APA Newsletters

ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES
FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY
HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
# Table of Contents

**Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies** .............................................................. 1

- The Multitudinous Dimensions of Japanese Aesthetics ............................................................................ 1
- Ante-Originality in Japanese Pathway Arts .................. 7
- “The Secret of Music” and Unity with Nature .............. 11
- The Dancing Truth: Spiritual Play in Zen Aesthetics ............................................................................. 17
- The Enlightenment of Things: Living with Everyday Objects ................................................................. 21
- A Cut Above: Aesthetic and Moral Virtuosity in Japanese Dō .............................................................. 26
- Ethically Grounded Aesthetic Sensibility in Japan: From Traditional Arts to Contemporary Design .... 31
- Norinaga on the Cultivation of Mono no aware ..... 36
- Saving Beauty: Art Museums, Empathy, and Impermanence ................................................................. 40
- From Speculative Realism to Ki-Realism: Or, Reality as Realization in Japanese Aesthetics .................... 45
- Kuki Shūzō: Art and Existence as the Play of Contingency-Necessity .................................................. 51
- The Ontology and Aesthetic of Iki: An Unbearable Lightness ............................................................... 55
- The Atomic Bombings in Anime: How Aesthetics Makes Actual Historic Terror Tolerable to Children (A Prolegomenon to Existential Aesthetics) ................................................................. 60
- The Aesthetics and Ethics of Suicide in Japanese Literature and Film .................................................. 66
- Kannon and Sanshō Dayū ...................................................... 73
- White Sand, Blank Beauty: Figures and Meanings of Sand in Japanese Arts .......................................... 77
- Karesansui Gardens as Exemplars of Virtue............ 80
- Nishida and Marion on the Beautiful: Resonance and Dissonance ....................................................... 86
- A Distinction between Art and Religion in the Aesthetics of Nishida, Schopenhauer, and Early Indian Buddhism .................................................................................................................. 89

**Japanese Aesthetics as Intercultural Double Bind: Philosophical and Artistic Practice between Nishida and Sesshū** ................................................................. 94

**The Field of Japanese Aesthetics** ........................................................................................................... 99

**Feminism and Philosophy** ................................................. 107

- Editor’s Introduction .......................................................... 107
- About the Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy ............................................................................. 107
- Submission Guidelines and Information ......................... 107
- Call for Papers ........................................................................ 107
- Critical Reviews ...................................................................... 108
- Précis: Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice ......................................................... 108
- Emphasizing Embodiment in Immigration Justice ................................................................................ 110
- Socially Undocumented and Structural Health Vulnerability ............................................................. 113
- Social Groups, Oppression, and the (Legally) Undocumented ............................................................ 115
- The Value and Limits of the Socially Undocumented Interpretive Horizon ........................................... 118
- Author’s Response ............................................................... 122
- Précis: No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis .......................................................................... 126
- Structural Injustice and Social Sin ........................................................................................................... 128
- No Refuge for Latin American (and other so-called Global South) Nations? ........................................ 132
- On No Refuge as Public Philosophy .................................................. 135
- Our Shared Responsibility for Refugees ................................................................................................. 137
- Response to Critics ............................................................. 141
- Book Reviews ......................................................................... 145
- Think Like a Feminist .............................................................. 145
- Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot ....................................................... 146
# Table of Contents, continued

*Caring for Liberalism: Dependency and Liberal Political Theory* ................................................................. 148

Contributors ........................................................................ 150

**Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy** ....... 153

From the Editor ................................................................... 153

Call for Submissions ............................................................ 154

Is Latina Mestiza Identity a Being-in-Worlds? ...... 154

Reconsidering the Epistemological Problematic of Nahua Philosophy .............................................................. 158

Lélia Gonzalez, Philosopher of Intersectionality ... 162

Hispanics, Latinxs, Philosophers .............................. 165

Gracia’s Latest View on Latin American Philosophy .................................................................................. 173

Book Review ..................................................................... 175

**Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy** .................................................................................. 175

Author Bios ...................................................................... 177

**Philosophy and the Black Experience** ....... 179

From the Editor ................................................................... 179

Submission Guidelines and Information................. 179

Professor Tommy Curry and “African American Philosophy”. What is it? What should it be? Why care? .................................................................................................................. 180

**Teaching Philosophy** ............................................. 185

Letter from the Editors ............................................................ 185

Submission Guidelines .............................................................. 185

Professors as Teachers* ..................................................... 186

Preparing Graduate Students to Teach: One Model .................................................................................. 188

Appendix: Further Readings ................................................. 191

The Logician ...................................................................... 192

Books Received ................................................................. 192

Addresses of Contributors ...................................................... 192
The essays in this special double issue (APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies 21, nos. 1-2) represent a cross-section of contemporary philosophical work on Japanese aesthetics, variously complementing, challenging, and expanding upon previous studies in the field. They display a widening theoretical attention to the range of concepts and practices that characterize Japanese artistic and cultural traditions, beyond the more traditionally studied Zen-based concepts like mono no aware, wabi, sabi, shibui, and yūgen, although these ideas, too, receive some consideration here. In addition to providing insight into central aspects of Japanese artistic and cultural traditions, including a wide range of Japanese categorical aesthetics, these essays provide an opening into ways of rethinking common aesthetic concepts from Western traditions such as “art,” “beauty,” “elegance,” “taste,” “representation,” “expression,” “emotion,” “creativity,” “originality,” “authenticity,” “design,” “style,” and “form” and, indeed, into ways of rethinking our conceptions of aesthetics and philosophy themselves. They also remind readers of features of some Western artistic practices that are often underappreciated or overlooked, such as the importance of working with and responding to material for artistic creativity, traditions that emphasize the impermanence of performance as opposed to recording, and the folk aesthetics of imperfection and insufficiency found (albeit in highly modernized, sometimes deliberate, and perhaps affected form) in musical styles like lo-fi. This issue, then, seeks to treat Japanese aesthetics in a cosmopolitan fashion, in dialogue with and in (occasionally unexpected) relation to other aesthetic traditions.

By applying this cosmopolitan lens, this collection of essays provokes the reader to question how one should understand “Japanese aesthetics,” and how one should situate it with respect to other traditions and its own subject matter. These essays are primarily philosophical essays and not essays in art history or the history of ideas. So how their authors understand the trajectories of influence on traditional Japanese aesthetic practices, including the influence of important Eastern wisdom traditions like Zen Buddhism and Shinto and other cultural traditions, whether Chinese, Indian, or European, is often left implicit or less central to the claims in these essays than may be the preference of scholars in these other disciplines. To leave them implicit or on the periphery is not, however, to deny these religious, cultural, or intellectual influences, which of course are central, as a matter of historical fact, to whatever may be called “Japanese aesthetics.”

The focus of the essays, as philosophical essays, is more on the second of the two terms, namely, aesthetics. Here the content is more open-ended. What these essays reveal is a conception of aesthetics that is broad along two dimensions. The first concerns the kinds of practices, objects, and subjects that are aesthetic. The second concerns the role that these practices, objects, and subjects play in the whole of interconnected existence. As regards the first dimension, the essays in this issue cover not only the traditional set of Japanese artistic practices like Noh theater, haiku poetry, and ikebana floral arrangement, but also contemporary Japanese cinema, photography, and landscape architecture. Other discussed items, recognized for giving rise to genuine aesthetic experiences in the Japanese tradition, include design of contemporary consumer products and “various ingredients of everyday life,” from “artifacts of daily use” and “chores around the house” to “interactions with other people” and “quotidian activities such as eating, walking, and bathing.” These essays thus widen the scope of aesthetics, following Yuriko Saito, in “raising theoretical issues that have not received adequate attention from the prevailing mainstream Western aesthetics,” and “illuminating and challenging the prevailing aesthetics discourse in contemporary Western philosophy.”

As regards the second dimension, while some essays focus on the human aspects of existence, or at least begin from that human perspective, others aim to pull us away from those (simply) human concerns toward larger and more capacious perspectives. The essays also reveal a wide variety of possible starting points for philosophical investigation into Japanese aesthetics. While some begin from particular works, forms, or styles, others take their opening from particular religious traditions, artistic exemplars, or philosophical figures, and others still from a comparative standpoint.
Yet among all this breadth and diversity, there are some recurring related themes. The first is an emphasis on ongoing aesthetic process and activity, in contrast to a focus on the completed artistic product. Aesthetic analysis in the Japanese tradition treats the “finished” artwork as part of a wider constellation of activities, practices, and relationships. Meaning, relevance, and significance inhere primarily in those activities, practices, and relationships, and not only in the work itself. To understand the work involves seeing how it is situated in and interactive with that wider constellation. This first theme is epistemological or methodological in the sense that it describes how artistic subjects of all kinds (whether artists and practitioners, or readers, viewers, listeners, audiences, and “consumers” more broadly) approach aesthetic objects of all kinds (treating “objects,” as suggested earlier, in very broad terms).

Alongside this first, epistemological or methodological, theme sits a second, metaphysical, theme, one of relationality and holistic contextualism. Japanese aesthetics treats objects (like artworks) not as standing by themselves, like the New Criticism thought of the work, but as in constant and changing relations with a larger whole. Artworks and other art “objects” (here in quotation marks because, on this view, they are not merely objects but also enact their own agency as subjects) themselves participate actively in that larger whole and are not just representations or reflections of it. As David E. Cooper argues, the ink painting is not an attempt from a conventional human standpoint “outside nature” to represent nature, but is itself part of nature; the music of the shakuhachi flute is not an imitation of the sounds of nature, but partakes in the entire soundscape. The changes to the tea instruments through use are not to be “remedied” in an attempt to recapture their original “undamaged” luster, but are developments in the aesthetic character of those objects. Artists and those who experience art are also part of this larger whole in which the artwork participates, and they are themselves transformed by that participation. This holism resists a variety of common dualisms such as those between culture and nature, subject and object, representative and represented, the animate and the inanimate, the cognitive and the affective, the aesthetic and the moral. It is reflected in the multimodal nature of many Japanese artforms, which—unlike, for instance, the influential modernism of someone like Clement Greenberg, who wants to isolate a “pure” form specific to each artistic medium—emphasize and celebrate multiple forms of detailed and deep sensory engagement, not only through sight and sound, but also through touch and taste and smell.

The third theme that the authors in this issue explore concerns subject matter and content. In contrast to aesthetic traditions that focus on the timeless, the permanent, the absolute, the complete, Japanese aesthetics values the ephemeral, the impermanent, the changing, the incomplete. Celebrating what Saito calls “everyday aesthetics,” an “aesthetics of the familiar,” and an “aesthetics of imperfection and insufficiency,” Japanese aesthetics begins with a certain humility in the acceptance that “all things must pass.” The physical and spiritual aspects of a work or practice change over time. Arranging flowers in the spring is different from arranging flowers in the winter, to achieve a similar effect with an arrangement in a particular space requires a different arrangement than in another space. That the flowers wither and die is part of the practice and the art, and is not a falling away from the arrangement’s initial beauty or significance. In a similar vein, in contrast to modern aesthetic traditions that emphasize originality and creative, uncontrolled genius set above the constraints of nature and tradition, Japanese aesthetics situates the development and exercise of those creative capacities both within traditions that form and cultivate skills and capacities for aesthetic appreciation and within a larger metaphysical framework that does not isolate creativity or aesthetic power in the artist, but extends them to the everyday.

The connections among these three themes should be readily apparent. Our aesthetic approach toward artistic practices and objects is relational and holistic because the aesthetic properties inhere in those relations and in the wider whole in which the art object or the art practice is located. Since that whole is not metaphysically complete or unchanging, or developing in Hegelian fashion toward such a completed state, but is rather in flux and contingent, to value that whole appropriately is to value it precisely as impermanent, imperfect, and changing. Artforms are a deeply appropriate way of coming to be in touch with and to understand this changing whole, precisely because physical objects fade and chip, decay and wither, and because the repeated performance of a series of actions is temporally bound and influenced by context and circumstance. Art is art not because it captures timeless essence, but because it is a (human-directed and human-crafted) part of changing nature, a part that can open us up to thinking of the whole from different and larger points of view.

These essays thus not only treat “Japanese” as functioning to modify “aesthetics,” but also reflect how “aesthetics” modifies—or, better, is a significant part of—“Japanese.” They illustrate, of course in incomplete, exceptionable, and limited ways, how certain aesthetic sensibilities are central to forms of Japanese culture. It is in this space that we can locate one final, relevant theme: the relation between the “aesthetic” and the “moral,” conceived broadly as regarding how to live and act. (These terms are placed in quotation marks to signal that their meaning is to be derived from examination of the relevant practices and forms, and not determined beforehand.) Many of the essays in this issue stress the interrelatedness of these two terms in different dimensions: how to act well involves forms of sensible appreciation, how aesthetic experience can develop moral virtues and moral capacities, how living well in the fullest sense of that phrase is a kind of human flourishing practiced in and through aesthetic forms, and how one can take as a moral exemplar not only other humans but also nature as it is embodied in particular art objects and art forms.

It would be remiss not to say a few words about the larger moral and spiritual concerns raised by these investigations into Japanese aesthetics. Several of the essays in this issue argue that the ways of thinking characteristic of Japanese aesthetics can be brought to bear on contemporary pressing issues. Aesthetic ways of seeing that are from
a broader-than-human perspective, for instance, may help us in thinking through our current environmental crises. Learning to feel more keenly through aesthetic practices the affective power that things (both animate and inanimate, if the former can be called “things”) have may enlarge our sympathy with and tolerance for other human beings. Appreciating what, from a different perspective, may be seen as imperfections or insufficiencies, and fostering a deeper connection with objects through those imperfections or insufficiencies, may be a small corrective to the rampant consumerism of our time and the capitalist machine that it feeds.

It should go without saying that these are possibilities not found only in Japanese aesthetics. Moreover, those possibilities do not depend on treating that aesthetics as part of the Japanese Other as opposed to “Western,” as if the capacities of capitalism and the attendant barbarities of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and unbridled nationalism were not also to be found in the history of the eastern half of the world and in Japanese history in particular, or as if it fell to the “Orient” to be the corrective or supplement to Europe. Nonetheless, those possibilities are to be found in these Japanese traditions and practices. In a cosmopolitan spirit, we ought to welcome such philosophical and social possibilities wherever they may be found, to bring them into conversation with one another, and thus to illuminate and, perhaps, to begin to tackle the complex issues that all humans, and the world as a larger more-than-human whole, face.

We have decided to organize the contributions to this issue thematically. This organizing principle is not intended to draw clear-cut distinctions or dividing lines between the themes. Rather, it is intended to provide different ways of approaching the material and to provoke conversations among these wonderful essays that will illuminate each of them in the light of the others. The issue contains five sections. The first three deal with general dimensions of the subject matter: the Spiritual, Moral, and Metaphysical Dimensions of Japanese Aesthetics. The fourth section, entitled Japanese Artworks and Artforms: Philosophical Explorations, contains some more explorations of particular artworks and/or artforms. The fifth and final section, entitled Intercultural Encounters and Metaphilosophical Concerns, delves into some aspects of the relationship between Japanese aesthetics and other traditions, including the Western canon and early Indian Buddhism, and some of the metaphilosophical issues of intercultural exchange and the defining features of Japanese aesthetics.

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

The first section contains four essays dealing with the spiritual aspects of Japanese aesthetics. We construe “spiritual” here broadly, to refer to how human beings find themselves in the world, and in relation to one another and to themselves. The spiritual in this amplified sense encompasses both what we moderns would now call the “religious” and what has long been called the “philosophical.” It thus sets a direction and acts as a kind of methodological ground for the essays to follow.

John C. Maraldo and Mary Jo Maraldo propose that the traditional Japanese dō, or “pathway arts,” embody a principle of “ante-originality.” In contrast to the prevalent Western value of originality, especially the idea that it is through being original that one is authentic, or true to oneself and as distinct from others, the Maraldos argue that training in a pathway art requires subsuming oneself to traditional forms of the art, modeling oneself on exemplars, and thereby learning—and, in the end, appropriating and embodying—a form of activity, the perfection of which consists in the performance of a certain know-how that allows one to adapt that tradition to the concrete circumstances and contingencies that one faces. Following the rules, seeing how those rules are embodied by one’s masters, and modeling the masters is a means of developing and deploying an interconnected set of capacities that, in the end, enable a form of freedom.

David E. Cooper explores what it may mean for aesthetic practices to enable “unity with nature.” Such claims, if taken literally, are either banal or false. Cooper argues, through an analysis of traditional Japanese hōkaku music and its modernist appropriators, that such claims ought to be understood, with the early Wittgenstein, not literally as “saying” that humans are identical with nature in its banal or false senses, but as “showing” or expressing a kind of practical and sympathetic intimacy with, of receptivity and responsiveness to, nature. That expression of receptivity and responsiveness is premised on, Cooper suggests, an understanding of nature as continuous with those practices themselves. It is because of that continuity that the practices can direct our attention to particular aspects of nature. As Cooper puts it, through “jamming” with nature (as opposed to, say, observing it from more of a distance), one comes to a deeper appreciation of nature and sees it not as mere material, something just there, but as the larger whole of which we are a part and which can act as teacher and guide to us.

