefit.” Labeling entire communities as homophobic, oppressive, sexist, or misogynistic is an example of false equivalencies because it seems as though a community is not progressive because progress is marked by white standards of inclusivity. Progress and incremental change only benefit those that are systemically or at the brink of benefiting from privilege. For example, the Women’s Rights movements and affirmative action continues to only benefit white women. Marriage equality only benefits white LGBTQ+ identified people. Black LGBTQ+ people are the largest population that suffers from suicide, murder, homelessness, and HIV infection. Yet, those coalitions remain silent on advocacy for eradicating those disparities. Instead, those groups often depict the Black heteronormative community as being homophobic and transphobic.

Lastly, Ziyad’s fifth sign of anti-Blackness in disguise is, “You’re more concerned about marginalized people gaining ‘rights’ than people who are losing power.” Ziyad notes that “incremental progress should never be the goal (even if it is celebrated), we have to make sure that we are always focused on dismantling the power system in general.” Marginalized people are often described as model minorities regarding race and gender. When those model minorities lose their power, they rely on coalition building. The biggest example of immediate coalition building is the Women’s March in 2017, which was depicted as a protest to the election and inauguration of Donald J. Trump, despite the fact that 54 percent of those who voted for Trump were white women and model minorities. Yet, the resources to coalition build co-opt the labor of Black men, Black women, Black LGBTQ+ people, and minorities of color in order to take back what was once theirs.

Ziyad, by discussing five signs of anti-Blackness in disguise in relation to intersectionality, insists that there is an analysis of an inadvertent dismantling of distorted approaches to intersectionality. Those five signs or points serve as a gateway to think through the ways that the Western invention of gender does not allow for Baldwin or any other Black man to existence as a man. Oyewunmi Oyeronke
argues that the Western invention of gender\(^4\) (and, as I mentioned earlier, what Curry and Wynter call "genre") problematizes the ways that gender discourse does not allow for a full anti-oppressive theory and praxis of gender. Instead, it situates binary Vitruvian “man-centrism.”\(^5\) Vitruvian-Man-centrism is extremely problematic when we are not only looking at cis-gendered Black men and women, but also transgender and gender non-conforming Black people. Thinkers who engage with Africana-Black Thought need to engage with the works of Baldwin to have a Black critique of gender that goes beyond the confines of queer theory and queer of color theory. Like feminist theory, queer/quare theory does not interrogate the ways in which whiteness appears in the form of a racialized Black body nor does it explore the differences within and between cis-gendered-heteronormative racialized Black bodies and LGBTQ racialized Black bodies.

Wynter’s genre theory is important for any Black critique of gender because Wynter sees race and the gendered Black body as being conflated into one thing. As Wynter notes, “I am trying to insist that race is really a code-word for ‘genre’ our issue is not the issue of ‘race.’”\(^6\) Our issue is the issue of the genre of ‘Man.’ As she states, “It is this issue of the ’genre of ‘Man’ that causes all the —isms.”\(^7\) This is why I argue that Spillers and Sharpe’s “grammar”\(^8\) and “anagrammar”\(^9\) and Warren’s abyss argue that Black flesh and the abyss that it resides in are below the distinctions of gender. Blackness in the white imagination does not distinguish between male/female. Yet, if we are to have a discourse on Black female-ness and the history and contemporary state of their subjugation, we must insist on a discourse on Black male-ness and the state of their annihilation. This is why Curry argues that, unlike in mainstream masculinity scholarship, there have been few efforts to verify non-hegemonic Black masculinities sociologically or conceptually separate from the already established norms in gender studies. As Curry notes,

Black males, who are stereotyped as hyper masculine and violent throughout society, are intuitively marked as patriarchal within theory. Instead of being similarly disrupted by the critiques of hegemonic masculinity’s failure to account for the class and cultural diversity within white masculinities, hyper-masculinity is proposed as the phylogenic marker of Black maleness. Consequently, Black males are thought to be exemplifications of white (bourgeois) masculinity’s pathological excess. In other words, the toxic abnormality of a hegemonic white masculinity becomes the conceptual norm for Black men and boys.\(^10\)

Like Baldwin, Curry is arguing for the space to have a conversation on the exclusion of Black male vulnerability from the view point of patriarchy and intersectionality. Curry, like Baldwin before him, notes that if Black men and boys do not confine to the strictures of white patriarchy and racist constructions of being and the confinement that it imposes, it is grounds for the extermination of Black men and boys.