Raquel Bouso begins her paper with an analysis of the notion of playful and dynamic “freedom from attachment” that she draws from Hisamatsu Shin’ichi’s modernist conception of the defining features of Zen art. She argues that this notion shows how, in Zen-influenced artistic and aesthetic experiences, humor or irony implies at the same time a serious engagement with the deepest questions of human life. She contends that the phrase can be appropriately used to describe not only the orientations of Zen art and Zen-inspired art, but also other artistic trends exemplifying playful and ironic gestures (see, for instance, Banksy’s work). These modernist readings of the essentially “spiritual” nature of Zen art should not be dismissed, Bouso submits, just because, according to some critics, such readings underestimate or overlook the material, political, and historical conditions in which Zen art developed, and thereby reinforce the essentialist ideology that nourished Japanese nationalism and imperialism. Thus, in the face of criticisms directed at Hisamatsu’s characterization of Zen aesthetics as elitism (one can only appreciate Zen art if one has experienced enlightenment) or essentialism (the uniqueness of Zen art in expressing certain spiritual values), Bouso attempts to understand his interpretation within his project of reviving Zen and, on a broader level, to recognize
what may be philosophically useful in these aesthetic categories beyond the context in which they originated.

Peter L. Doebler gives us two essays. The first addresses issues at the intersection of aesthetics and spirituality, whereas the second addresses issues at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. Doebler’s first essay, “The Enlightenment of Things: Living with Everyday Objects,” examines the influence of Buddhist traditions on the Marie Kondo phenomenon. What is common to these traditions, he argues, is the convergence of art, ethics, and metaphysics in the idea that non-sentient things have a life of their own. In particular, he reads Kondo through the literary tradition of Isukumogami, tools that obtain spirits through repeated use. Doebler conjoins this tradition with a reading of Ishiuchi Miyako’s photographic series focusing on the continued lives of the ordinary objects that the dead leave behind. Doebler suggests that in Kondo and in Miyako, as in the background traditions in light of which he interprets them, we can find an aesthetics of the everyday. This aesthetics is potentially transformative for our relations with ordinary objects.

MORAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

The four essays in this section consider how Japanese aesthetic concepts and notions may support moral change and moral improvement. The term “moral” in these essays ought to be taken in a fairly wide sense, extending beyond morally right actions to the whole person, including habits, sensibilities, and ways of thinking and feeling.

Jesús Ilundáin-Agurruza examines the traditional Japanese dō artforms in light of the practical and soteriological forms of flourishing they exemplify. People engaged in the practice of such arts, argues Ilundáin-Agurruza, holistically develop an interconnected set of cognitive, aesthetic, affective, and moral skills that manifest, in the particular, in virtuosic performances and, more generally, in a normative way of life in which the ongoing instantiation of the way is what is of value. Ilundáin-Agurruza uses this claim to illustrate aspects of the central Zen concepts: hōben, wabi, yūgen, mushin, and shugyō. His essay may usefully be read in conjunction with John C. Maraldo and Mary Jo Maraldo’s essay from the first section.

Yuriko Saito describes how certain features of an “other-regarding” Japanese sensibility, one that is simultaneously aesthetic and moral, inform contemporary Japanese design. The demand on the artist is to withdraw and empty themselves in order to listen to the others involved in the artistic activity. “Others” here include not only the recipients of and other participants in the artistic practice, but also the material and subject matter of the work. Saito traces this sensibility, which predates the introduction of Zen to Japan in the thirteenth century, back through various Japanese artistic traditions, and argues that we can find it in the design of contemporary consumer products. Such a sensibility asks us to approach both ordinary consumer objects and “high” objects of design (like buildings) differently than we currently do, in a humbler spirit of care. Such an ethics of care, she suggests in closing, may resist some of the more troubling consumerist, fast-fashion, and environmentally damaging aspects of contemporary capitalist culture.

Johnathan Flowers examines Motoori Norinaga’s argument that cultivating mono no aware through experiencing and responding to art can serve as a means of fostering more compassionate and enriched social relations, both through interpersonal relations and through humane governance. Flowers argues that responding to art develops one’s general capacity to be appropriately moved in one’s heart (or kokoro) by the aware, or the affective power, of things, which can lead to a greater understanding of the worlds that others inhabit. Central to Flowers’s interpretation is the claim that mono no aware is not simply an intuitive or felt appropriate sensibility, but also one richly laden with cognition. Individuals with mono no aware are aware (in the English meaning) of the aware of things, and this intentional awareness is necessary for understanding the worlds of others.

This section ends with the second essay by Doebler, “Saving Beauty: Art Museums, Empathy, and Impermanence.” Doebler extends recent literature on the possible role of museums in cultivating ethical capacities in visitors as a means of fostering positive personal and social change. Drawing on an analysis of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi’s woodblock print series One Hundred Aspects of the Moon, Doebler argues that the key theme of impermanence in Japanese aesthetics can serve as a means of cultivating empathy. Key themes in the Japanese aesthetic tradition can thus enhance the ethical role of museums in building community and combating indifference.

METAPHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

The third section focuses more strictly on the metaphysical themes that have been featured in the previous essays.

Leah Kalmanson explores the relationship between Japanese aesthetics and a ki-based metaphysics. She makes two major claims in her essay. The first is that the predominant Zen-based focus in theorizing Japanese aesthetics may be usefully complemented with a ki-based framework. Drawing on Chinese Song-dynasty influences, such a framework emphasizes metaphysical themes of activity, permeability, interaction, and harmony. The second is that this ki-based framework provides resources for addressing certain issues faced by contemporary Western process philosophies and new materialisms that situate themselves against dominant Western dualisms of mind and matter, of subject and object. In this way, Kalmanson looks to begin a non-Eurocentric conversation with those traditions of thought.

Mayuko Uehara provides an interpretation of part of Kuki Shūzō’s views of contingency, which Kuki articulates and defends in his writings on aesthetics. Contingency, for Kuki, comprises everything in the work of art that is not determined by artistic intentions. Uehara focuses, in particular, on what Kuki calls “the human existentiality of the artist.” How is it that the contingent matter of the artwork, say, the lump of clay that is to become the earthenware dish, takes the form that it (in the end) does? One answer is the artist’s intentions. The artist sees the work latent in the material, as Michelangelo is said to have
This process of creation, however, cannot be captured in the form of law; no matter how firm the intentions of the artist, there are always surprises, deviations, and incongruencies.

So, for Kuki, “the human existentially of the artist” must come into play—the latent intuition by which the artist works with the contingencies of the material and the circumstances to co-create with nature the end result. Artistic intentions cannot fully determine the work; there is always a play between those intentions and contingency.

Carol S. Gould also looks at Kuki’s writings, this time on his analysis of the Edo-era “floating world” concept of iki. Gould argues that iki is best understood as an aesthetic property of persons, an ontologically complex property specific to Japanese culture, which comprises fundamentally a phenomenological structure of attitudes and dispositions that embodies a way of experiencing the world and responding to that lived experience. For Gould, iki as an aesthetic property of persons is not an aesthetic virtue or vice—a state of character—but rather a piece of one’s personality, like charisma or glamour, that both informs how one responds aesthetically to the world and is responded to aesthetically by others. Personality traits, unlike character traits, cannot be deliberately cultivated. They are rather developed through how one lives one’s situation. Iki, on Gould’s analysis, is an erotic aesthetic property of persons, one based on fostering desire, deferring its fulfillment and thereby perpetuating it, and achieving a certain lightness and insouciance of being through resigning oneself to that endless deferral of desire. Iki, Gould argues in closing through reference to Donald Keene, is a concept that is quintessentially Japanese, in part because it exemplifies key features of Japanese aesthetics. But, Gould wonders, in a world where cultures are not singular, separate, or internally unified, what of the potentials for cross-cultural fertilizations, and what are the possibilities for iki in such a world?

JAPANESE ARTWORKS AND ARTFORMS: PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATIONS

The five essays in this section take a more particularist attitude toward Japanese aesthetics by studying its features as they manifest in particular artworks and/or artforms.

Like Doebler, Mara Miller also contributes two essays to this issue. Her first, “The Atomic Bombings in Anime: How Aesthetics Makes Actual Historic Terror Tolerable to Children (A Prolegomenon to Existential Aesthetics),” examines how Japanese anime—particularly the two films Barefoot Gen and Grave of the Fireflies—draws on features of traditional Japanese aesthetics to convey the horror of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan at the end of World War II in a manner that both engages the viewer (adults and children alike) and does not negate that horror or the attendant agony through psychical distance or through a false moral transcendence (“we will never follow in that path”). Those traditional aesthetic features are mobilized to promote ethical engagement with the horror and the agony through an empathetic identification not only with the characters but also with specific and ordinary experiential features of their situation in each moment, in a kind of presentist awareness of the aware of those moments.

Miller’s second essay, “The Aesthetics and Ethics of Suicide in Japanese Literature and Film,” examines the changing depictions of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentionally in Japanese literature and film. She notices a recent and radical turn in contemporary postmodern Japanese literature from traditional, idealized, and aestheticized ways of depicting suicide as honorable to portraying it as horrible or reprehensible. Miller finds in that turn a feminist challenge to masculinist and imperialist conceptions of power, authority, and honor, which is reflected at the level of aesthetic form in a refusal to romanticize, idealize, or glorify suicide by beautifying or aestheticizing it and in a commitment to keep unf-finching in view the aftereffects of the event.

Jason M. Wirth analyzes Mizoguchi Kenji’s well-known film Sanshō Dayū as an exercise in Buddhist filmmaking that aims to evoke a Buddhist compassionate sensibility in its viewers. For Wirth, this sensibility is not only or even primarily evoked by the content of the film, as can be seen through a comparison with the short story on which it is based. Rather, it is a matter of cinematic form: how that sensibility is expressed visually in the film and calls to the viewer for uptake. Wirth suggests that this compassionate sensibility has political and anti-oppressive significance. But it—and the way it is expressed visually in Sanshō Dayū—operates at a level prior to the overtly political, to what Hannah Arendt called the “public.” It does not guarantee the right kind of politics; indeed, one can overtly express its sentiments and not feel the core of the sensibility. In this sense, claims Wirth, the sensibility is fundamentally religious, a matter of how we fundamentally exist in and respond to the world.

Rudi Capra provides us with a phenomenology of sand. Sand, for Capra, is characterized by elusiveness and neutrality. It is a medium that allows for other things to be expressed through and in it, for associations to form and re-form, for, finally, the impermanence and significance of things to be given voice. This means of indirect expressiveness is found, Capra argues, in the great karesansui or dry gardens in certain temples located in Kyoto, in the use of white sand as an amorphous background in miniature bonsai landscapes, and in the liminality and temporality that sand expresses visually in Hiroshi Teshigahara’s film Woman in the Dunes.

Julianne N. Chung’s essay is usefully read against this phenomenological analysis of sand. It draws on Ian James Kidd’s claims that “[c]ertain traditions . . . incorporate a cosmic mode of emulation, where the virtues are manifestations, in human form, of qualities or aspects of the ground or source of the world,” and that “there are forms of emulation where the ultimate model for the good or flourishing life as manifested by the exemplar is nothing human.” If these claims hold, then ethical emulation need not take as its object human beings who lead or have led a good life, but we can also take non-human entities as exemplars of virtue. While Kidd focuses on the Zhuangzi and on cosmic emulation of “qualities or
aspects of the ground or source of the world”—in short, the Dao—Chung focuses instead on cosmic emulation of karesansui. She argues that karesansui gardens exemplify “nothingness” or “emptiness,” qualities of the ground of being. In conceiving karesansui gardens to be exemplary in this way, we recognize that we, like all beings, are part of a larger whole and interdependent with all other beings. Karesansui gardens allow us to appreciate, in a sensible, direct, and unmediated fashion, this aspect of the world, rather than to apprehend it in the detached form of a belief. Chung suggests that this method of appreciating rather than believing may have consequences for how we think about emulation and exemplification more broadly.

INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS AND METAPHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS

This issue closes with some reflections on the relation between Japanese and non-Japanese aesthetics and the relation between Japanese aesthetics and larger thoughts concerning the philosophical enterprise.

Gerald Cipriani compares Nishida Kitarō and Jean-Luc Marion on the nature of beauty, particularly the resonances and dissonances between Nishida’s conception of muga and Marion’s conception of phénomène. There are historical connections between the two, both drawing on while distancing themselves from Kant and the Kantian tradition. Cipriani’s comparison is of interest not merely for these historical reasons, however. He hopes to gain from the comparison support for a more holistic conception of the relation of beauty, one that includes not only the perceiver and the beautiful object, but also the creative role of the artist and the situation of the beautiful object in a larger world. Beauty, Cipriani argues, is for Nishida and for Marion—whatever important differences there may be between the two—potentially transformative of the self and of one’s relation to others.

Steve Odin’s essay looks also at the historical trajectory of Nishida’s conception of muga. The essay expands on Odin’s previous work, which argues that Nishida was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer and, in particular, Schopenhauer’s appropriation of early Indian Buddhist themes. For Schopenhauer and for Nishida, beauty, and beautiful art in particular, is a symbol of and a means to the kind of liberation achieved through religious renunciation of this world. But, one might object, giving such a pride of place to art may run counter to trends in early Indian Buddhism that see art as a distraction from the divine, as drawing one’s attention back to the suffering and the attachments of this world. Odin argues that the artwork in the Ajanta caves in Maharashtra, India, along with associated writings and historical records, show that beauty has long been a Buddhist value. Nishida and Schopenhauer ought to be read as extending this line of thought and not simply as running a modernist rereading of the Buddhist tradition.

Adam Loughnane’s paper examines the conditions for intercultural philosophical discussion. He claims that some commitments of Japanese aesthetics have the potential to expand the Western conception of philosophy and important philosophical concepts. But this potential cannot be fulfilled, Loughnane argues, unless Western philosophers are able to bracket certain of their deep commitments. Primary among those requiring bracketing is the idea that while art is a perfectly good subject of philosophical inquiry, it is not itself a way of doing philosophy. Seeing the artist as a philosopher (Loughnane’s case in point is Sesshū Tōyō) is a means for bracketing other deep metaphysical assumptions, like the idea that art is set apart from nature, that color and form are essential to art, and that art is the expression of a substantive self. Loughnane does not argue, however, that Western philosophy ought simply to negate its commitments. Rather, there is a particular double bind faced by the philosopher who wants to engage in intercultural encounter. One can choose to remain within the methodological norms of one’s own tradition, thus rendering encounter impossible. Or one can reject those commitments, thereby opening oneself to cultural appropriation or a false neutrality. Loughnane suggests that precisely this double bind is a productive condition for intercultural philosophical encounter and ought not to be solved so much as engaged with.

Thomas P. Kasulis also begins with this question of intercultural encounter. He proposes six deep and linked differences between the predominant tendencies of Western philosophical aesthetic traditions and those of Japanese traditions, drawing on ink wash paintings and poetry as media studies. Those differences concern the source of creativity, the role of the audience, the boundaries of the artwork, and the relation between artistic practices and the personal qualities they develop on the one hand, and the kind of epistemology that, at least some may think, finds its culmination in philosophy on the other. These are, Kasulis argues, deep metaphysical differences that ramify out into wider cultural differences on a number of levels and in a number of respects. But wherever one, in the end, locates these differences, Kasulis’s articulation of them invites reflection on one’s own philosophical commitments and philosophical methods, reflection that cannot but be beneficial for one’s own philosophical practice.

The breadth of the contributions to this issue indicates the range and the fertility of Japanese aesthetic traditions and concepts. The editors hope the work here will spur further philosophical consideration of these ideas, a consideration that they fully deserve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Nhi Huynh, Vivian Nguyen, Brent Robbins, Yuriko Saito, and Caylee Weintraub for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this introduction. Our gratitude to all the contributors to this issue—especially Raquel Bouso, Juliane N. Chung, Peter L. Doebler, Carol S. Gould, Thomas P. Kasulis, Adam Loughnane, John C. Maraldo, and Mary Jo Maraldo—for helping us present their work clearly and accurately. Vivian, Brent, and Caylee are currently serving as our editorial assistants, and we are grateful for their outstanding contributions to the editing of this issue. Brent’s work is underwritten by the Honors College of Florida Gulf Coast University, where he is a rising senior, and we would like to thank the FGCU Honors College, especially Dean Clay Motley, for their generous support. Lastly, tremendous thanks to Erin Shepherd, APA Publications and Communications Coordinator, for her extraordinary patience and understanding during the preparation of this issue.
I. SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

Ante-Originality in Japanese Pathway Arts

John C. Maraldo
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA
JMARALDO@UF.NEEDU

Mary Jo Maraldo
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR AND VISUAL ARTIST
MJMARALDO@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT

Traditional Japanese pathway arts emphasize ways of modeling exemplars more than creating an independent, original work. The artist in the making spends years incorporating the knowledge and skills of teachers before she introduces variations and innovations. Masters, as well as beginners, continue to embody forms that are not abstract but rather compliant with one’s concrete situation. Authenticity in these traditions means appropriating a pliable model that has been refined through the practice of numerous predecessors. Emphasis is placed on perfecting an activity rather than producing a unique artifact. In contrast to prevalent notions of originality in art, the relevant notion might be called “ante-originality,” for it is embodied in a model that precedes and takes precedence over the production of original works. We illustrate this

NOTES


2. For the latter, see Thomas P. Kasulis’s and Adam Loughnane’s contributions to this issue.


6. Saito, “Aesthetics of the Everyday.” It is worth noting that Saito views this recent development of “including objects, events, and activities that constitute people’s daily life,” which have not been included in the realm of art in the West at least until recently, as “restoring the scope of aesthetics rather than opening a new arena” (emphasis in original).

7. For the first, human-focused category, see the essays by Jesús Ilundain-Agurruza, Johnathan Flowers, Carol S. Gould, and Jason M. Wirth. For the second category, see those by David E. Cooper, Yuriko Saito, Leah Kalmanson, Julianne N. Chung, and Thomas P. Kasulis.