We need to read Baldwin as a genre/gender theorist because Baldwin never identified with the Gay movement. He made this clear in an interview with Richard Goldstein entitled “Go the Way Your Blood Beats,” which was published in June of 1984, the same year as his published conversation with Audre Lorde for Essence magazine. When Goldstein asked him the question, “Do you feel like a stranger in gay America?”, Baldwin responded:

Well, first of all I feel like a stranger in America from almost every conceivable angle except, oddly enough, as a Black person. The word gay has always rubbed me the wrong way. I never understood exactly what is meant by it. I don’t want to sound distant or patronizing because I don’t really feel that. I simply feel it’s a world that has little to do with me, with where I did my growing up. I was never at home in it.\(^11\)

Then, Goldstein asked him, “Do Black people have the same sense of being gay as white gay people do? I mean, I feel distinct from other white people.” Baldwin responded,

Well, that I think is because you are penalized, as it were, unjustly; you’re placed outside a certain safety to which you think you are born. A Black gay person who is a sexual conundrum to society is already, long before the question of sexuality comes into it, menaced and marked because he’s Black or she’s Black. The sexual question comes after the question of color; it’s simply one more aspect of the danger in which all Black people live. I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, into a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly. Their reaction seems to me in direct proportion to the sense of feeling cheated of the advantages which accrue to white people in a white society. There’s an element, it has always seemed to me, of bewilderment and complaint. Now that may sound very harsh, but the gay world as such is no more prepared to accept Black people than anywhere else in society. It’s a very hermetically sealed world with very unattractive features, including racism.\(^12\)

What is important is that Goldstein views himself as a minority in relation to white people who are heteronormative. Hence, anyone who is LGBTQ identified has reason to identify as an oppressed person since they are not fully accepted by their white heteronormative counterparts. Yet, Goldstein fails to realize that he is still seen as a white man; although queer affirming and Jewish, there is a whiteness that he himself cannot deny. Goldstein’s view that a white LGBTQ person can be an oppressed person in the same way that Black LGBTQ people are oppressed ignores Baldwin’s Blackness and instead only sees his being, or personhood, through a queer affirmation. Baldwin refused to affirm his queerness as being the same as white queerness because doing so would entail denying his Blackness, his manhood; it would also become a false passage into white respectability. For Baldwin, who often speaks of his experiences of violence and racism within the white queer community, would have
been silenced because Goldstein's queer/gay identity is saturated in a white imagination and mobility. The saturation is so palpable that Baldwin himself was not willing to affirm and profit from this false passage. He realized that affirming his queerness without affirming his Black maleness would erase his Black Manhood. This is why I insist on Baldwin being categorized as a gender/genre theorist more so than a queer theorist.

Yet, during his 1984 conversation with Audre Lorde, critics have accused Baldwin of "delegitimizing Lorde's struggle as a Black queer woman dealing with many systems of oppression." I insist on pushing back against that claim because, as Ziyad argues,

my gender is Black is to emphasize the importance of recognizing how none of us Black folk conform to manhood and womanhood as those constructs have been formed, nor can we even conform to queer, trans and non-binary genders that way either—the way that makes the state recognize us as human. Ultimately, Gender identity under whiteness is a tool, not an end.

Secondly, if critics would read Baldwin's "Open Letter to Angela Davis" and "Letter to My Nephew," they would quickly realize that he (Baldwin) knows fully that all Black Lives Matter. However, when Black men and boys matter, then there will be a revolutionary moment within the struggle for affirming Black being. Therefore, the goal is to work against an institutional/canonical fixity of the limited scope on what isn't read as politically correct which serves at retaining a specific positionality. Modes of retaining a specific positionality paint the picture of how Black men and boys are perceived when they put their genre up-front and into the conversation. Hence, nonpopular and emerging theories on Black men and boys have to work through that level of minutiae and toxicity in order to circumvent statements like delegitimizing the struggle of a Black women, queer people, and trans-people who are dealing with many systems of oppression.

In his conversation with Lorde, Baldwin states,

for whatever reason and whether it's wrong or right, for generations men have come into the world, either instinctively knowing or believing or being taught that since they were men they in one way or another are responsible for the women and children, which means the universe.

Lorde responds by saying "mm-hm." Her verbal acknowledgement is not only a signifier that her definition of men centers white men. Baldwin's use of "men" is a rhetorical trope to show that Man is not Black man. Furthermore, man or white men is the nucleus of whiteness. It neither allows nor ever will allow any form of centrality for Black people in general and Black men in particular. However, when Baldwin states, "You don't realize the only crime in this republic is to be a Black man?" Lorde disagrees and says it is to be Black and that includes me. Baldwin never says that it isn't a crime to be a Black woman, but he said "real crime." "Real crime" for Baldwin is death.

It is articulated in his essay "Letters to My Nephew" that death or perishability is the real crime for Black men and boys who are seen as men. To see death as a Black man and as Black flesh acknowledges the continuity of flesh in the abyss. It is to "un-read" as Jaima reminds us of the ways that whiteness co-opts how language and its signifiers are how Baldwin's articulation of Man is misread.

Baldwin continues his reading of Man during his dialogue with Lorde. Despite institutional/canonical methodologies of reading Man, he does not back off on his claim of Black man as the point of annihilation and extinction. As he states, "A Black man has a prick, they hack it off. A Black man is a nigger when he tries to be a mode for his children and he tries to protect his women. That is a principal crime in this republic." After his statement, Lorde has to admit that she and other feminists are guilty for blaming Black Men instead of institutional racism. For example, in her essay "Man Child," she states, "I wish to raise a Black man who will not be destroyed by, nor settle for, those corruptions called power by the white fathers who mean his destruction as surely as they surely mean mine." However, she proceeds to say that "but the particulars of a structure that programs him to fear and despise woman as well as his own Black self." Hence, she too needs to work to not fear and despise her own son or someone else's son because of the intricacies of power.

Secondly, what Lorde, as well as other womanist/feminist thinkers, is forced to think about is allowing Black men and boys to love their bodies, including their pricks. To love their bodies and pricks does not erase Black women. Nor does it erase non-heteronormative people from exercising their right to be and love who they love. Yet, the intervention in Lorde's essay and conversation with Baldwin fell flat because she identified "man" as a universal qualifier. Subsequently, Lorde herself and those who accept Lorde's universalizing a problematic concept of man and apply it to all males become contributors to the rhetorical erasure of Black malehood.

By accusing Baldwin and her son of the possibility of inflicting violence on themselves and others is reinscribing the trope of Black man as monstrous and the site of inflicting violence. That infliction of violence is not only embracing their body and its parts, but the mere composition and the ability to exercise their masculinity implies erasure of Black women and queer Black people. Her misreading of Baldwin's Man and Black malehood is a key reason why Lorde herself and those who see her as providing the template for articulations of Black queer bodies cannot see Black masculinity as anything other than violent. Interpreting Black masculinity in the way Lorde does is part of a larger discourse and a world, in which the need to police, silence, and contribute to the annihilation of Black masculinity is not only allowed but celebrated. It is as Houria Bouteldja states: "the non-white male gender is just as dominated, maybe even more in white milieus."

Working through a queer existence is another white milieu. That is why Baldwin pushes back against Goldstein's concept of oppression. His oppression is at the expense of Baldwin's Blackness. Even Lorde states, "for survival, Black
children in America must be raised to be warriors." This is why, during their discussion, Baldwin states,

what happens to a man when he’s ashamed of himself when he can’t find a job? When his socks stink? When he can’t protect anybody? When he can’t do anything? Do you know what happens to a man when he can’t face his children because he’s ashamed of himself? It’s not like being a woman." 24

Sexuality does not matter. Black manhood is predicated on the ability to do. To do is the ability to push through the dysfunction of existing while being a target of annihilation.