8. The fourth group of essays, in the section entitled “Japanese Artworks and Afforms: Philosophical Explorations,” begins from particular works, forms, or styles, as do the essays by John C. Maraldo and Mary Jo Maraldo and Carol S. Gould. The influence of Chinese and Indian religious traditions is examined in the contributions by Peter L. Doebler, Leah Kalmanson, Jason M. Wirth, and Steve Odin. The fifth and final group of essays, in the section entitled “Concerns,” considers Japanese aesthetics from a comparative standpoint.

9. The New Criticism was a (largely North American) formalist movement in literary theory and aesthetics in the middle decades of the twentieth century. For the New Critics, the artwork was a standalone object that could be studied on its own terms, independently of extrinsic factors like historical context; authorial intention, morality, and audience response. See John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1941) for the original use of the term; also Cleanth Brooks, “The New Criticism,” The Sewanee Review 87, no. 4 (1979): 592–607 for a later reassessment. For an overview of the New Criticism and its deconstructionist critics, see Miranda B. Hickman and John D. McGinnis, eds., Rereading the New Criticism (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

10. This doctrine of Greenberg’s is known as medium specificity; see Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” Partisan Review 7, no. 4 (1940): 296–310. As the title of that essay indicates (rather obliquely), Greenberg traces this doctrine back to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1766 essay Laocoon, where Lessing makes a similar claim to distinguish painting and poetry in virtue of what those media are capable of representing. Claims to medium specificity for particular media are widespread: for instance, André Bazin for cinema, John Szarkowski and Susan Sontag for photography, and Arthur Schopenhauer for music. See also Noël Carroll, “Medium Specificity Arguments and Self-Conceptually Invented Arts: Film, Video, and Photography,” Millennium Film Journal, nos. 14–15 (1984–1985): 127–53.

A common stereotype in the practice of floral arrangement, tea ceremony, and calligraphy—arts that among others are often called “pathways” (道), as in 花道 (花道), the Way of Flowers, or 書道 (書道), the Way of Writing. Ante-originality is not unique to artistic practice in Japan, nor is it characteristic of all Japanese arts, but its prevalence there lets us better notice its working elsewhere.

***

In his 1935 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin famously wrote that “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.” This evaluation of the work of art is undermined by one common feature of traditional Japanese aesthetics: the esteem placed on modeling the work of a teacher who herself has learned by emulating the work and actions of a model master. While other aesthetic traditions have also recognized the educational value of reproducing the styles and techniques of exemplary artists, several Japanese traditional arts prioritize the practice of modeling oneself and one’s work after exemplars. Instead of striving from the start to become independent and original, the artist-in-the-making spends years incorporating the awareness and skills of teachers before she introduces variations and innovations. Masters, as well as beginners, continue to embody forms that are not abstract but rather compliant with one’s concrete situation. Authenticity in these traditions means appropriating a pliable model that has been refined through the practice of numerous predecessors. Emphasis is placed on perfecting an activity rather than producing a unique artifact. In contrast to prevalent notions of originality in art, the relevant notion might be called “ante-originality,” for it is embodied in a model that precedes and takes precedence over the production of original works. We will illustrate this notion in the practice of floral arrangement, tea ceremony, and calligraphy—arts that among others are often called “pathways” (道), as in 花道 (花道), the Way of Flowers, or 書道 (書道), the Way of Writing. Ante-originality is not unique to artistic practice in Japan, nor characteristic of all Japanese arts, but its prevalence there lets us better notice its working elsewhere.

Since Japan is often described as a “copy culture,” it is important to distinguish the aesthetic practice of modeling from the practice of imitation noted throughout Japanese history. The ability of the Japanese to assimilate foreign technologies and artificially remake and automate the world around them is renowned. A common stereotype (which itself is a kind of copy) depicts Japanese artists and engineers through the centuries as borrowing, copying, and sometimes improving upon products and methods of producing them. The notion of copying implies an original, but Japanese history reveals several modalities of originality and copying—from flawlessly tracing over a piece of Chinese writing and displaying it alongside the original, to adapting “quality control” in the production of automobiles and claiming it as Japan’s invention. Traditional “arts of citation,” including some calligraphy and poetic composition, demonstrate the originality and creativity of the copy by identifying a process and particular persons by which the copy is made. Copying can generate creativity by transforming the character of the copier and employing new materials and techniques. Calligraphic artists as well as painters in Japan often apply a stamp or seal to their work to signify its temporal origin, but each successive owner of the work may add a seal to indicate a provenance that extends its caretaking over time. Poetic composition may cite a verse (without credit) and then build new verses upon it. In short, what is often simplistically differentiated as original and copy displays a wide variety of modes. But the arts that display ante-originality challenge that difference in all its modifications.

Imagine that an encounter with a Japanese floral arrangement has surprised and delighted you for its striking liveliness and way of configuring space. The space around it seems charged with electricity. You decide to begin formal instruction in ikenobō, the oldest school of ikebana, the art of displaying the momentary life of flowers. In your first lesson, you watch as your teacher lays out three or four flowers alongside five or so branches of different lengths and holds each branch up to notice its shape. She selects one to place in the pin holder in a vase or container with water, then the second, the third, and so on, trimming each in sequence and adding the flowers. Pausing to gaze at the composition, she may make small adjustments, trimming here and there or coaxing a branch or flower to curve a bit more or a bit less. Finally, she sits back to appreciate the composition and its space. All the while you have been sitting slightly behind her to notice how she holds and turns the materials as she examines them and executes each step. You take advantage of the opportunity to see her seeing.

After a few moments, she motions you to remove all items from the container and then to recreate the arrangement with the very same materials and vase. What you imagined to be a simple act of replacing the materials soon proves to be a challenging assignment: your branches somehow stand differently, the flowers seem a bit misplaced, and the arrangement looks a bit askew even to your beginner’s eyes. The teacher gracefully guides you through some adjustments that shape the arrangement closer to her model. She shows you how the branches display a shade (or yin) side and a sun (or yang) side in their natural growth, and how the arrangement forefronts their interaction with each other under a specific light source. She may clarify that this particular work exhibits the classical shōka style, with the tallest branch standing for heaven, the shortest branch representing the earth, and a mid-length branch standing in for the human as mediator in this mini-universe. The three elements with other “attendant” branches and the flowers together configure a space that now comes clearly into view. At the end of your lesson, you disassemble the arrangement, take it home, and put it back together again. And yet it is not exactly the same arrangement, for the shapes of materials have slightly changed, the vase or container is different, and the space in which it is placed is altogether distinct. After a few days, the flowers wither, following the natural way of all life forms, and the arrangement is gracefully discarded.

Over the following one or two years of weekly lessons, you repeat the pattern of watching the teacher compose...
and recreating her composition. There is variation enough. Even within the same style, shōka for example, the materials change according to the seasons; the number, shape, and color of branches and flowers vary; new placement techniques are required; and, in every recreation of the teacher’s model, your arrangement reflects your own level of active understanding. Further seasons of instruction gradually introduce other styles, each with its own guidelines, some styles simpler yet and some complex, some more regulated and others more free-form. Each lesson embodies your unique interaction with a manifold of factors. You learn to see cutting as shaping that expresses the temporal limits of every life form, and for each arrangement you trim branches and flowers anew. It might take four spring seasons to learn to cut an iris leaf adeptly. A repertoire of practical solutions builds into a body of experiential knowledge. That knowledge, in turn, lets you see plant life differently, noticing the stage of a bud’s blossoming, for example, the sun and shade sides of leaves, the ways that different plants grow precisely and compliantly in response to their surroundings and sources of light and water.

At some point in your training, your teacher instructs you to do an alteration (henka 変化) on a formal style while still remaining within that style. The set of rules that specifies a particular style, more or less, has guided your interactions with the material, and the teacher’s actions have modelled appropriate interactions. If you have internalized the guidelines, you need not “bend the rules” but can now realize them in your own way. You come to see your teacher’s arrangements not as originals that you copied but rather as models to which you learned to conform. “Once you learn the form,” she tells you, “the flowers (the arrangement) become(s) your flowers (your arrangement).” This sounds like a contradiction: if all you are doing is applying rules that are not of your own making, how could you be creating something that is uniquely your own? But the form circumscribed by a set of rules is not a fixed and transcendent Platonic form whose instantiations are inevitably only imperfect copies. It is rather a compliant form that comes to life only through creating actual, unrepeatable arrangements. The contour and color of the branches and flowers will differ on each occasion, so the material immediately at your disposal serves as a guideline as much as do the rules. The teacher, too, has been modeling a form that comes to life only in virtually infinite variety. Just as natural things never repeat themselves exactly, your precise actions in arranging as well as the materials you use are singular, one time only. Your experience has not been a matter of learning to “do your own thing” and make something original, as is often stressed in art education focused on originality. Your education in ikebana has been a matter of realizing a form over and over again by modeling the natural growth of plants as well as the actions of a teacher.

The Way of Tea (sadō 茶道) provides another example of a form that precedes the endeavor to produce something original. This example reveals further insight into the nature and origin of rules. Like ikebana, the art of tea produces no lasting artifact. As we shall see, however, that lack does not determine the form. In tea lessons one learns to model a master’s movements and skill, to pay close attention to hands and gestures, and to follow the precise order of minutely prescribed steps in preparing and serving the tea. For example, one learns precisely how to lift the lid from the little iron pot of heated water and where to place it, how to lower the bamboo dipper into the pot and gently pour water into the tea cup, then replace the dipper on its stand and slide one’s fingers along its handle before lifting the hand for the next move. We need not recount all the details here to make the point. To the beginner or the unfamiliar observer, the activity may seem an excessively rule-bound procedure. True, the implements used and the occasion provide some variation: the charcoal used to heat water will burn differently each time, the utensils and tea bowls as well as the tea itself will vary, and the movements of the teacher and student will change to adapt to the situation. Despite these variations, however, the rules seem to take precedence. And they do—but only because they express a model that has previously emerged from extensive practice.

The tea master and philosopher Hisamatsu Shin’ichi explains their origin in relation to the performance. “The Way of Tea is unthinkable without conformity to the rules,” he writes. However, the rules do not represent some external mandate. They have been formulated from the proficient practice of making and serving tea. Their origin lies in the refined activity of tea masters, practitioners who sought the most efficient and elegant ways of preparing and appreciating an everyday refreshment. The rules that guide the movements of the body, the handling of the implements, and the attention to everything and everyone present express the forethought that paves a way to harmonious interaction. Each object and each person are treated with respect. Respect also entails seeing how a rule ensures the simplicity, elegance, and appropriateness of an action. The beginner might respond, “Of course, this makes perfect sense!” And because one is following the most direct, simple, and appropriate way to accomplish something, unfettered by distractions and extraneous matters, one is becoming free. The interiorized rules take the truism that “creativity thrives under constraints” to the next level.

Hisamatsu makes a comment that, taken out of context, seems contradictory: “[A]utonomous and free activity becomes the rule, so that conformity with it occurs naturally. For this reason, the practitioner is forever breaking away from the rules to work freely.” We once watched a student who had been taking lessons for about a year do “tea ceremony.” Afterwards an old Japanese philosopher who had learned decades earlier prepared and served tea. It was obvious that the student had memorized the rules and was consciously, somewhat stiffly, conforming to them. When the old person “did tea,” the motions were fluid and the ambiance relaxed; the rules, it seemed, had been interiorized and forgotten. Perhaps this is what Hisamatsu meant by “breaking away . . . to work freely.” By freeing up a fixed form to comply with ever-changing situations, the rules are kept alive and adaptive. One learns to keep the rules alive and make this art one’s own by modeling a teacher’s performance. Once again, a prior origin facilitates the “originality” of the artist.
The Way of Writing (shodō 書道) is another art form that exhibits ante-originality. It could also be called the Way of Drawing, for calligraphy in this guise is as much drawing as it is writing Sino-Japanese characters or kanji. The “Way of the Brush” in the broad sense includes both shodō and sumi-ink painting, both of which involve mastery by way of modeling. These arts differ from the ways of flowers and tea in that they leave a durable object in the world, the writing or the painting that can be displayed in a tokonoma, an exhibition, or a museum. Indeed, museums often collect Chinese, Korean, and Japanese calligraphic works as superlative examples of an individual artist’s originality. The Way of Writing would seem to exemplify a pattern of originality commonly celebrated in modern Western cultures. It developed from distinct kanji that are intelligible because of their repeated usage, but it re-presents them in unique and unrepeatable patterns. Various styles have developed over the centuries, from very distinct writing resembling uniform printing to very cursive and nearly illegible flows. The artist may adhere to a relatively fixed number and order of brush strokes within each style, but the few styles depicted in writing manuals are patterns generalized and simplified from historical works. The avant-garde “calligraphy” that developed in the second half of the twentieth century transgressed historical patterns both by creating abstract images and by displaying works in exhibitions. As long as the “writing” is of ink brushed on paper or another surface, whether based on kanji or not, it is considered sho. In both traditional and avant-garde calligraphy, an unwritten rule constrains the way the brush is used: the brush never retraces its path.

What, then, is the place of modeling in this art form that seems geared toward originality? Of course, the beginner first learns to prepare the sumi-ink and to brush kanji on the paper by closely watching the teacher’s actions and then trying things out herself. But mere imitation will get the student nowhere. Far too many contingencies arise for straightforward copying to work. One usually already knows how to form the kanji, what stroke order to use, and what “radicals” or often-repeated elements to write. But writing with brush and ink is entirely different from writing from rote memorization with a pen. It demands constant attention and fluid bodily movement; it engages the whole body-mind at once. At the same time, it demands a willingness to let go of one’s will and conform to the quirks of the material that may thwart one’s initial intentions. The speed of the flow of the ink from the tip of the brush guides the speed of the brush moving along the paper as the writer intends. The surface of the paper eases and sometimes impedes the flow. It can seem as if the whole world becomes located in that tip, but it is crucial to widen one’s vision and see the field of the entire paper too. One’s focus on a point of rolling ink expands to the space that takes shape with the developing contours of the inked image. The artwork is the space opened by the image as much as the inked image itself. The agency behind this art is the interaction of artist, brush, ink, and paper. The avant-garde calligrapher Morita Shiryū goes so far as to say that what is created is the artist as much as the artwork; the artist becomes the activity of writing.

The model in Japanese calligraphic art is manifold. For the novice, the teacher who first demonstrates the method sketched above is a model. In the traditional practice called rinsho (臨書), artists take an example of classical Chinese calligraphy (or sometimes later Japanese calligraphy) as their model, which they copy as exactly as possible. (Often, the model itself is one of several classical copies of a work no longer extant). Yet artists who practice rinshō are already proficient writers of kanji, and what they are doing is more than producing a copy that a photographer could do better today. They are modeling their movements after the movements their eyes trace in the exemplary work. In a sense, then, it is the performance captured in the exemplary writing and visible to the trained eye that serves as the model. While calligraphers want to conceal the effort required to achieve technical mastery, they cherish the way that their work makes spontaneity visible. There is no hiding the dynamic movement that created the work, and trained viewers try to trace in their mind or with their hand the choreography of the brush across the surface. The work is a record of an “expressive gesture”—still another way to define what it is that the artist models.

These prior (ante-original) models point the way to a “different kind of creativity.” By way of modeling, the artist is neither reproducing the work of another nor attempting to express herself independently. Through patient practice, the expressive gestures become her own, and her personal style emerges. As in the case of ikebana and the Way of Tea, creativity does not reduce to producing an original or independent work, but appears in the unique performance of the art. Here the parallel between calligraphic art and the floral and tea arts becomes apparent: the outcome is ephemeral. Some calligraphers liken their artistry to the performance of a musical composition, “an activity where one performs forms of words envisaged in mind.” The Western abstract painting that features nothing but the brush and ink is a record of an “expressive gesture”—still another way to define what it is that the artist models.

In other words, authenticity is achieved by reenacting an ante-original.

The notion of ante-originality reminds us that the practice of modeling is not something unique to Japan and is not its original invention. Nor is this practice characteristic of all Japanese art forms. We find it decisive for Japanese “pathway” (道) arts—those that present flowers, tea, and writing, for example—and for theatrical arts like Noh. In this limited sense, its presence in Japanese aesthetics is exemplary. However, precedents are apparent especially in classical aesthetic practices of China, the home of the pathway traditions. Outside those traditions, modeling was a practice of artists who trained in institutions in Europe as well as in Japan—the Renaissance art academies of Italy, for example, or the Kanō school of painting that thrived from the fifteenth century to the Meiji period (1868–1912).
What is more, subsequent interaction between modern Euro-American visual artists and Japanese calligraphers has erased imagined boundaries between “East” and “West.” For some seventy years now, sho artists and Euro-American abstract painters have engaged in a virtual dialogue of images that transformed methods and objectives on both sides.14 *Ikebana* and the Way of Tea, although adhering more closely to Japanese traditions, have become international practices, and the modern Sōgetsu School of *ikebana*, with its use of plastic, plaster, and steel in its arrangements, arose partially in response to Western cultural influence in the twentieth century. There is no monopoly on creativity.

Modeling has, of course, been practiced in cultural forms in which originality has not been an issue. Practitioners of martial arts such as Taekwondo, aikido, and judo learn by modeling forms or kata. Apprentices in trades such as welding learn by modeling the techniques of experienced teachers and by conforming to the demands of the material. Learning a language requires its own modes of modeling. There is no premium placed on originality in these practices. But where an artwork is defined as “an original object that can be created only once,”15 the role of modeling is undervalued. In the facet of Japanese aesthetics reviewed here, the “artwork” designates the one-time performance as much as the object of temporal duration, and the performance uniquely models what we may call the ante-originality of the art.