Bouteldja’s articulation of the oppression of non-white males is a more recent statement of Baldwin’s correct observation that others perceive of Black males as being the perpetrators of real crime. As I mentioned earlier, real crime is not just what can be grounds for incarceration and criminalization; it is the attempt to exist beyond flesh. Being a whole body beyond the abyss of flesh is the real crime that would dismantle and subsequently destroy whiteness. However, it would also mean destroying all the institutions that feed it. It would mean that Black males would no longer face annihilation and extinction. For example, during their exchange, Lorde admits that “we have to take a new look at the ways in which we fight our joint oppression because if we don’t, we’re gonna be blowing each other up.” 27 Blowing each other up is what those in power hope for and antagonize. Giving illusions of power to oppressed groups works to continue the annihilation of Black male bodies. It continues the tension between Black men and women as well as Black boys and girls.

By thinking of Baldwin as a theorist of and advocate for Black male gender/genre forces is to think of no longer contributing to Black male annihilation. We have to begin, as Baldwin notes, to “redefine the terms of what woman is, what man is, how we relate to each other.” 28 He continues by stating, “but that demands redefining the terms of the western world.” 29 For Baldwin, the Western Man is central, and it is through the eyes of DaVinci and Vitruvius that we can see what Man is central. Yet, he argues that the Black sense of male and female is much more sophisticated than the Western idea. This can be argued because “Black men and women are much less easily thrown by the question of gender or sexual preference, and all that jazz.” 30 To be thrown by Western confines of gender and sexuality is arguably to be thrown by the confines of the Western idea of gender and sexuality or the centrality of Western man. The ability to go beyond Western man is to read Black men in texts that seek to annihilate them. Reading the work of Baldwin as a gender/genre theorist would be an intervention in how contemporary methodologies work to silence, police, and annihilate Black male existence. Current methodologies that do engage in the work of Baldwin covertly work to undo his existence as a Black man and his advocacy for the existence of Black males. His works go beyond an articulation of Black bodies and being while his own state of being resides in the abyss.

NOTES
2. Bryant Keith Alexander, Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity (AltaMira Press, 2006).
3. I Am Not Your Negro, directed by Raoul Peck, written by James Baldwin (Magnolia and Amazon Pictures, 2016).
5. See Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own (Crown Publishing Group, 2020).
10. Christina Sharpe states in her book In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Duke University Press, 2016) that “regarding Blackness, grammatical gender falls away and new meanings proliferate; how ‘the letters of a text are formed into a secret message by rearranging them’ or a secret message is discovered through the rearranging of the letters of a text.”
11. In his essay “On the Discursive Orientation toward Whiteness” Amir Jaima states that, in addressing a white narrator, we are compelled to negotiate the significantly limited persuasive potential of an interlocutor who is unsympathetic—if not simply hostile—to research questions that pertain to race and racism. “On the Discursive Orientation toward Whiteness,” The Journal of Intercultural Studies 40, no. 2 (2019): 210–24.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Obama launched My Brother’s Keeper in February 2014 (during Black History Month) to address persistent opportunity gaps facing boys and young men of color and to ensure all youth can reach their full potential. In 2015, the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance (MBK Alliance) was launched. In late 2017, MBK Alliance became an initiative of the Obama Foundation, www.obama.org/mbka/.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. Italics added by author.

31. Ibid. Italics added by author.

32. Ibid.


35. See Leonardo Davinici’s 13.6 in. x 10 in. sketch “Vitruvian Man” c. 1490. The original is in Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice, Italy.


37. Ibid.


40. Ibid.


42. Ibid.


49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.


53. Ibid.

54. Ibid. Italics added by author.

55. Ibid. Italics added by author.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.
LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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The editors of the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy are happy to welcome our readers to our fall 2021 edition. We offer you an article, a book review, a challenge for students, and some poems.

The article, “Choosing an Anthology for Teaching Introductory Philosophy,” is by Steven M. Cahn. It is directed at young professors who are entering the teaching profession and whose college or university has asked them to handle a standard “Intro” course for which no specific set of readings has been prescribed. Graduate schools of philosophy do not normally prepare their students for teaching and they rarely have on hand bibliographies of introductory anthologies of readings in philosophy, so the new teacher has to go it alone in choosing materials for his or her first semester. After having considered and rejected one possibility (course packs containing the teacher’s favorite articles from graduate school), Professor Cahn turns to anthologies or collections of classic and contemporary works (or parts of works) by thinkers in the “canon.” He is aware of the difficulties in this approach, but he concludes that a judicially chosen anthology, where cost and relative difficulty are also considered, is the best choice. The author concludes with a list of anthologies that might fill the bill. The editors would like to add a note of caution: one’s first opportunity to teach Introduction to Philosophy is fraught with dangers, one of which is having a classroom of students who are either bored or overchallenged. The teacher would come away from such a disaster questioning his own worth as a teacher. The new teacher should seek input from older philosophy teachers about the average freshman’s comprehension level at the college. She should next read over, before the semester begins, each anthology article she intends to assign and develop a strategy for communicating the force and point of each, and then for tying together the selections for each unit so that students can measure their cumulative significance for the topic under question.

Next is a review by Rick Repetti of P. Boghossian and James Lindsay’s How to Have Impossible Conversations. The book offers training for instructors in informal logic on how to declaw classroom discussions of “hot button” issues familiar to citizens of our politically and morally polarized society. Professor Repetti writes that the strategies presented in the book assist instructors in “finding ways to respectfully engage students without triggering their defenses, shutting down inquiry, and perhaps intimidating the rest of the class,” rather than teaching “weaponize techniques for defeating one’s ideological opponent.” The end sought is the “restoration of faith in civil discourse.”

We then present a short piece entitled “A Free Will Puzzle” by Steven M. Cahn. The puzzle is meant to challenge students to consider how, were they to be given the option of trading the exercise of their free will for a guarantee of their lifelong marital happiness, they would judge the wisdom of deciding one way or the other. (In a postscript from the editors, readers are asked to share the success of their presentation of this puzzle in generating fruitful discussions amongst the students to whom it was presented.

Finally, Felicia Nimue Ackerman offers us some poems that suggest amusing but also deep questions about the teacher-student relationship, the editing of journals, and competition in Academe.

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 material that we receive are generally listed in the Books Received section of each issue of our publication, due to the present circumstances we have no publications to list in this issue. However, as always, readers are welcome to suggest material for review that they themselves have used in the classroom and found useful. 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.

As always, we encourage our readers to write of their experience as teachers for our publication. We also welcome articles that respond to, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.
The inexperienced teacher is apt to plan the course by choosing favorite articles that were discussed in graduate school and making these available online or having the bookstore collect them in a course pack. An obvious difficulty with this approach, however, is that materials appropriate for a graduate seminar are not likely to suit the needs of beginners. If this concern is not taken seriously, then one semester of implementing the plan will clarify its inadequacy.

Furthermore, the online or course pack options are not as free of technical difficulties as might be supposed. After all, the bookstore needs to obtain permission to reprint any copyrighted material, and the resultant fees, sometimes large, will be passed on to students in the price of their course pack. As for placing copyrighted material online, the process needs to be carried out within a variety of legal constraints that may require consultation with the school’s general counsel’s office.

Is another choice available to instructors? Yes, but it is unlikely to have been mentioned in graduate school, where thinking about such matters is at best neglected or at worst disparaged. An available option is to use an anthology in which readings are grouped by topic and drawn from historical and contemporary sources. Undergraduates thereby become acquainted with major issues, read important past and present writings on each subject, and think through controversies for themselves.