**NOTES**


6. Theodore Adorno argues that, for all the originality we see in works of all eras of art, the focus on creativity or originality and on art detached from religious functions is a modern Western phenomenon. See Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1998); cited in Fuyubi Nakamura, “Creating or Performing Words?” 80. In contemporary art erases the distinction between original and copy more than Walter Benjamin imagined, and yet art buyers still seek authenticity: “[I]n a fast-growing market for ownership rights to digital art, ephemera and media called NFTs, or ‘nonfungible tokens,’ the buyers are usually not acquiring copyrights, trademarks or even the sole ownership of whatever it is they purchase. They’re buying bragging rights and the knowledge that their copy is the ‘authentic’ one.” “Why an Animated Flying Cat With a Pop-Tart Body Sold for Almost $600,000,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/22/business/nft-nbs-top-shot-crypto.html, accessed May 12, 2022.


10. “Expressive gesture” is the anthropologist Tim Ingold’s phrase to describe musical performance, and adapted by Fuyubi Nakamura to describe calligraphic art in “Creating or Performing Words?” 85. That article presents insights we have appropriated here as well as many details about Japanese calligraphic art that we have had to pass over. Our presentation differs from Nakamura’s by emphasizing modeling in distinction from “imitating.”


---

**“The Secret of Music” and Unity with Nature**

David E. Cooper  
**DURHAM UNIVERSITY**  
**DAVID.COOPER001@YAHOO.COM**

**ABSTRACT**

The title of this paper is taken from a short story by Tanizaki that implies the idea, very familiar in Japanese literature, that music—like other arts—inspires an intimacy with natural environments. Several features of Japanese music traditions encourage this idea, such as the common use of natural sounds in musical performance and enthusiasm for playing music in natural environments. The meaning, however, of hyperbolic claims about music enabling “oneness” or “fusion” with nature is opaque. In this paper, it is suggested that such claims are gestures towards expressing an understanding of our relation to nature that cannot, however, be propositionally articulated. It is an understanding or sense that “shows” itself, but cannot be “said.” The focus should therefore be on musical practices in which this understanding or sense shows itself. This proposal, it is argued, is consonant with the Zen Buddhist sensibilities to which much Japanese music and art bear witness. These include antipathy to “theory,” the thought that there is “nothing special” in enlightened understanding, and an aesthetic in which self-denial is preferred to self-expression.

**TENKO’S LESSON**

In Jun’ichirō Tanizaki’s short story, “A Portrait of Shunkin,” the eponymous music teacher describes how she has trained a nightingale, Tenko, to sing so as to evoke a secluded ravine, a rushing stream, and clouds of cherry blossoms, and to
make us “forget that we are still in the dusty city.” Here, Shunkin comments, is “where art rivals nature. And here too is the secret of music.” For some readers, it is the first of those comments that explains the point of the story: the great irony that artifice more effectively conveys aspects of nature than does nature itself. It is, however, on the second comment that I focus. Whatever else Tanizaki intends, he is claiming that it is of the essence of music—its “secret”—to enable certain experiences of nature. Many writers have rued the seeming impossibility, as Aaron Copland put it, of “stating in so many words what meaning [in music] is.” Tanizaki claims to have responded to this complaint, to have “penetrated [one of] of the mysteries of art.”

**NATURE, ART, AND MUSIC**

In maintaining that there is an intimate relationship between music and nature, Tanizaki is continuing a long Japanese tradition in which perception of an affinity between nature and art has been prominent. “Plum blossoms and poetry, how wonderful together,” declared Ryōkan, while for Bashō it was “rice-planting songs from the heart of the country(side)” that constituted “culture’s beginning.” As D. T. Suzuki observed, without reference to “their intensive love of nature,” it is not possible to “understand the cultural life of the Japanese people.”

The literature is replete, too, with remarks on the particular case of music and nature. For the central character in Natsume Sōseki’s novel, *Kusamakura*, music is, quite simply, “the voice of nature.” He is perhaps expressing the allegedly Japanese view that nature and music must be “appreciated together, for music is considered a subset of nature.” If that is right, then it is unsurprising to find writers, like the composer Toru Takemitsu, pleading that “music should be based on a profound relationship to nature.”

These are large claims to make about art and nature, but familiar in the literature are even more ambitious ones to the effect that art enables the achievement of a unity or “oneness” between people and nature. Echoing Bashō’s remark that the poet must not only “follow nature,” but also be “one with nature,” the novelist Yasunari Kawabata, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, exclaimed that the authentic poet “sinks into nature, becomes one with it.”

Remarks like these on a unity with nature enabled by art and poetry are frequently accompanied by ones on the unreality or illusion of the distinction between subjects and objects, selves and the world. An aesthetic relationship to the natural world, writes one commentator, “necessarily destroys the subject-object dichotomy.” In the same vein, Richard Pilgrim states that in practices ranging from poetry to the tea ceremony, the artist or participant “lets go of the subject/object ego perspectives.”

Once again, remarks like these about the arts in general are repeated in the particular case of music. One writer holds that, in the Japanese view, through music “one becomes nature” so that there is, in effect, a “transcending [of] subjective borders and merging of one’s self into nature.” Elsewhere, the same author stresses that because of a “fusion between the self and sound,” there is a “blurring” or erasing of “the relationship between the subject and object.” Claims about music’s capacity to achieve oneness of persons and nature are especially frequent in the literature on the Japanese bamboo flute, the *shakuhachi*, particularly where the focus is on the flute as a “spiritual tool” rather than as an instrument played to entertain. One author who draws this distinction between a “spiritual tool” and a “musical instrument” argues that the “sweeping,” “wailing,” “thrashing” sounds of the flute confirm the alleged Zen insight that there is “no ontological distinction between the sound of humans and the sound of nature,” or more generally that there is a “complete lack of distinction” between people and their environments.

**ASPECTS OF JAPANESE MUSIC**

How should we understand and assess these large claims about the power of art to induce a sense of unity with nature and dissolve such contrasts as those between culture and nature and subjects and objects? These claims are problematic. One of the problems is the high level of generality and abstraction at which they are made. This provides a good reason to confine our reflections, in the first instance, to a particular art form or practice with the prospect of then generalizing from them.

There is, in my judgment, a good case to be made for this focus to be on music rather than, say, painting. To begin with, the large claims about fostering oneness with nature are peculiarly plentiful in connection with music. Second, there are several features of Japanese music that are apt to invite reflection on its relationship to nature—for instance, the copious use of natural sounds alongside musical tones.

Before considering these features, it might be thought, it is first necessary to determine which types of Japanese music are under consideration. No one, after all, would claim that every kind of Japanese music—J-pop and J-pop, for instance—is apt to invite reflection on its relationship to nature—for instance, the copious use of natural sounds alongside musical tones.

Since it is traditional Japanese music (hōgaku) that has primarily invited such claims, it is with this that we’ll be concerned—but with the proviso that relevant, too, is modernist music, by composers including Takemitsu and Michio Miyagi, that consciously draws upon traditional forms. There are, of course, many forms of hōgaku, including traditional court music (gagaku), Buddhist chanting (shōmyō), and Nō theatre music. Among Japanese instruments, it is the *shakuhachi* whose playing has especially invited reflection on the relationship between music and nature. But the music of the zither-like *koto*—and its variants and predecessors—has also, since the days of *The Tale of Genji* in the eleventh century, prompted the same reflection.

Let’s turn, then, to some aspects of traditional Japanese music in which a relationship to nature is prominent. First, there is the ancient, but continuing, enthusiasm for *al fresco* music-making, for playing music in natural
A striking feature of the novel, notes one scholar, is the sound of the flutes mingled with the singing of the pines. While the koto is heard "to the singing of the waves," a striking feature of the novel, notes one scholar, is how "natural music and human music cooperate." Prince Genji even subscribes to the belief, also found in Shinto myth and practice, that music may influence the course of nature—"moving the moon and stars and bringing unseasonal snows and frosts." 

A second aspect is the copious use in several forms of traditional music of unpitched noises, many of them—like the sound of cicadas—taken from or simulating the sounds of nature. It is not unknown in Western music, of course, to import such sounds—bird calls, frog croaking, and the like—into pieces of music. But this, in the West, is a marginal practice in comparison to the employment of "paramusical sounds" in, for example, Kabuki and Nō theatre music, and in compositions for the shakuhachi and koto. Takemitsu goes as far as to hold that sawari ("noise-like elements") provide the "unique character of Japanese music." 

A third and related aspect is the high incidence of representations or evocations of nature in Japanese music. Pieces mentioned in The Tale of Genji include "The Royal Deer," "Joy of Spring," and "Green Willow." It is not only natural sounds, like that of wind in the pines, that the music may represent. The contours of musical phrases may also seek to capture the flight of a crane or the rhythm of the waves. Nor is the evocation of nature confined to that of particular sounds or phenomena. It has been argued that the contrasting sounds made by the shakuhachi and also by certain drums are intended to represent "the duality of yin and yang" and other dimensions of "the flow of ki [Chinese qi]" throughout the cosmos. 

A final feature deserving of mention is an attitude, not to the music, but to the instruments that play it. In the charming novel, The Forest of Wool and Steel, the piano-tuner is alert to the relationship between the instrument and the natural materials it is made of. The wool of "good sheep make for [the] good sound" of the hammers, and the piano’s wood "replicates the atmosphere of the forest"—so that, in effect, the "sound of the piano [is] connected up with the whole world." Many shakuhachi players express a similar sentiment, including the most famous player of the twentieth century, Watazumi Doso, whose flute of choice was the rough-sounding, unlacquered hōchiku. Another player reports that "when I play shakuhachi I feel a very strong connection to the earth's energy, especially because of the root-end of the bamboo." Parallel remarks are sometimes made about string and percussion instruments, confirming that it is not only the sounds an instrument makes, but also its actual physical properties that can induce a sense of relationship to nature.

Here, then, are four aspects of Japanese musical tradition in which connections are made, in different ways, between music and nature. They demonstrate in their different ways "mutual inflections" between musical practice and nature. When the flute or koto player "jams" with the wind in the pines or the lapping of waves on a beach, his or her experience of a natural environment is modified or inflected at the same time as their experience of the music is. Feeling the root-end of the shakuhachi prompts an awareness of its source in a bamboo grove, while attention to its natural provenance inspires further appreciation of the instrument.

But how, if at all, do these aspects of Japanese music lend support to claims about music’s power to foster a sense of oneness with nature? How do we move beyond "mutual inflections" between culture and nature to their identity with one another?

UNITY WITH NATURE

While talk of unity with nature and erasure of the subject/object contrast is familiar in nature writing, it is often difficult to determine what a given writer intends by it, let alone to find a meaning shared by the various authors. One problem is that such utterances as "humans are not set apart in any way from the processes of nature" lend themselves to readings that render them either absurd or relatively banal, with nothing obvious in-between. If the utterance means that human beings do not differ in any significant ways from everything else in the natural world, it is patently false. Only human beings, for instance, engage in mathematical reasoning, have a sense of history, and think about music. If, on the other hand, it means that human life, like all life, is subject to natural processes, no one is likely to challenge it.

Often, the same author will veer between these poles. D. T. Suzuki, for example, portentously tells us that "the merging of nature and man" means that a person is "in no way different from the birds . . . insects . . . flowers . . . water— not even from Mt Fuji." But a little later, he writes that it simply means that a person, like everything in nature, belongs in a "nexus of infinite inter-relationships." Taken literally, the first of these statements about our "merging with nature" is absurd, while the second is unobjectionable to the point of being trite.

A further problem is that different authors intend different things by the term "nature." Sometimes, it refers to what embraces or pervades everything, or a very considerable slice of everything—the cosmos, the bio-sphere, energy, ki (Chinese qi), and the like. Elsewhere, it refers to something like natural environments. But this reference, too, is ambiguous. According to which author one reads, these environments might or might not include "human landscapes," such as parks and farmland, as well as "wilderness." It is often pointed out, moreover, that the nature many Japanese writers, including Kawabata in his Nobel Prize speech, have in mind seems to be a "secondary" and "romanticised" nature. In Donald Richie's words, the
“nature” that prevails in much of the Japanese aesthetic imagination is “edited and abbreviated,” subjected to “the rules of art.” By contrast, the nature Bashō instructed the artist to follow and be one with was primarily “the ‘lonely’ wild nature of the Japanese countryside,” harsh and austere.

Despite these problems and ambiguities, one might try to soldier on in the hope of arriving at a common understanding—at once cogent and substantial—of a unity with nature that art has the power to inspire. In my judgment, this hope is misplaced, and one would end up simply prescribing, not interpreting. Does this mean, then, that one should abandon the claims about art and music’s power to foster a sense of oneness?

This would be premature. Instead, we should rethink the relationship between the idea of unity and the practices of art. So far, I have been assuming that claims about our “oneness” with nature are propositions that can be assessed for their truth or falsity—that they are descriptions of the relationship between human beings and nature. We might do better, however, to think of utterances like “We are one with nature” in a different way, as being what Ludwig Wittgenstein called Äusserungen. By this term, he meant utterances whose role is not propositional description, but the expression of attitudes, moods, or feelings—as, in effect, continuations of the forms of behavior that also convey them. Some religious utterances, for example, might best be treated not as propositions about reality, but as belonging to, or being akin to, rituals that express religious commitments or sentiments.

It can be especially helpful to regard utterances as Äusserungen in cases where, if they are treated as statements of how things are, they appear to be either wildly false or boringly true. And this, I suggest, is precisely the case with the kind of utterance that concerns us, the rhetoric of oneness with nature. Instead of first asking what is meant by “oneness with nature,” and then trying to see how music and other artistic practices might promote it, the strategy should be almost the reverse of this. We should first identify certain practices and then ask why it is natural for the practitioners to express the attitudes and feelings that inform their practices in the language of unity with nature. To understand such language is, in effect, to understand why people find it natural to express themselves through it.

We already have a fair idea, from the previous section, what the relevant aspects of Japanese musical practice are—al fresco playing, the copious use of natural sounds, and so on. So our question becomes, what features of Japanese culture—religious and spiritual ones, perhaps—inspire people engaged in traditional musical practice to reach for the rhetoric of oneness with nature?

**ZEN BUDDHISM AND THE PRIMACY OF PRACTICE**

For some people, it has been said, “to play shakuhachi is to play Zen.” That may be exaggerated, but it gives dramatic voice to the familiar perception that Japanese arts, including music, have been powerfully shaped by Buddhist, especially Zen, tradition. This is due, in part, to what Suzuki calls the “immense impetus” Zen has given to the appreciation of nature, thereby guaranteeing that it is in “the atmosphere emanating from Zen” that the relation between art and nature is largely to be understood. (In focusing on Zen, incidentally, I am not pretending that other schools of Buddhism have not also had profound effects on the arts.)

Shortly, I shall identify some prominent features of Zen that help to explain why many practitioners of Japanese arts are drawn to the rhetoric of unity with nature. For the moment, however, I want to emphasize how congenial to Zen is the strategy I have proposed—that of understanding this rhetoric by reference to the practices themselves. This is because of what has been called the “fiercely pragmatic stance” of Zen.

It might be thought that, to appreciate Zen’s impact on the relationship of art to nature, we need to turn to characteristic Zen doctrines, such as those of “emptiness [kyū],” “nothing [mu],” and the universality of “Buddha-nature.” However, this would be unhelpful. For one thing, these doctrines share with claims like “We are one with nature” the problem of finding interpretations that do not render them either absurd or banal. Indeed, it may be that the doctrines themselves are best viewed as expressions of attitudes that inform various practices. Simon P. James, for one, has proposed that such doctrinal utterances are not “philosophical propositions which can be assessed as true or false,” but “skilful means” to discourage certain attitudes. Second, it is doubtful that it is through such opaque doctrines that Zen could have exerted its influence on the arts of Japan. As Suzuki remarks, it is not due to “the teaching of Zen,” but to its “atmosphere,” that its impact on “aesthetic sensibility” owes.

The primacy of practice over doctrine is attested to in many Buddhist texts. For Dōgen, in the Buddha-dharma, practice and realization are inseparable, as are “performing practice and attaining realization” for the main architect of the tea ceremony, Sen no Rikyū. It is plentifully attested to as well by shakuhachi players. It is when he “play[s] a simple piece of bamboo in the forest,” surrounded by animals, that Watazumi possesses “understanding of the entire natural world.” His student, Yokoyama, kept silent about his understanding of music and nature, his “awareness of being in the world shown by [his] practice.” Another player denies that the understanding expressed in his playing owed to “ever [having] thought consciously about nature.” All these players, I suspect, would endorse a point Wittgenstein makes about understanding a piece of music: “Don’t look inside yourself. Ask yourself, rather, what makes you say that’s what someone else is doing”—phrasing the theme, perhaps, or ornamenting it, in a certain way.

The primacy of practice means that engagement in music is not a means to something further and separate—to a eureka moment of metaphysical enlightenment, say. Rather, it is a vehicle of understanding and, to recall an earlier phrase, of awareness of one’s being in the world. To ask what is meant by talk of a oneness with nature achieved through music is to ask what are the aspects of the “atmosphere”
surrounding this music that make it natural for those engaged in it to talk in that manner.

RETREAT, HUMILITY, AND NATURE’S VIRTUES

There are at least three ingredients of Zen “atmosphere” that help explain the readiness to speak of music, in its “mutual inflections” with nature, as fostering unity with nature.