Although the numerous introductory readers differ in many ways, they all contain fifty to a hundred selections, plus a variety of pedagogical features, including introductions, study questions, bibliographies, a glossary, an index, and so on. Importantly, each collection reflects not merely the preferences of its own editors but input from numerous instructors around the country whose names are usually listed in the acknowledgments. Such assistance from those who have taught the course in institutions large and small is an invaluable resource for editors. Why not, then, have a look at their work? I have heard at least three reasons for not doing so.

First, anthologies can be expensive. True, and if the cost of a text is prohibitive, it should not be used. Yet collections at a reasonable price are usually available.

Second, anthologies contain more material than can be covered in a single course. Again, true, but the anthology displays the breadth of the subject, and students can easily explore topics of interest that the instructor might have bypassed, whether from lack of time, interest, or familiarity with all the articles. An anthology thus frees students from the perspective of any single instructor.

A third concern is that no anthology contains the exact readings any instructor wishes to assign. Granted, but one or more collections are likely to fit the teacher’s preferences, offering most of what is wished as well as unexpected material that may work well. Thus, the only reasonable way to decide whether an anthology might be an effective choice is to view its contents. Blanket rejection
of all possibilities, sight unseen, is unjustified and most often stems from unfamiliarity with current options.

In addition, obtaining review copies of these books is simple and cost free. Any instructor can email the leading textbook publishers and request their introductory anthologies. Publishers, hoping for an adoption, will be pleased to provide the books. (Incidentally, graduate departments would provide a valuable service for their students by obtaining the most widely used readers and making them available for review.)

Each anthology should be checked not only for price and coverage but also for the difficulty of the readings. The same philosophical issue can be approached through either relatively simple selections or far more complex ones. While a demanding book may be appropriate for a sophisticated audience, assigning overly difficult readings to students unprepared to handle them is a common cause of classroom distress. Admittedly, studying philosophy is challenging, but why ask students to read materials that few, if any, can understand?

One important guideline in selecting any book is never to adopt one that has not been examined personally. For students on a tight budget to be asked to buy a book, then be told later that it doesn’t contain the right materials, is, to put it mildly, annoying.

On an autobiographical note, my first teaching assignment fifty-five years ago was leading discussion sections of introductory philosophy at Dartmouth College. Our anthology was the then preeminent collection, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap. Edwards was immensely gifted as an anthologist, and the sections of the book for which he was responsible, those titled, “Determinism, Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” “Body, Mind, and Death,” “Moral Judgments,” and “The Existence of God,” are models of ingenious editing. Unfortunately, the book was never updated after 1967, but its structure has been adopted by many of the numerous collections that have appeared since then.

I myself have been involved with four such coedited books. They are *Reason at Work: Introductory Readings in Philosophy* (Harcourt Brace), edited with Patricia Kitcher, George Sher, and Peter Markie; *Philosophical Horizons* (Wadsworth/Cengage), edited with Maureen Eckert; *Philosophy for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Reader* (Oxford), with associate editors Delia Graff, Robin Jeshion, L. A. Paul, Jesse J. Prinz, Stuart Rachels, Gabriela Sakamoto, David Sosa, and Cynthia A. Stark; and *The Elements of Philosophy: Readings from Past and Present* (Oxford), edited with Tamar Szabó Gendler and Susanna Siegel.

I have also undertaken a couple of introductory anthologies on my own. Only a few years ago I edited *The World of Philosophy: An Introductory Reader* (Oxford), now in its second edition, which includes not only standard analytic materials and Western historical texts but also writings reflecting Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Arabic, African, South American, Chicano, and Native American sources. Yet judging from the comments of colleagues and reactions of students, my most successful attempt has been *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology* (Oxford), originally published in 1999 and now in its seventh edition. The topics covered are reasoning, knowledge, mind, free will, identity, God, moral theory, moral problems, society, social justice, art, the meaning of life, and Asian outlooks. The collection combines clear recent essays with influential historical sources, and many of the articles have been edited to sharpen their focus and enhance their accessibility. While an unfortunate feature of most introductory anthologies is their focus on the work of men, one-third of the contemporary essays in *Exploring Philosophy* are authored by women. Overall, I have been pleased to hear from various instructors that even students not drawn to philosophy have found the book engaging.

In sum, instructors may suppose that deciding on an appropriate text is not worth much time or effort. The opposite, however, is the case. For success in the classroom depends not only on the quality of teaching but also on the content of readings. An unwise decision on the materials to be studied can undermine student interest, while an appropriate choice can be a boon to learning.

(This essay is a revised and expanded version of an article that appeared on the Blog of the APA on May 9, 2019.)

**BOOK REVIEW**

*How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide*


Reviewed by Rick Repetti

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*How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide* (hereafter “the Guide”) offers a highly researched set of theories, principles, guidelines, strategies, examples, and lessons designed to enable the reader to engage in difficult conversations with anyone on any topic. While it is written as exactly what its subtitle suggests, namely, “a very practical guide,” the Guide is, in my view, an ideal, practical, auxiliary text for informal logic, reasoning, critical thinking, and even political philosophy, debating, and public speaking courses, for reasons which should become obvious shortly. Philosophy instructors in the increasingly incredibly polarized universe of discourse in which we find ourselves in the current political climate can benefit from teaching its many excellent theoretical, practical, strategic, and intuitive principles, illustrative examples, and insightful analyses.

One example of the many virtues of the Guide is that it manages to speak charitably even about dogmatic ideologues, explaining that in such cases what is typically
behind this sort of “epistemic closure”—when beliefs are closed to new evidence—are deeper moral values and issues of identity, a theme running throughout the book. The authors explain that when individuals’ beliefs are held independently of evidence, the reason is usually that they think holding those beliefs makes them a good person—they believe in belief, as Dennett put it—so their loyalty to the belief represents their sense of themselves as good people. This charitable analysis promises to make it easier to view dogmatic individuals more compassionately, and thus to engage their underlying values in less of a confrontational manner, opening up the grounds under which their currently closed beliefs may become amenable to reason and evidence. While this perspective toward the dogmatic might seem naive, the authors back up this analysis with examples of its success, explanations therewith, and solid empirical research about the relationship between epistemic closure, identity, and values. Philosophy instructors may benefit from finding ways to respectfully engage students without triggering their defenses, shutting down open inquiry, and perhaps intimidating the rest of the class.

Each chapter in the Guide is presented as a necessary training stage for the chapters to follow, and the authors are repeatedly emphatic about readers not trying the more complex techniques until they have had significant experience and developed substantive skill levels with the previous chapters’ techniques. This structure lends itself to using this text as the primary text in an informal logic, critical thinking, or practical philosophy course, particularly for those instructors who, increasingly, strive to make philosophy not merely relevant, but more practical, living skills-cultivation-oriented (as was most original or ancient philosophy: tools for a philosophical way of life).

As a real training manual, the Guide offers pithy, memorable names for its techniques. “Golden bridges,” for example, are statements that help lessen the risk of triggering your conversation partner’s defense mechanisms—note even the de-escalating nature of “conversation partner,” as opposed to “opponent”—as well as lessen the fear of losing face and/or lessen the likelihood of polarization. Examples of such statements are: “everybody makes mistakes”; “this is a very complicated issue”; or “we are all trying to figure out what’s best here”; “we are doing the best we can, given what we believe.”

Another technique that the authors suggest is to ask one’s conversation partners to place their confidence in their belief claim (or yours) on a scale, with 0 representing no confidence in its truth and 10 representing absolute certainty in its truth. Depending on the confidence rating offered, one can then follow up with more pointed questions that might provide clues as to the interlocutors’ epistemological situation relative to that belief. For example, if they claim maximal confidence—a 10—the instructor can then ask them why it’s not 9.9, that is, what is it that pushed it from 9.9 to 10, why they don’t have any doubts about it at all, or what it might take to lower their confidence to 9.9. Conversely, if their confidence in a claim is very low, you can ask them what it would take to raise it. Such questions open a path to the evidential supports of the belief, and/or the lack thereof. These are excellent strategies for moving the dial with incorrigible, dogmatic minds.