Takemitsu’s pieces evocative of water, forests, sounds, and a corresponding accentuation of the virtue of humility.

In fact, Zen’s hostility is less to the city, in its literal sense, than to the degraded condition of human existence that it epitomizes. In modern urban life such things are found everywhere, and it would seem that the “stream of sounds” issuing from a traditional instrument, such as the shakuhachi, is an arena of “sadness” and “suffering.”

The metaphor of a musical space is a common one in musicology. It might be extended to that of music as a nature, from the pressures of modern civilization, and to achieve a more relaxed, and more accepting, “objective and impersonal” perspective on the world.

The city, in effect, is an arena of dukkha (suffering, unsatisfactoriness). By contrast, nature affords a place of retreat, where people can, as it were, cleanse themselves of “the dusty city.” In the countryside, it is possible to liberate oneself from the materials an instrument is made from, and so on. The city, in effect, is an arena of dukkha (suffering, unsatisfactoriness).

The same idea figures in writings on music. Takemitsu, for example, claims that the “stream of sounds” issuing from a shakuhachi player refers to the way his music offers “a context for “seeing and dealing with things as they are,” impersonally and objectively.” Crucially, though, music is not always a space or retreat separate from nature. It is in “song and nature” together that Chômei, in self-exile from the world of urban life, exhorts the reader to “find your friends.”

A final ingredient of the “atmosphere” of Zen is hinted at in Bashô’s instruction to artists to “follow nature.” This is the idea, partly inherited from Daoism, that nature is a teacher from which we should learn. Dôgen makes the point explicit: “grass, trees and lands . . . expound the profound dharma . . . [and] bring forth the teaching for beings,” so that we might obtain “Buddha virtue.” It has been proposed, in fact, that the Zen attribution to all beings of “Buddha-nature” should be understood as telling us “these beings have something to teach us . . . that they exemplify virtues, and that we can, in turn, learn virtue” from them. Examples abound in the literature of Zen: attention to nature enables us, inter alia, to discern and appreciate the spontaneity or “self-so-ness” of nature, and the freedom from contrivance to which we should aspire. As Ryôkan puts it, when you “abandon the fleeting world” of society, “then the moon and flowers will guide you.”

The same idea figures in writings on music. Takemitsu claims that the “stream of sounds” issuing from a gagaku orchestra effectively conveys “the concept of transitoriness.”

Retreat, humility, and nature’s virtues were the initial components of Zen’s “atmosphere.” Yuriko Saito points out how many Japanese poets and artists, including Bashô and the painter Tsubaki Chinzan, recommend practices that “result in a de-emphasis” on the artist’s own creativity. Artworks should not strive to communicate “expressive power,” but rather the qualities of naturalness and spontaneity.
of the instrument, it is claimed, “provide a sensitization to the natural world,” so that it is an “ideal advocate for the environment.”

The point here is that music—and art more generally—can, ironically, render aspects of nature more salient than simply attending to nature itself. This seems to have been Tanizaki’s point: remember that Tenko, whose song conjures up the beauties of nature, is a trained singer—an avian artist—not a wild nightingale. The role of music, then, is to provide and shape experiences of the qualities and virtues of nature that we need to contemplate in order to live according to “the Buddha Way.”

To participate in musical practices, like shakuhachi playing, that engage with and “sensitize” to nature is, then, to encounter the natural world not as something dumb, something that’s “just there,” but as a teacher and guide. Better, perhaps, it is to experience nature as a whole school of learning to which one belongs and in which one feels at home, dependent upon for the direction of one’s life, and grateful to. It is not surprising if people who experience such an intimacy with nature reach for the vocabulary of identity or “oneness” with nature.

**SUMMARY**

“The secret of music,” suggested Tanizaki, resides in its power to put human beings in a certain relationship to nature. Some very large claims, we saw, have been made as to the form of that relationship—notably ones that speak of “oneness” or unity with nature, and the dissolution of the subject-object relation. These claims, I argued, are problematic, and I proposed that, instead of treating them as philosophical propositions, we might regard them as attempts to express attitudes that inform various musical practices that engage with the natural world—as, in effect, extensions of these practices.

In order to understand why practitioners might invoke the rhetoric of unity, their practices should be seen in the context of a cultural and spiritual “atmosphere” emanating from Buddhism, especially from the Zen tradition. Belonging to this “atmosphere” are the perception of nature as a salutary retreat from “the dusty city,” the elevation of humility and self-denial over self-expression and self-assertion, and the appreciation of nature as a teacher of wisdom and virtue. Each of these ingredients helps to explain how recognition of the many “mutual inflections” between music and nature might modulate into an impression of “oneness” with nature.

**NOTES**

The Dancing Truth: Spiritual Play in Zen Aesthetics

Raquel Bouso
POAPEU FABRA UNIVERSITY
RAQUEL.BOUSO@UPF.EDU

ABSTRACT
The philosophers of the Kyoto School have devoted countless pages to reflecting on art, especially poetry and painting. Among these philosophers, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi 久松真一 famously wrote about Zen aesthetics and attempted to systematize the characteristics of Zen art. As knowledge about the history of Asian art increased in the West, Hisamatsu’s pioneering attempt, like that of D. T. Suzuki, at interpreting Zen arts through their religious background was criticized for ignoring the sociohistorical context of this type of artistic production (e.g., Levine 2007). However, here I suggest that both approaches may be complementary rather than exclusive. One can read certain works of art as expressions of a spiritual experience without overlooking the material conditions of their production. Based on one of the aesthetic notions with which Hisamatsu defined Zen art, shadatsu 楽適 (the “free from attachment”), which he links to the Buddhist teaching of the absence of obstruction mugé 無礙 and the Zen expression yuke sammai 遊化三昧 (the “samadhi of absolutely untrammeled play”), I propose to examine how this approach is fruitful for understanding not only the conception of art in a premodern religious context but also certain works of contemporary art.

INTRODUCTION
“We must function like a surgeon, which never gets stuck in its web, not like a silkworm, which gets bound by its creation.” This metaphor was used by the Japanese philosopher and Zen master Hisamatsu Shin’ichi 久松真一 (1889–1980) to convey his insights.1 He applied it to his educational and socially engaged project “The Association for Self-Awakening,”2 but it also found expression in his performance of poetry, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony. Perhaps the British artist Banksy adhered to a similar principle in 2018 when his Girl with Balloon, which was sold for a considerable amount of money at an auction house in London, promptly self-destructed right before an astounded audience. According to art critics, Banksy’s gesture outdid Marcel Duchamp’s provocative display of his Fountain in a gallery in 1917. Both artists subverted inertias of the art world in order to denounce the artistic conventions of the time. Moreover, there is something ironic or playful in these artistic gestures.

In contemporary art, it is possible to identify practices that are directly influenced by the artist’s reception of Zen Buddhism or that, even without having any apparent link to it, can be related to the aesthetic categories that have been used to describe Zen art. Consider Jackson Pollock, John Cage, or Yves Klein, to cite a few well-known examples. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to resort to the 1950s or the 1960s avant-garde, as works by contemporary artists or movements, such as Land-Art, also utilize practices of
Zen Buddhism. Land-Art’s dialogue with the environment is reminiscent of the artist composing a Zen garden. However, my interest here is in one of the aesthetic categories used by Hisamatsu to characterize Zen art, “free from attachment,” or “unrestricted freedom.”[6] I suggest that this aesthetic category can shed light not only on traditional Japanese Zen-inspired art but also on certain contemporary artistic practices.

ON DEFINING ZEN ART

Many Westerners came into contact with Zen art and aesthetics through D. T. Suzuki’s *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1938) and Hisamatsu Shin’ichi’s *Zen and the Fine Arts* (1971).[4] In the twentieth century, the influence of Zen was so pervasive in Western culture that the historian Lynn Townsend White, Jr., dared to predict that “Suzuki’s first Essays in Zen Buddhism in 1927 will seem in future generations as great an intellectual event as William of Moerbeke’s Latin translations of Aristotle in the thirteenth century or Marsilio Ficino’s of Plato in the fifteenth.”[5] Yet, in recent years such influential works have been subject to revision. As Gregory Levine has rightly shown, the characterization of Zen art has changed with the new studies on Zen tradition and the tools provided by critical theory and historiography in art history.[6] Both Suzuki and Hisamatsu described Zen arts as a set of works expressing core spiritual values without taking into account the material and historical conditions of production of the works of art themselves. The fact that Suzuki virtually identified Zen with Japanese culture and Hisamatsu’s interpretation of Zen art from the standpoint of the spiritual experience of awakening, which rendered this art distant from most people, has been the target of considerable criticism.[7] Indeed, Suzuki and Hisamatsu failed to account for the transformation of Zen arts over time and to acknowledge Zen arts’ political dimension as an object of intellectual inquiry. Thus, some of their claims contributed to nurturing both the myth of Japanese uniqueness, and therefore cultural nationalism, and the exoticist discourse of Orientalism in the West.

When Hisamatsu established the distinctiveness of what he called “Oriental nothingness” and emphasized the need of a Zen realization to appreciate Zen art, he certainly accentuated the gap between East and West, as well as the existence of an insider and an outsider perspective. However, it could be said that he wrote, often to an uninformed audience, from an internal or emic viewpoint (to borrow a term employed in anthropology and other disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences), that is, from within the tradition as a Zen practitioner and artist. At the same time, as a philosopher, his notion of the Selfless Self speaks more of an attempt to grasp an experience of self-denial and transformation of the self-centered Self than of fixed identities. In the same way, his famous seven categories to define Zen art tell us more about his way of understanding and living Zen and creating art from this vantage point than about a dogmatic and universalizing theoretical proposal.[8] Thus, a balanced way to interpret the legacy of these authors is to read their writings with a critical eye while trying to understand them in their own terms and time. In this regard, Hisamatsu provides us with both an aesthetic discourse on Zen art and his embodied experience as someone who participated in it and attempted to modernize the tradition in which he was educated.[9]

**ZEN AESTHETICS ACCORDING TO HISAMATSU**

Hisamatsu’s approach to aesthetics is clearly seen in *Zen and the Fine Arts*, where artistic considerations are intertwined with references to Zen literature. He offers concrete examples from different fields of Japanese art (paintings, calligraphy, architecture, flower arrangement, gardens, crafts, and dramatic art), which he regards as creative expressions of a unitary cultural complex. The analysis of the qualities common to these various cultural forms leads him to identify the following seven interrelated characteristics: Asymmetry, Simplicity, Austere Sublimity or Lofty Dryness, Naturalness, Subtle Profundity or Profound Subtlety, Freedom from Attachment, and Tranquility. Furthermore, he argues that Zen teachings provide the basis for all these characteristics, through which Zen finds a concrete expression.

For the Japanese philosopher, what turns a work of art into Zen art is not that it has been made by a Zen monk or that it deals with a Zen theme, but that it aesthetically expresses a Zen meaning.[10] Since this meaning is not intellectual, Hisamatsu assures that it can only be discerned by a living Zen mind. Does this mean that Zen art requires both the artist and the viewer of the artwork to be enlightened? If so, how can that be determined? Certainly, art is conceived here as an expression of what the artist has experienced inwardly, and the cardinal experience of the Zen tradition is usually called “awakening” or “enlightenment.” For Hisamatsu, Zen is “the self-awareness of the Formless Self” so that the Zen artist gives expression to her self-awareness, allowing the observer to delve into her own Formless Self as well. In the case of the self-aware viewer, namely, the one who is able to see what is formless within a form, their own Formless Self is reflected in a specular way in that expressed in the artwork. Rather than a kind of elitism,[11] esoterism, or mystification, this can be seen as a conception of the work of art as an occasion for meditation, both during the process of its making and during its enjoyment, since the aesthetic experience becomes, in turn, a religious experience.

Consequently, when Hisamatsu describes Zen painting as subjective and expressionist, he implies that the Formless Self is expressing itself freely and creatively.[12] Although he concedes that many modern aesthetic movements follow this same path, Zen expressiveness for him lies specifically in the capacity to evoke detachment and profound peaceful quietude.

**THE AESTHETIC QUALITY OF THE “FREE FROM ATTACHMENT” AND THE BUDDHIST “ABSENCE OF OBSTRUCTION”**

However, if we go through this issue with an even finer-tooth comb, the Zen work of art that Hisamatsu has in mind is not a mere object of contemplation: as a concretion of the formless, it refers primarily to a dynamic process of self-expression. This is seen paradigmatically in the painting “Dancing Buddha,”[13] which, according to Hisamatsu,
embraces the Zen quality of the unconditioned freedom, “what is called in Japanese, yuke sammai” — the samādhi of absolutely untrammeled play.15

The Sanskrit term samādhi in the context of Buddhist meditation theory and practice means “concentration.” The Mahāyāna sutras describe as samādhis a wide variety of profound meditative experiences denoting attainments of the bodhisattva—a being who has resolved to become a buddha—through the stages of training. The element of “play”11 appears in these sutras in connection with the bodhisattva’s activity. Rather than highlighting the austerity of asceticism, it is said that such activity will be successful when the bodhisattva enjoys what he is doing. Hence, not conditioned by his goal, his task becomes an easy practice similar to “playing.”11 Indeed, as Johan Huizinga explains in his famous book Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (originally published in Dutch in 1938), freedom is a necessary condition for playing insofar as playing means expressing one’s own freedom through play. Moreover, he also stresses the disinterestedness of play, as it is not connected to any material interest, nor to any benefit, reason, or purpose.18 The play element in the life of a bodhisattva lies in his freedom from every form of constraint and restraint; his compassionate heart functions all the time freely and self-sufficiently. His free and sovereign activity allows him to go from one domain of Buddha to another, to enjoy in the state of Buddha, to have an unhindered mind, to come and go, to be comforted and consoled, and to be without attachment.19

The emphasis on the bodhisattva’s freedom and detachment from self-actualizing goals characteristic of much of the Mahāyana tradition is even more visible in Zen literature. For example, in his work Shōbōgenzō, the Sōtō Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) refers to the upright sitting position in meditation as the right way “to make samādhi playful.”20 The context is the master’s explanation of the “samādhi of self-fulfilling activity”21 as the criterion to transmit the Buddha’s teachings (the Dharma) and to realize the supreme enlightenment. It would be like simply receiving and accepting one’s own spiritual position in the world and effortlessly letting all things be what they are in their self-nature. This translates into ceasing to be affected by convoluted explanations and theories, which Dōgen likens to the knots of bamboo that block free passage. It is the samādhi of the self in which one finds joy, fulfillment, or satisfaction, away from discriminatory and dualistic thinking. Without discriminating thought, there is nothing else or outside of this self, as this self does not have an object. It is an experience that takes place here and now; it is not something that can be acquired or obtained. As Hee-Jin Kim observes, for Dōgen, it means a total freedom of self-realization without any dualism. However, dualities are not erased or even blurred, but rather realized, as this total freedom is not separated from duality.22 With the samādhi criterion of self-fulfilling activity, Dōgen would not have an abstract principle in mind, but a mode of activity itself.

Therefore, for Hisamatsu, Liang Kai’s painting emblematically expresses the mode of being in which one goes about freely, unattached and calm. Free from rigid beliefs, judgments, and preferences, the portrayed monk is immersed in his activity, showing a humorous and carefree attitude towards the world and towards himself. It is worth noting that samādhi, in the locution yuke sammai, does not refer merely to the concentrated mind but also to the fact of being entirely and exclusively immersed in something, for instance, in the case of Budai, dancing. Therefore, samādhi perfectly applies to arts. It is important to recall here that Hisamatsu establishes a clear correspondence between the seven aesthetic characteristics and Zen teachings, the latter being articulated through the use of negative language in the following way: No Rule, No Complexity, No Rank, No Mind, No Bottom, No Hindrance, No Stirring. Despite the negativity of the language, the content expressed in this way is positive, since it points to the aforementioned creative act: the concretion of nothingness into forms. In particular, the aesthetic quality that concerns us here, “free from attachment,” matches the teaching of “no hindrance” or “unobstructed.”23 In the Buddhist tradition, it may refer to a type of conduct that is not constrained by the restrictions of customary morality or mundane societal expectations.24 As an aesthetic-religious quality expressed in the freedom from conventions, it is not against any principle, pattern, law, or rule. Hisamatsu argues that the freedom in question falls within the rules of reason.25 It is not that law is bad, as Nishitani Keiji, another Kyoto School philosopher, clarifies with regard to the Zen standpoint; rather, what is bad is to fix one’s self on some universal.26 The Formless Self, lacking a fixed form, can freely adopt any form without being attached to it.27

To elucidate this Self in terms of modern philosophy, while still reminiscent of Dōgen’s views, Hisamatsu specifies that this self should not be understood as the subject against the object, for, in the true self, there is neither subject nor object. The awareness of this self is not of something else but of itself. Since there is no duality between that which is aware and that which comes to awareness, Hisamatsu posits that the Buddhist term kenshō is more adequate to describe this self-awareness than the usual notion of self-consciousness:

Kenshō is the perfectly non-noesis-noema awareness; it denotes the dancing truth, full of vigorous activity, of the true self and certainly not a contemplative consciousness. In kenshō, nature is not the object but the subject. It is, if you want, a noesis without noema.29

CONCLUSION
Following this line of reasoning, as Liang Kai’s Formless Self is expressed in the dancing Budai, the dancing truth expresses itself through the activity of the self-aware and unattached self. We could say that through his reflection on Zen aesthetics, Hisamatsu draws our attention to the creative process that underlies the work of art. Thus, Hisamatsu’s perspective does not only contribute to an understanding of the works of art as Zen—a perspective that should undoubtedly be complemented with the knowledge of their cultural and historical context—but it also shows their scope beyond said context and helps us grasp what lies at the basis of certain contemporary artistic practices.
Interestingly, in tune with the playful, open, and unrestricted aspects of Zen art that we have seen, the piece by Banksy mentioned at the beginning was not completely destroyed, but transformed into an entirely new piece, which the artist retrospectively titled Love Is in the Bin.30

NOTES
2. In 1958, it became the F.A.S. Society (Formless Self—All Mankind—Suprahistorical History).
7. “In order, however, to determine which calligraphic style or which style of painting or which music expresses a Zen style, one must have a thoroughly vivid Zen realization. If one lacks this realization, one probably will not be able to understand why a certain calligraphic style, a certain painting style, a certain piece of music or a certain living manner even if it expresses Zen meaning.” Hisamatsu, “On Zen Art,” 31.
8. Hisamatsu mentions, for instance, Okakura Kakuzô (also known as Okakura Tenshin) and Ernest Fenollosa (Zen and the Fine Arts, 32).
9. As a calligrapher, Hisamatsu was unorthodox, and he attempted to reform the tea ceremony of his time, which seemed to him to depart from the spirit of Zen with its tendencies towards mannerism (Hisamatsu, “The Nature of ‘Sadō’ Culture,” 18).
13. “Dancing Budai” (Odori Hoteizu 舞布袋図) is a painting attributed to the Chinese painter Liang Kai (twelfth–thirteenth centuries) preserved in the Köetsu Museum of Art, Kobe.
14. 遊化三昧.
16. Yuge 遊 or yuge jinshu遊居自由 is a painting attributed to the Chinese painter Liang Kai (twelfth–thirteenth centuries) preserved in the Kōetsu Museum of Art, Kobe.
17. In tune with the playful, open, and unrestricted aspects of Zen art that we have seen, the piece by Banksy mentioned at the beginning was not completely destroyed, but transformed into an entirely new piece, which the artist retrospectively titled Love Is in the Bin.30
19. Frédéric Girard, Vocabulaire du Boudhisme japonais, Tome II (Genève: Droz, 2008), 1610.
20. Kono zamurai ni yuke surunin これに遊化するに. See Dōgen zenji zenshū 『道元禅師全集』 [Complete Works of Zen Master Dogen], Volume I, ed. Doshû Ōkubo (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1969–1970). It seems that in a later version of Shōbōgenzō’s fascicle Bendōwa (Discourse on the Practice of the Way), the characters of yuge 遊 or yuge jinshō遊化自由, which would mean “go out and expend the teaching”—see Shōhaku Okumura, Soto Zen: An Introduction to Zazen (Tokyo: Shotosho Shumucho, 2017), 77—while, curiously, the second sinogram conveys the idea of “change” or “take the form of.”
21. Jiyū-zanmai 自受用三昧, literally, “self-enjoyed,” that is, the “samadhi of self-realization,” the “bliss of self,” or the “samadhi of self receiving or accepting its function.”
23. Muge 無碍. In Buddhism, this term is used in the central doctrines of the Huayan school (J. Kegon), which Hisamatsu refers to in Dialogues: Part One, “100.
27. This can be related to the process of learning traditional arts indicated in Japanese as shuhari 学習者. This means “respect” the rules, exercise imitation, be faithful to tradition; ha means “infringe,” go beyond the rules, invent and renew; ri means “separate,” which alludes to the need to separate oneself from both, to hold on to the forms and therefore to the personality of the master, not to one’s own transgressive and creative abilities and therefore to one’s own personality. Ri proves to have incorporated the norms to the point of violating and surpassing them, and to have separated oneself from the reference to the self that has expressed itself with such force.
28. 見性, “seeing one’s nature.”
The Enlightenment of Things: Living with Everyday Objects

Peter L. Doebler
DAYTON ART INSTITUTE
PDOEBLER@DAYTONART.ORG

ABSTRACT
In her best-selling book The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, Marie Kondo advocates expressing gratitude to the objects you are about to discard. Having regard for the “life” of non-sentient objects is not new; rather, it is an important thread in the Japanese aesthetic tradition where art, ethics, and metaphysics converge. This essay aims to elucidate this perspective by discussing its roots in Japanese Buddhism, drawing on Shingon, Zen, and Pure Land teachings. I also discuss the literary tradition of tsukumogami, tools that obtain spirits after years of use. In order to illustrate the theoretical discussion, I draw on Ishiuchi Miyako’s photography series Mother’s (2000–2005), which documents daily life objects from her deceased mother. Overall, I aim to further an aesthetics of everyday life, arguing that such regard for non-sentient things has the potential to transform how we engage with the environment around us. It cultivates an aesthetic sensibility that appreciates the uniqueness of each thing, even those with perceived deficiencies, and nurtures an ethic that aims to help all things flourish and reach their full potential.

INTRODUCTION
In her popular book The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, Marie Kondo gives the following advice: “The best way to choose what to keep and what to throw away is to take each item in one’s hand and ask: ‘Does this spark joy?’ If it does, keep it. If not, dispose of it.” This assessment is an internal dialogue where the individual reflects on themselves through the things they have accumulated; Kondo even likens it to a meditative state. However, she goes further and suggests that it is a conversation. She advises against listening to music or watching TV while tidying to avoid distracting the internal dialogue between the owner and his or her belongings.

Kondo amplifies this point throughout the book. She progressively talks about things as living partners that have feelings and with which we can converse. For example, folding clothes “is really a form of dialogue with our wardrobe. . . . It’s like a sudden revelation—So this is how you always wanted to be folded!—a historical moment in which your mind and the piece of clothing connect.” Coins that are stored and unused are “stripped of their care that athletes give to their equipment, we could greatly increase the number of dependable “supporters” in our lives. The act of possessing is a very natural part of our daily life, not something reserved for some special match or contest.

Express your appreciation to every item that supported you during the day. . . . Of course, I know some people find it hard to believe that inanimate objects respond to human emotion. . . . Still, we often hear about athletes who take loving care of their sports gear, treating it almost as if it were sacred. I think the athletes instinctively sense the power of these objects. If we treated all things we use in our daily life, whether it is our computer, our handbag, or our pens and pencils, with the same care that athletes give to their equipment, we could greatly increase the number of dependable “supporters” in our lives. The act of possessing is a very natural part of our daily life, not something reserved for some special match or contest.

For Kondo, every object that we encounter each day is an opportunity to form and develop a mutually supportive relationship.

Kondo’s conception of mundane daily objects like handbags and pens as “dependable supporters” and intuition of the sacredness of this bond with the owner are expressed visually in the profound photographs of Ishiuchi Miyako. Since 2000, Ishiuchi’s work has especially focused on series that intimately explore the lives of objects after their owners are gone, such as her mother (Mother’s, 2000–2005), the artist Frida Kahlo (Frida by Ishiuchi, 2012), and anonymous victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (ひろしま/hiroshima, 2007–). Mother’s includes photos of lipstick (Fig. 1), shoes, a wig, a hairbrush, dentures, and undergarments. Coupled with these objects are detailed closeups she had previously taken of her mother’s body, highlighting scars, making the owner and owned inseparable, imbuing the silent objects with both a sense of the presence of the absent owner and the continuing life of the object.

Kondo’s comments about having regard for the “life” of non-sentient objects and Ishiuchi’s photos that seem to preserve this life are not new; rather, they echo an important thread in the Japanese tradition where aesthetics, ethics, and metaphysics converge around the human-made things that support our daily lives. In the following, I will tease out this thread, focusing in particular on contributions from the Buddhist tradition that entertain the possibility of the enlightenment of non-sentient objects and the path through which they may achieve enlightenment.

I will conclude by returning to Kondo and Ishiuchi to reflect more broadly on how having regard for non-sentient things has the potential to transform how we engage with the

Figure 1. Ishiuchi Miyako (Japanese, born 1947). Mother’s #36, 2002–2005, chromogenic print. © Ishiuchi Miyako. Image courtesy of The Third Gallery Aya.
environment around us, especially the quotidian objects that support our mundane existence.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THINGS

Can non-sentient things attain highest enlightenment or Buddhahood? In the eighth century, Buddhist thinkers in China and Japan began to consider this question as a logical extension of the Mahāyāna tradition, which developed a teaching about the progressive enlightenment of all sentient beings. Saichō (766–822), founder of the Tendai school in Japan, used the phrase "the Buddha-nature of Trees and Rocks," but he did not elaborate. Over the following centuries, the Tendai school progressively defended either the possibility of plants achieving Buddhahood, or that they already were in an enlightened state.

However, it was the Shingon school that would take the idea of the Buddhahood of non-sentient things to its furthest extreme. This originates in the thought of Kūkai (774–835), Shingon’s founder, who asserts the Buddhahood of non-sentient things based on their participation in the dharma-kāya (法身, J. butsu). This is the Dharma-body, a metaphysical ideal of which all things, sentient and nonsentient, are manifestations and in which all things are interrelated. Kūkai comments:

The explanation of the Buddhahood of insentient trees and plants is as follows: the Dharma-kāya consists of the Five Great Elements within which space and plants-and-trees are included. Both this space and these plants-and-trees are the dharma-kāya. Even though one might see the coarse form of plants-and-trees, it is with the Buddha-eye that the subtle color can be seen. Therefore, without any alteration in what is in itself, trees-and-plants may, unobjectionably, be referred to as Buddha.

By connecting non-sentient things to this deeper reality, Kūkai laid the groundwork for subsequent Shingon thinkers to give sustained attention to non-sentient phenomena, particularly material objects. This is exemplified in a remarkable way in the Tsukumogami ki (付喪神記, The Record of Tool Specters), an example of the genre of short, entertaining, and edifying tales popular from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.

The text opens by introducing the custom of throwing out old tools in a year-end cleaning because of the belief that after one hundred years they will receive souls and trick people. This leads into the narrative, where a group of tools gather to strategize how they can get revenge on the people who threw them out. A string of Buddhist prayer beads advocates benevolence, but he is beaten by a club and kicked out of the group.

On New Year’s Eve, the creation god reorganizes everything, and it is then that the tools receive souls and become specters in the form of men, women, demons, animals, etc. They go on to exact revenge by eating people and causing a nuisance. Buddhist protectors attack the malevolent specters with wheels of fire. Rather than destroy the tools, however, the divine figures tell them to seek Buddhahood.

Meanwhile, the prayer beads advanced to the stage of a Buddhist priest, so the tools come back, repentant, and seek its spiritual guidance. They become novices and study the precepts of Buddhism with a sense of urgency: "If possible we would like to receive profound teachings and attain Buddhahood swiftly." The priest responds that the only way to attain Buddhahood immediately and in one’s current body is through the three-fold mystic practices of the Shingon sect (mudra, mantra, and meditation), and goes on to tell the story about how the founder, Kūkai, proved that it was possible to enter into an enlightened state during one’s lifetime. The tools agree to follow the way of Shingon and eventually all the tools achieve Buddhahood in their current bodies. It is then in the conclusion that the text applies the tale, unashamedly promoting Shingon:

Regarding the teaching of realizing Buddhahood by nonsentient beings, although both Tendai and Kegon sects also preach this, their teachings are amorphous and they have not mastered all the subtleties. Therefore, while other sects advocate only sōmoku jōbutsu (the enlightenment of plants), the teaching of the Three Mysteries of the Shingon sect alone goes so far as to say sōmoku hijō houshin shugyō jōbutsu (plants and nonsentient beings become Buddhas by arousing the desire for enlightenment and performing ascetic and religious practices). If attainment of Buddhahood by awakening and training is possible for animate beings, how much more so for the nonsentient beings?

Tsukumogami ki illustrates how abstract philosophical discussions about the place of non-sentient things in a Buddhist cosmology can spread on a popular level. It can also serve as an impetus to ask broader questions such as the following: If non-sentient things may also attain enlightenment, just as humans can, what is the relation between the two? If all is interrelated, is there a role humans may play in the enlightenment of things?

THE PURSUIT OF ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THINGS

One potential way humans may contribute to the enlightenment of things is by cultivating a sensitivity to materiality and time, which is part of a basic change of mindset from thinking in dualities; for example, person vs. thing. Of particular importance here is the Buddhist teaching of shinnyō (真如), or “suchness.” Shinnyō denotes “the true form of things” and it requires overcoming logical distinctions and subjective attachments to grasp a thing as it is internally without turning it into an object.

Perceiving things in their "suchness" requires a particular kind of thinking. The Zen priest Dōgen (1200–1253) called this kind of thinking hishiyō (非思量, or "without-thinking." This contrasts with thinking (shiryō, 思量) and not-thinking (fushiryō, 不思量). Speaking about the difference between these, Michael Marra comments:
The peculiarity of "without thinking" is its nonconceptual and prerelective mode of consciousness, which makes the individual perceive reality as it is (genjōkōan), without letting consciousness and the construction of categories intervene in the modification and distortion of reality. . . . Reality is then perceived in its phenomenological aspect of constant transformation (mujō). . . .

Sensing things in this way, "without-thinking," has qualitative and quantitative aspects that are relevant for the aesthetic experience of anything. Qualitatively, shinnyo "cultivates an attentive and respectful attitude toward the characteristics essential to defining its individuality."10 Quantitatively, if each thing is to be appreciated in its "suchness," as it is without the restriction of subjective attachments, this levels the perceptual playing field and makes anything a potentially significant object of attention, because it will communicate ultimate reality, but in a completely unique and particular way—and unavailable in any other way—within the immanent. Furthermore, usual ontological binaries such as beautiful/ugly, perfect/ imperfect, important/unimportant are also destabilized, because if even common, imperfect things express their own intrinsic Buddha nature, then they should be valued as they are.

In his essay "The Dharma Gate of Beauty," Japanese folkcraft advocate Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961) emphasized this way of appreciating "ugly" or "imperfect" things as they are. Yanagi discovered the basis for a beauty beyond the duality of beauty and ugliness in the fourth vow of Dharmakara in the Larger Sutra of Eternal Life, where it states, "unless there is no beauty and ugliness among them, I will not attain highest enlightenment."11 Yanagi argues that achieving this beauty is quite simple; it depends on experiencing the thing in its "suchness."12 This is to recognize the beauty naturally inherent in all things; it is only humans who distinguish between beautiful and ugly:

Since the nature inherent in all things is prior to beauty and ugliness, if instead of striving for more beauty, everything stays within its original nature, there is no reason why anything should fall into ugliness. The nature of things is such that everything, however clumsy, is beautiful just as it is, even in its clumsiness. And yet, having inflated opinions of themselves, most people endeavor by their own means to work their influence on things.13

For Yanagi, things in nature naturally exist in this state, and can remind humans of it, but for humans to enter it what is required is a change of mindset. In words that echo Dōgen's "without-thinking" noted above, he says:

Since this means a liberation from attachment to things, it also means the free mind. In Buddhism, becoming free-mind [means] returning to the "non-abiding mind." This "non-abiding mind" is the "mind of non-obstruction" inherent in the Buddhist way of life. . . . To conclude, if a [person] lives a life of free-mindedness, then whatever [they] make will avoid ugliness. . . . Ugliness finally is a representation of an unfree state, and therefore is an indication of bondage."24

A free mind that goes beyond conventional dualisms created by human attachments—skilled/clumsy, high/low art, beauty/ugliness—takes one into what Yanagi calls the "Pure Land of Beauty," a place where all things, sentient and nonsentient, are liberated and participate in a free beauty that transcends rigid classifications and discriminations.15

This egalitarian feature of Buddhist thought helps explain in part Yanagi’s appreciation of traditional folk craft in East Asia, and more broadly the appreciation in Japanese culture for the quotidian and imperfect. A preeminent example is the wabi (わび) tea ceremony that came to prominence in the sixteenth century and is exemplified in the aesthetics of the tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). This form of tea ceremony placed a high value on mundane, mishapen, or even broken implements as expressing wabi, a form of beauty marked by simplicity, imperfection, and austerity.26

This appreciation of the materiality of things in the wabi aesthetic, especially their fragility, has a temporal aspect and is related to the Buddhist teaching of impermanence (無常, mujō). This teaching asserts that all things are in a constant state of flux, arising and passing away. Backward looking with nostalgia at the past or forward with longing to some meaningful telos are misguided ways of perceiving and dealing with the existential situation of constant change. This is also exemplified in the tea ceremony. As Yuriko Saito describes it:

Though highly stylized and guided by almost excruciatingly detailed instructions, the overall purpose of the wabi tea is to celebrate and appreciate the aesthetic experience brought about by the chance meeting of many elements beyond human control. The occasion thus created by meticulous preparation and chance is for one time only, referred to as ichigo ichie (one chance, one meeting). In a sense, this aesthetic activity represents our entire world and life where the ruling principles are transience, insufficiency, imperfection, and accidents.27

While certainly a formalized activity set aside from daily life, the tea ceremony has as its goal providing an intense microcosm of what our entire lives are in their ephemeral beauty. Likewise, the appreciation of aged and imperfect artifacts both in the tea ceremony and more broadly finds an aesthetic value in the way time interacts with materiality; the ways beginnings and endings are remembered and anticipated in the present moment of the thing’s life as it engages a person who faces a similar situation. “By celebrating the aesthetic value of such objects,” Saito observes, “human submission to and eventual affirmation of life with all its contingencies become aesthetized.”28 However, this experience is not merely aesthetic. Nor is it only for the individual. Instead, by sensitively attending to things in their uniqueness and recognizing a common fellowship in impermanence, humans may support the liberation, the enlightenment, of things.
Returning to Yanagi’s celebration of folk crafts created by anonymous craftspeople, Ronald Y. Nakasone notes how Yanagi’s “proposal for the ‘liberation of things’ radically extends our understanding of sentence and spiritual transformation.” Humans do not merely make and use things with no consequence; rather, their spiritual state has a direct impact on the life of the objects. As Yanagi comments:

If the article is beautiful, we may say that it has achieved Buddhahood, for it is not [humans] alone that may become Buddha. A beautiful artifact may be defined as one that reposes peacefully where it aspires to be. A [person] who achieves Buddhahood has entered the realm that lies beyond that of duality; by the same token, beauty is that which has been liberated—or freed—from duality.