The Guide goes into the technique of introducing scales in great detail, and it does the same with dozens of other techniques, offering many illustrative real-life examples as well as a vast amount of supporting research and evidence, much of it from cult deprogrammers, hostage negotiators, professional epistemologists, social science studies, and, appropriately, a vast body of literature on communication psychology in general and difficult conversations in particular.

The Guide manages to convey a spirit of a shared sense of aspirations toward evolved modes of being with others, understanding them, and sharing ideas with them in fruitful conversations as opposed to, say, teaching weaponized techniques for defeating one’s dialectical opponents. It goes without saying that these perspectives and the content that they frame can be invaluable in the Socratic mode of pedagogy employed daily in our classes.

This last fact brings up another virtue of this text: the authors make several remarks explicitly designed to encourage in their readers—not only by their own well-crafted verbal examples but by explicit advice—the use of non-combative language. They encourage responding to points with which one disagrees with “yes, and” instead of “but,” as these sorts of uses of language are less likely to trigger polarizing psychological effects. The book is loaded with these sorts of ideas, and many examples of them are deployed by the authors themselves.-

Because the Guide advocates ways in which we can all engage in difficult conversations, it implicitly endorses the traditional liberal value of free speech.

The Guide begins with an introductory chapter overviewing the rationale and structure of the book, with advice about how to use it, followed by seven more chapters loaded with well-scaffolded strategies that make for a smooth, insightful, and at times uplifting read. Structured as a course, each chapter begins with a list of main techniques that will be covered in that chapter, followed by a section on each such named technique. The Guide has an extensive bibliography, an index, as well as hundreds of notes not merely referencing these materials, but explaining them and guiding the reader to follow up on the claims and strategies offered in the text.

How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide is a must-read for anyone who enjoys, or wishes to enjoy, being engaged in difficult discussions with people who hold what appears to be (at least initially) a difficult position. I think that if most or even many of us on both sides of the present political and cultural divide were to not only read this book but, like me, to reread it while practicing its advice until mastering most of it, that alone could turn the tides, restore faith in civil discourse, and depolarize our country. The Guide is sorely needed, and highly recommended.
POETRY SECTION

Felicia Nimue Ackerman
BROWN UNIVERSITY


A TALE OF TWO PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS

Elinda livens up my class,
Her fervor all aglow,
But never fears to take a pass
By saying, "I don’t know."

Eugene will not admit a doubt;
No way will he demur.
He’s frantic to increase his clout.
Why can’t he be like her?

ADVICE TO STUDENTS

Philosophy won’t make you rich.
Philosophy won’t make you wise.
But if it’s your passion, don’t switch.
Delight in your cognitive highs.

ADVICE TO JOURNAL EDITORS

Be careful whenever you choose
The people to write your reviews.
A reader can hardly depend
On critics who favor a friend.

A TALE OF TWO PHILOSOPHY CAREERS

Behold the unstoppable Greg.
Where there’s a round hole, he becomes a round peg.
Behold how he fits with the team.
His path is unswerving; he rises like cream.
Behold Larry still down below.
Does Greg make him jealous? He doesn’t quite know.

CHALLENGE

A Free Will Puzzle

Steven M. Cahn
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Here’s a hypothetical case that may prove useful for class discussion or as a topic for term papers.

Suppose you are seeking a person to marry but have been unsuccessful in finding a satisfactory partner. Then you learn of a matchmaker named Quinn who has an extraordinary record. Every one of hundreds of persons who has come to Quinn for guidance is happily married to the individual Quinn recommended. The one condition for using Quinn’s service, however, is that you are obligated to marry sight unseen and not divorce the person Quinn names. Is availing yourself of Quinn’s service the reasonable course of action? Does doing so imply that finding happiness may be more valuable than exercising free will? Does morality require that you not relinquish responsibility for such a decision?

From the editors to our readers: It might be useful for fellow teachers of philosophy if you would comment on student responses to the presentation of the above case in your own classroom. Alternatively, or in addition, comments on the case from your own perspective would also be welcome.

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NOTE

1. Many of these examples come from their own experience, a good number of them depicting their own failures that could have been avoided had they known or remembered these techniques at the time.