Liberation, enlightenment, the Buddhahood of the object is intimately linked to the Buddhahood of the person who makes it and uses it.

EVERYDAY ENLIGHTENMENT

One may wonder how far the Buddhahood of things can be extended. Speaking of austere, rough Korean bowls valued by tea ceremony masters like Rikyū and, centuries later, Yanagi seems plausible, but what about the mass-produced, disposable objects we employ on a daily basis, the clothes we buy for only a season or even a single vacation? Looking at Ishiuchi’s photograph of her mother’s lipstick, where does the Buddha potential originate and how is it realized? In the cosmetic manufacturer? In her mother who used it? In Ishiuchi’s photograph? Across the interplay of these?

The central themes of Marie Kondo’s philosophy of tidying are service and joy. Things desire to serve, support their owner, and the owner in turn cares for things with thoughtful attention. This applies even to the act of storage, which Kondo refers to as “the sacred act of choosing a home for my belongings.” Just as humans find peace and security in having a safe place, “possessions that have a place where they belong and to which they are returned each day for a rest are more vibrant.”

The result of this mutually supportive relationship is joy that is manifest in both the person and the thing:

When you examine things closely, you can begin to discern whether or not those things bring their owner joy. When a woman is in love, the change in her is apparent to everyone around her. In the same way, things that are loved by their owner and treated with care are vibrant and radiate an aura of wanting to be of more service to their owner. Things that are cherished shine. The genuine emotion of joy resides in the body and in the possessions of the owner, and therefore it can’t be concealed.

Kondo then applies this criterion of joy to deciding what to keep and what to throw away when organizing one’s environment.

One of the most unsettling aspects of reading Kondo on tidying is how she relates working with clients who throw out sometimes over one hundred garbage bags full of things that no longer “spark joy.” The popularity of Kondo’s book is symptomatic of these deeper issues raised by rampant material consumerism, which in turn raises the question: if indeed there is a Buddhahood of things, are humans impeding this in their avaricious production, consumption, and disposal of things? Kondo does not address this directly, but her solution is to not simply throw things out, especially in exasperation, but to take each thing in one’s hand, consider whether it sparks joy, and, if not, to express gratitude for its service, no matter how minimal, and send it on.

Then what do the things in our homes that don’t spark joy actually feel? I think they simply want to leave. For this reason, when you part with something, don’t sigh and say, “Oh, I never used this,” instead, send it off joyfully with words like, “Thank you for finding me,” Make your parting a ceremony to launch them on a new journey. Celebrate this occasion with them. I truly believe that our possessions are even happier and more vibrant when we let them go than when we first get them.

While this may sound overly optimistic about putting things in landfill, it is possible to argue that cultivating a sense of what sparks joy in oneself may help ameliorate the deleterious side of material consumerism. If the focus shifts from only thinking of what is cheapest or most convenient for oneself to giving consideration of the things we bring into existence through our creating, purchasing, and using—one approach being the sensitivity to materiality and time delineated from a Buddhist perspective above—this may in turn reduce thoughtless waste of natural resources and callous use and disposal of things.

This tension between the ideal, surrounding ourselves with quality, well-made things that we joyfully share our life with, and the real, the haphazard and often thoughtless way we acquire and use things because of numerous factors (convenience, economics, availability) pervades Ishiuchi’s photos. The quotidian thing stands alone, usually with no background that would distract from it, and it fills the frame as the body of a person in a portrait would. Looking closely at things serves as a means for Ishiuchi to both reflect on the people who owned them and the things themselves. Speaking about the series Mother’s, she notes, “What I have now are only the things that my mother left behind for me. I bring them out into the light one by one, to see their [sic] image onto photograph, as a farewell to her.”

As with Kondo, the thing becomes a medium for dialogue, this time with another person. At the same time, Ishiuchi has spoken of how when photographing things such as dresses, it becomes a meditation on the life of the thing, how cloth was woven, cut, sewn, and worn.

The peculiar power of Ishiuchi’s photos is that they simultaneously preserve the uniqueness of items and their owner—her mother, Frida Kahlo, victims of Hiroshima—while creating a microcosm of all the quotidian things that
As in the Buddhist Japanese aesthetics discussed above, attention to the sufficiency of a material thing leads to an awareness that overcomes dichotomies that would divide the self from other people or things and discriminate between beautiful/ugly, perfect/imperfect, or important/unimportant.

While one may hesitate to use the word joy, as Kondo does, perhaps a better word is equanimity. Ishiuchi’s photos bring us closer to the unique particularity of the objects and memories of our own lives, and of those close to us.”

Ishiuchi’s photos recognize the fragility and fallibility of human lives and the lives of things—how we fail things in our joint quest for enlightenment but also how we get it right sometimes—and how they interrelate in the broader flow of impermanence.

NOTES
1. Regarding the order of Japanese names, I have written Marie Kondo’s name in the English order because this is used in her official English website, https://konmari.com/. I have retained the Japanese order for Ishiuchi Miyako, as this is the common way her name is written in English publications. For works cited if the work was written in English, I have used the English order. If a work was translated from the Japanese, I have retained the Japanese order.


9. The indigenous Japanese tradition of Shintō undoubtedly plays a role in this perspective, but for sake of space and focus is not discussed here.


18. A related concept is mushin (無心), or “no-mind.”


II. MORAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

A Cut Above: Aesthetic and Moral Virtuosity in Japanese Dō

Jesús llundáin-Agurrüza
LINFIELD UNIVERSITY
JILUNDA@LINFIELD.EDU

ABSTRACT
This paper examines the aesthetic and moral facets of Japanese dō such as the Way of Tea or the Way of the Sword. As artistic paths, they aim at personal flourishing within an ethos of shugyō that embraces lifelong striving. Thus, they offer unique soteriological and artistic methods to thrive. These Ways, I argue, normatively embody cognitive, aesthetic, affective, and moral dimensions of personhood that amalgamate into improvisational virtuosic performances. A holistic, situated, and enactive model of embodied cognition helps explain dō given that they are enacted by way of attentive and polished ritualized movement. Pivotal, and enabling consummate transformative action, are hōben (improvisational virtuosity) and mushin (engaged presence). Wabi (austere beauty) and yūgen (deep mystery) illustratively embody how normatively complex dō blend aesthetic and moral facets.

AN ILL-FATED ENCOUNTER – INTRODUCTION
Once upon a time during the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868), a master of the Way of Tea, chadō, had an ill-fated encounter with a disreputable rōnin, masterless samurai, that ended with a challenge to a duel. The tea master, sure that he was to be cut down, convinced the rōnin to momentarily postpone the fight under the ruse of finishing an errand for his lord. Having never wielded a sword, he went to a nearby fencing school he had noticed earlier to ask for advice on how to die honorably so as not to embarrass his lord. After listening to his account, and before teaching him how to die, the sword master asked him to serve a cup of tea. The tea virtuoso forgot about his plight and fully gave himself to the task of preparing the tea. Impressed by the tea master’s skill and complete absorption, the fencing master exclaimed, “There you are! No need for you to learn the art of death! The state of mind in which you are now is enough for you to cope with any swordman.” The sword master proceeded to explain that, once facing his opponent, the tea master was to act as if he were going to serve tea. Then, he should ready his garments for the duel. When collected, he should raise his sword above his head and strike down as the opponent attacked. The sword master expected it would end in an honorable mutual slaying. Upon looking at the tea master, the rōnin immediately noticed the change in attitude: the erstwhile fear had been replaced by a resoluteness to die there and then. One cut would decide their fate. Cowering, the rōnin asked for forgiveness and took off running.

This story illustrates a number of issues at the heart of this commentary on virtuosity in the context of Japanese artistic dō: a skillful ability to handle verifiable predicaments (even lethal situations), the tea master’s concentration, and the implicit normative principles and corporeal and kinetic nature underlying such arts. All these present an aesthetic and moral mode of ameliorative self-transformation. Indeed, dō, as fulfilling paths, embody normative ways of life that blend cognitive, aesthetic, affective, and moral dimensions into improvisational virtuosic performance. The next five sections will discuss the following: 1) Japanese dō as unique soteriological and artistic paths; 2) dō in terms of ritualized embodiment both in their traditional context and in relation to embodied cognition; 3) hōben and mushin as virtuosic and transformative; 4) aesthetic and moral facets of dō, specifically wabi and yūgen; and 5) shugyō as lifelong striving.

PRIVILEGED ARTISTIC PATHS – JAPANESE DŌ
Even the humblest, most ordinary objects and simplest everyday-life moments are highly aestheticized in Japan. Indeed, the commonplace hides in plain sight a sophisticated aesthetics. This is most evident in Japanese dō, deeply transformative practices such as the Way of Tea (also referred to as chanoyu, tea ceremony), kado (Way of Flowers), and kendō (Way of the Sword), as well as related traditional arts such as Nō theater. Through their highly refined ritualized techniques, Japanese dō act as soteriological methods for self-realization and spiritual liberation. An ethos that seeks flourishing through relentless dedication to seemingly unachievable perfection is vital. Crucially, this manifests immanently and concretely in action and individuals rather than through abstract frameworks and principles. Exemplars include groundbreaking Zen priests Dōgen Zenji (1200–1253) and Takuan Sōhō (1573–1645), formidable swordsman Musashi Miyamoto (1584–1645), virtuoso Nō actor Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), multifaceted Buddhist nun Ōtagaki Rengetsu (1791–1875), and contemporary takumi (master craftsperson) kirie (Japanese papercutting) artist Kojima Nahoko (1981–). Japanese dō afford transformative openings where action and practice are fundamental, formative, and foundational, and precede theoretical analysis and intellectual understanding. In other words, epistemically, embodied intuition leads to conceptual discernment. Tea masters’ posture, hands, and movements refine their character and enable them to acquire Socratic insight from the very tea brewing and tea serving. Thereby, they cultivate the capacity for fully attentive and fluid engagement in their actions while remaining aware of the broader situation, which includes being attuned to the mood of the ceremony’s attendees. In this way, they are poised and prepared to skilfully redirect the overall ambiance and energy in the room, e.g., kindly easing anxiety or subtly tempering overenthusiasm.

To be clear, methodology does not preclude intellectualization necessarily. It is a matter of emphasis and circumstance. Verbalization and instruction often get in the way, as Eugen Herrigel frustratingly found out when learning kyudō (the Way of the Bow). Sōtō Zen master Dōgen fiercely advocated for the primacy of zazen (seated meditation) as shikantaza: One just sits...
in a state of without-thinking and thereby bypasses any sort of conceptualization or verbalization. Yet, he wrote extensive treatises that recursively commented—both philosophically and doctrinally—on this tension between logos, propositional thought, and action. At the core lies the problem of transmission: how to communicate what is not just ineffable but manifestly personal qua experienced. Sometimes, the answer is to just do it. Further, lessons are to be in-corpor-ated—inTEGRATED psychosomatically: the union between mentality and corporality is not a metaphysical given but phenomenologically experienced and an achievement.\(^\text{9}\) As such, it is trainable, subject to being perfected, and liable to both improvement and deterioration.\(^\text{1}\)

Biomechanically, Western sports and fine and performing arts share kinematic facets and formal elements with but differ in crucial aspects from Japanese dō. The most salient difference is that, as Robert E. Carter explains, “There is nothing like this understanding in the West, which does not employ its arts and crafts, or its sports to achieve spiritual self-transformation.”\(^\text{2}\) While sports and the arts can result in existential insights, this is neither commonplace nor fully comparable.\(^\text{3}\) Rather than results and victory in sports or self-expression for its sake in the arts, in the Japanese case the onus lies on striving after a personal performative excellence.\(^\text{10}\) As Carter points out, “Self-cultivation by means of the Japanese arts is transformative. It can yield enlightened seeing and enlightened being.”\(^\text{1}\) In dō, this happens in and through the body.

**INCARNATE TRACES ON PAPER – THE ARTS AND EMBODIED COGNITION**

To discuss the artistic case in more detail, the "real" work of art is not the painting (this medium being the clearest case) but the artist and her performance.\(^\text{1}\) This is so in two ways: first, it refers back to the artist; second, it is less an aesthetics for an audience than one concerned with the artist's own cultivation-through-performance (explored in the next section). To delve into the first issue, even when looking at a "simple" sumi-e, the Japanese minimalist monochromatic ink painting, the actual object d’art is but a finger pointing at the moon, to elicit a common Zen trope of fittingly obscure origin: the painting is not to be enjoyed simply for its overt aesthetic qualities, although this can be part of the process, but it should primarily lead discerning eyes to how the artist moved inclusive of her affective state.\(^\text{13}\)

Viewers recreate kinesthetic and proprioceptive dynamics as they empathetically explore the lines on paper or silk. Whatever the image may depict, the point is to parse it for the artist's character and her emotional state when creating it. The lines depicting a shrike on a dead branch, in swordsman Musashi's drawing, evince the assurance, vigor, and determination of a warrior who finds himself self-composed and at peace yet ever alert.\(^\text{14}\) Contrastingly, the image of a samurai in a rush, accompanied by the witty lines of a poem about a romantic rendezvous reveal the whimsical and playful irreverence of Buddhist nun Rengetsu's carefree joviality.\(^\text{15}\) Of course, what applies to calligraphy and painting more readily applies to other more physical arts.

A closer look at calligraphy is beneficial for two reasons. First, it is a relatively simple case that necessitates little in the way of familiarity with art forms, styles, or artistic periods. Second, it further elucidates the congruence between the cognitive framework discussed below and Japanese ritualized movement. Although the original analysis pertains to scholarship concerned with Chinese calligraphy, the insights are transferable given that Japanese kanji borrow Chinese characters and that hiragana transcriptions also rely on equivalent techniques and movements.

Calligraphy in East Asia is an art of writing in its own right; it is not simply about beautiful writing as in the West. Jean François Billeter says it is "an art of movement."\(^\text{16}\) John Hay explains that there was a correspondence between looking at the characters themselves as being arteries and bones and the suggestion that they grasped kinesthetically the implications of movement.\(^\text{1}\) Such kinesthetic resonance, Billeter writes, makes it possible to "intuitively grasp our body" and simultaneously "gives us the power to give body to the characters themselves, that is, to make of them the expression of our lived body [vécu corporel, lived experience]."\(^\text{17}\) Michelle Merritt helps bring together movement and meaning, explaining that "our gestures just are communicative. In fact, gestures have been shown to alter our thinking patterns—facilitating, augmenting, and in some cases, impeding them."\(^\text{18}\) The compelling evidence supports the view that gestures "are not mere movement, but instead are thought in movement."\(^\text{2}\) Moreover, Kenji Tokitsu clarifies that, in Japan, "the gesture," whether technical or in everyday life, "was received as a total expression of the person making it."\(^\text{21}\) Briefly put, East Asian calligraphy is an art of gesture. Further, calligraphy also partakes of morality for both calligrapher and reader. In the process of writing, the former inks down a model of her character as well as moral and artistic standards to follow while the latter traces these in his imagination and effectively co-creates a community.\(^\text{2}\)

In the case of Dōgen, who was as much a profound philosopher-monk as he was a skillful calligrapher, these points regarding calligraphy are particularly valid. Examining the Fukanzazengi, a sort of instruction manual to clearly guide acolytes how to properly sit in zazen, Charlotte Eubanks argues that Dōgen's calligraphy "is a carefully orchestrated performance . . . it does precisely what it asks its readers to do: it sits calmly, evenly, and at poised attention in a real-world field of objects (trees, grasses, and so forth)."\(^\text{23}\) Since the concern lies with Dōgen's writing as performance, we can evoke Zeami's analysis of the three essential endowments of the Nō actor and say that the lines immanently and materially record the Zen skin/flesh/bones that animate the monk's brush.\(^\text{2}\) This millenary virtuosity coheres with certain contemporary views of embodied cognition.

The version of embodied cognition that best supports the present analysis is holistic, situated, and enactive. As holistic and situated, it advances continuities in kind between lower and higher organisms, cognitive and affective modes, and psychophysical processes. A key element to accentuate is the mutual and constitutive relationality among performer, performance, and situation. As enactive,
it posits a two-level scaffolding of intelligence. One layer involves mental representations as truth-bearing stand-ins that involve semantic content (meaning/intensionality) typical of linguistic sociocultural practices. The other layer operates without representations or mental content but still engages an environment-targeting intentionality that enacts dynamically according to the situation.\textsuperscript{25} If tea or sword masters explain what they do to someone unfamiliar with the ceremony or dueling, this would engage the first layer. When one serves the cup of tea or the other cuts and parries, however, each relies on flexible, intelligent, embedded habits that act as repertoire from which to improvise as needed.\textsuperscript{26} When it comes to performance, given that practice leads the way, it is the latter aspect that we are concerned with. Ritual and patterned movement infuses, intensifies, and incorporates our skills and virtues into a holistic relational performance.\textsuperscript{27} The constraints of ritualized action embed past engagements as a repertory from which to open novel opportunities to act. These openings both nurture and test our skills. Improvement in this context thrives on the unique psychosomatic states characteristic of the improvisational bodymind that dō foster.

**VIRTUOSITY IN ACTION – MUSHIN AND HÖBEN**

Compared to mainstream spectator-centric Western artistic practices, within the framework of dō art is created less as object of appreciation than as execution of self-cultivating performance. Of course, the object or the performance is offered to others for appreciation oftentimes. Yet, if art pieces or performances are to partake of any value worth appreciating, this is premised on the artist’s mastery of herself first and foremost. Somewhat paradoxically, even in cases where the primary concern of the artist is the delight of the audience, as Michiko Yusa attests regarding nonpareil Nō artist Zeami, the highest expression of the artform is concerned with the direct experience of mushin.\textsuperscript{28}Mushin literally translates as “no-mind” or “without mind,” however, for our purposes, it is better conceived of as committed, awakened, virtuosic, and engaged presence: a skillful attentiveness that is improvisational and fully present. In this state, the artist, attuned to the situation, responds untrammeled and instantaneously. Much as the moonlight reflects on water, another common Buddhist trope, action takes place without delay. Rinzai Zen monk Takuan “brushed” a long missive to legendary samurai Yagyū Munenori (1571–1646) that in essence explained mushin as improvisational, immovable—in the sense of unperturbable—wisdom. In the Buddhist context, this is about not getting caught up in the karmic net of interdependence while still skillfully interpenetrating with phenomena; for the sword master, this is about not getting cut up by the adversary’s sword while becoming more virtuous because more able; for the artist generally, this is about being attuned to audience, artwork, and herself in a way that her creativity flows unimpeded. In short, mushin is an improvisationally engaged presence that relies on without-thinking; this amounts to being present in things as they are.\textsuperscript{29}

On a broader scale, this concerns the Buddhist notion of hōben (Sanskrit, upāya), which usually translates as skillful or expedient means. As John Schroeder points out, hōben eschews metaphysical explanation for practical results in tune with the needs of the situation and the persons involved.\textsuperscript{30} Functionally, it operates as a relational and improvisational virtuousness, as Peter D. Hershock argues, characterized by a liberating attentive mastery that works much as jazz musicians attune to unfolding acoustic dynamics and achieve creative synchrony expressed in shared appreciation of unlimited possibilities, thereby “giving birth to entirely new worlds.”\textsuperscript{31} In virtue of their underlying Buddhist ethos, dō bring to the table a clearer, firmer moral facet. They foster relational emancipation from karmic fetters through responsive improvisation—each in their own way. Indeed, if dō have methodological particularities, these are but different paths to the same destination: awakening or fulfilling self-transformation. Remarkably, this is achieved by means of tailored corporeal engagements that range from the meticulous but fluid movements of hands and fingers in tea masters to the taut yet comfortable intensity of kyūdō archers.

The worry may arise that Japanese dō problematically instrumentalize the artistic process as a mere means to self-realization or awakening, thereby removing any meaning from the process itself. Accordingly, the practice becomes irrelevant so long as awakening takes place. Therefore, in themselves, they are valueless. A corollary is that this trivializes the aesthetic peculiarities of each art ultimately. Overtly, this seems to be the case. The arts are means to awakening. This poses the matter mistakenly, however. The Buddhist canon, particularly Zen, addresses this putative instrumentalization squarely and successfully. As Thomas P. Kasulis explains, practice, for Buddhists such as Dōgen, “is not simply the path to enlightenment, but it is enlightenment itself.”\textsuperscript{32} Hershock puts it thus, “zazen is not sitting to become a Buddha. Zazen is sitting as Buddha.”\textsuperscript{33} Effectively and ideally, this applies to all dō and action generally, not just seated meditation. To wit, if we look at martial arts and swordsmanship, in his treatise on Musashi, Tokitsu explains that the traditional notion of waza (technique) “is not a means of achieving a preconceived end. . . . The process in itself constitutes the goal.”\textsuperscript{34}

Another way to confront the quandary is to subvert the means/ends relation. The problem arises with the application of instrumental rationality as the criterion of choice. As Garrett Thomson argues, we should never treat “our actions instrumentally” for, as mere instruments, just in virtue of being instruments they are valueless.\textsuperscript{35} Instead, as he paradoxically puts it, we should think that “The ends are means to the means” or, alternatively, that “goals are means to non-instrumentally valuable activities, which are also means.”\textsuperscript{36} Hence, completing the poem, painting, or hitting the target with the arrow are but incentives to more and better composing, drawing, or shooting in an ongoing process of improvement conditions and opportunities. In this way, the virtuosity itself becomes a way of life where noninstrumentality, and hence meaning, thoroughly permeates action. This is profoundly transformative as it results in engaged and appreciative action that, in the case of Japanese dō, is concomitantly aesthetic and moral.
A BEAUTIFULLY GOOD REPERTOIRE – THE AESTHETIC AND THE MORAL

At the heart of this awe-inspiring and stimulating virtuosity lies a normatively rich palette that, in Japanese dō, fuses aesthetic and moral values and concepts. An initial discussion of how bodily aesthetics nurtures moral virtues leads to two illustrative concepts: wabi (austere beauty) and yūgen (deep mystery).

Yuriko Saito shows how bodily aesthetic factors such as “handling of objects, tone of voice, facial expression, [and] bodily movement,” by way of artistic training, nurture “virtues such as respect, care, civility, consideration and thoughtfulness.” This connects to the aesthetics of the performer. As Saito explains, to achieve excellence artists must rigorously train and cultivate a particular way of life, which means developing moral virtues. In Japanese culture, respecting “the other,” for instance, encompasses even inanimate natural objects such as rocks or plants in Zen gardens and, of course, extends to people. In fact, “other-regarding” considerations poignantly are exemplified by shitsuke, whose kanji combines those of body and beauty, and is concerned with a discipline or cultivation of manners through which “artistic skills and respectful conduct tend to become internalized so that one becomes a certain kind of person.” One value that “becomes the person” involves austerity.

The austere beauty of wabi is best appreciated and most developed in the art of tea and in the context of Zen. The endorsement of austerity and simplicity extends to an appreciation of usage-acquired imperfections that also challenges the assumption that beauty costs a fortune. Further, it “sets up as an ideal ridding of desires and acceptance of one’s lot in the world,” as Richard Bullen writes. He further traces the fusion of the epistemic, aesthetic, and moral to Shingon Buddhist school founder Kūkai (774–835). More appositely, the communal dynamics between masters and followers set up standards and moral roles to be emulated. Our tea master is in the thick of it again, for it turns out that the tea ceremony best exemplifies this: the process fully revolves around hosting and the peremptory rules for civilized behavior and refined etiquette. The next concept offsets the, perhaps for some, fastidious preciseness this involves.

Yūgen, according to Yuasa Yasuo, means profound or suggestive mystery. Much like fog shrouding a forest transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, yūgen’s inner workings remain hidden but to those who know how (or where?) to look. Its conceptual borders are foggy indeed. Effectively, yūgen stimulates the imagination, and also asks us to become comfortable with ambiguity, inconclusiveness, and uncertainty. This has moral implications as far as how to confront life. Nonetheless, yūgen primarily developed in the context of Nō. Zeami viewed it as the most ineffable kind of beauty possible onstage. For him, the way to foster yūgen was by dint of arduous work over many years as the actor strived to acquire the mystery of the supernatural. Developing the ability to conjure yūgen is thus premised on backbreaking discipline. This is a protracted and difficult, yet stimulating, process.

IN FOR THE LONG HAUL – SHUGYŌ AS PERPETUAL STRIVING

One last unique aspect of Japanese dō worth exploring is shugyō, a sustained lifelong dedication to perfecting dō practice as a way to temper and enrich one’s character. Consonantly, shugyō also enhances performance or artistic creation. Its beginnings lie in the Buddhist practice of sennichi shugyō (one thousand days of practice): devotees were to engage in extended, strenuous, and punishing exercises aimed at perfecting themselves. Self-cultivation is the rendering of choice, but Yuasa points out that shugyō lacks the overtones of land tilling, refinement, and education; rather the Japanese word connotes the strengthening of spirit and enhancement of personality—crucially for us—by training the body. In short, it is a perpetually enacted and spirited skillful striving that steadfastly and lucidly seeks unattainable personal perfection.

Takumi, exceedingly skilled artisans, fittingly illustrate this relentless devotion. In the West, the established view posits 10,000 hours of practice for expertise, which amount to about three daily hours for ten years. In contrast, the threshold for takumi is 60,000 hours, which is the equivalent of five and a half daily hours for thirty years. This has deep roots in the land of the rising sun. Musashi, at the end of the Scroll of Water, wrote, “A thousand days of training to develop, ten thousand days of training to polish,” which equals about thirty years. Kiriu (Japanese papercutting) artist Kojima Nahoko, who began her arduous training as a five-year-old, is one such takumi. As she explains, the essence of takumi is “to gain a sublime understanding of the nuances of a particular art.” Echoing familiar themes by now, she adds that, “to be focused and spend countless hours on one thing, and to carry on. . . . It requires one to empty the mind and focus in a way that is simply not possible when still acquiring a skill.” This process is endless—no matter the age.

Eventually, regardless of how young we begin or fast we progress, the realities of human ageing impose themselves: physical skills deteriorate. Yet, the “mandate” to perfect oneself remains. Because Japanese dō and shugyō involve perfection not as an absolute but rather as a personal quest for self-transformation, the goals are dynamically reversible. To this effect, Zeami writes about how aging actors must keep reinventing themselves and continue learning. Specifically, his advice is to learn to deliver their performance with more simplicity, which brings its own kind of aesthetic quality and is foreclosed to younger actors. Normatively, shugyō is ethical in its perennial struggle as it involves resilience and an enduring “beginner’s mind” always open to learning.

It is time to return to the tea master for a parting cup. As his skilled motions froth the tea to perfection and we slowly turn the cup in our hands admiringly, we can reminisce and appreciate both the how and why his clean-cut moves, the accurately swift slicing blade of the sword master, the on-target sharp words of the awakened Zen monk and nun, the incisively polished movements of the Nō actor, and the impossibly silhouetted trimming of the kirie takumi are all a cut above the rest. As such they become inspiring paragons for the rest of us.
NOTES


3. Originally, peerless poet Bashō was in the roster of artistic epitomes to be discussed. Adequately doing so was not feasible given space limitations. In essence, the argument is that his itinerant lifestyle is constitutive, not just causally contributory, of both his poetic and moral qualities. Cheryl Crowley stresses how Bashō and Yosa Buson “both argued that haiku was not only a means to literary self-expression but also a way to improve the character of those who wrote it.” See her “Knowing Elegance: the ideals of the Bunjin (Literatus) in Early Modern Haikai,” in New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, ed. A. Minh Nguyen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 249.

4. Traditionally, in Japanese culture the last name comes first then the given name. In cases of historical figures, the first name alone is often used. While I observe this convention, I refer to historical figures by the most common appellative.


7. This means that the process is subject not to rationally established success conditions but rather to corporeal intentions that regulate improvement conditions. See Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, Retrieving Realism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).


12. Painting is the clearer case because artists produce relatively stable objects rather than temporary performances (comparing performances would obfuscate the issue and make discernment of signal differences more difficult).

13. For simplicity’s sake, the other senses are not discussed. Ceteris paribus, what applies to eyesight extends to the rest. Even the gustatory could be explored similarly. See Graham Parker, “Savoring Tastes: Appreciating Food in Japan,” in New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, ed. A. Minh Nguyen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 109–19, for a delectable exploration of Japanese cuisine that presents the rich interactions between Zen and the tension that arises between engaging in amenable social repartee and paying attention to the what, when, and how of the food.


29. This notion of without-thinking is found in Thomas Kasulis, Zen Action, Zen Person (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1981).


31. Hershock, Liberating Intimacy.


34. Tokitsu, Miyamoto Musashi, 289.


Ethically Grounded Aesthetic Sensibility in Japan: From Traditional Arts to Contemporary Design

Yuriko Saito
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN
YSAITO@RISD.EDU

ABSTRACT

One of the enduring themes of art-making in Japan has been humility and other-regarding considerations toward materials, subject matters, and experiencing agents. Despite their thorough Westernization and technologically advanced life, this ethos still informs today's design practice in Japan. It is often described as "emptying the designer's self" by respecting user experiences and the cumulative wisdom accrued from repeated use. Resultant objects are characterized by simplicity and modesty in appearance, lacking ostentatiousness or conspicuousness, as if they had not been designed. This design philosophy affords freedom for the users to exercise their own imagination and creativity to suit the object's use to their needs, but it also encourages them to live and grow with the object. Particularly today, when rampant consumerism discourages consumers from developing an enduring and intimate relationship with the material world, this time-honored Japanese aesthetic sensibility offers pragmatic wisdom to the designers outside of Japan who are concerned with design's role in promoting a more sustainable future.

***

Japanese aesthetic sensibility has a long lineage formed over many centuries. Historically, major political changes gave rise to distinct aesthetic concepts and artistic practices of each period, from the court culture of the Heian period (794–1185) to the warrior culture starting in 1185 with the Kamakura period (1185–1333), followed by the popular culture of the Edo period (1603–1868), and the modern period that ushered in rapid Westernization.

Despite these changes, there are consistent threads that form Japan's aesthetic sensibility. One such strand is the "other-regarding" aesthetic sensibility, both in creating and experiencing an aesthetic object. This paper explores how this ethically grounded aesthetic sensibility continues to inform contemporary design in Japan.

One enduring ethos of Japanese art-making is respecting the material used or the subject matter featured. The earliest statement regarding this attitude is found in the eleventh-century treatise on garden-making, Sakuteiki (Book on Garden Making), written by an aristocrat, Tachibana-no-Toshitsuna. In this treatise, Toshitsuna emphasizes the principle of "obeying (or following) the request" (kowan ni shifagau) of rocks, the primary ingredients of the garden at the time. This principle means that their placement and arrangement should be dictated by each rock's individual characteristics. For example, Toshitsuna recommends that the gardener "should first install one main stone, and then place other stones, in necessary numbers, in such a way as to satisfy the requesting mood of the main stone." 1

In later centuries, the same design strategy extends to the care and maintenance of plant materials. Instead of allowing their free growth, Japanese gardeners meticulously shape and maintain the trees and shrubs by extensive pruning, clipping, shearing, pinching, plucking, or by using various gears, such as wires, ropes, poles, and weights, and even sometimes stunting the growth of some parts by applying retardants. Such manipulation aims at accentuating the particular shape of the individual tree by eliminating what is considered to be adventitious, inessential, or irrelevant. As such, the extent of human artifice in the Japanese garden equals that of the European formal garden. However, while the European topiary method imposes preconceived geometrical or representational shapes on the plant materials, Japanese gardeners work closely with rather than in spite of or irrespective of the material's natural endowments. Contemporary garden makers still adhere to this principle, as stated by Masuno Shunmyo, a leading master gardener: "[T]he most important thing in executing a design is to talk to the plants and stones and hear what they themselves have to say about how they want to be laid out. In other words, I engage in a kind of dialogue with them." 2 The gardener is primarily a listener in this dialogue, characterized by Robert E. Carter as “emptying” one’s mind.

Similar considerations also govern the art of flower arrangement (ikebana), elevated to an artistic status primarily through its contribution to the tea ceremony during the sixteenth century. While this art form begins paradoxically by cutting off a live flower or branch and initiating its death, its primary aim is to "let flower express itself" (ikasu), or "to represent nature in its inmost essence." 3 This can be achieved by further cutting of branches, leaves, and blossoms so that only the essential parts defining the particular plant can be clearly delineated. A contemporary master teacher of flower arrangement states, "When the students themselves become empty, they do very well at ikebana." 4
The same principle of articulating the distinctive characteristics of an object is found in the art of representation. For example, haiku, a 5-7-5 syllable verse, established in the seventeenth century by Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), aims at presenting the native characteristic of the subject matter. According to Bashō, the poet must “enter into” and identify himself with the object, summarized in his well-known saying: “Of the pine-tree learn from the pine-tree. Of the bamboo learn from the bamboo.” To achieve this, what he calls “the slenderness of mind” is required, as one has to overcome one’s personal feelings and concerns in order to grasp and appreciate the qualities of the object. Sometimes described as “impersonality,” the ideal of haiku-making should be object-centered rather than subject-driven. When successful, the poet’s effort will “grow into’ (naru) a verse” rather than “‘doing’ (suru) a verse.”

Bashō’s contemporary Tosa Mitsukuni (1617–1691) develops a similar theory regarding the art of painting. For him, the main purpose of a painting is mimesis, thereby repudiating factual errors, but it is “the spirit of the object” that the painter must grasp and present.10 Toward this end, the painter should omit certain elements, making the overall effect “incomplete” and “suggestive,” facilitating the presentation of the essential characteristics more readily, such as bird-ness. Most likely conscious of the teachings by Bashō and Mitsukuni, another painter, Tsubaki Chinzan (1800–1854), also claims: “[E]ven when painted with black ink, bamboo is bamboo; with red ink, bamboo is also bamboo. If the spirit of bamboo is embodied in the brush, the ambience of bamboo will naturally arise. This is the essence of painting.”11

Even when engaging in everyday activities not specifically intended to be art, a similar ethos prevails. In Japanese cooking, the manipulation of each ingredient (cutting, choice of cooking method, seasoning, arrangement) is done in order to bring out the best of its native qualities. For example, in nimono, a Japanese version of vegetable stew, each vegetable is cooked and seasoned separately to retain the respective color, taste, and texture, and then arranged in a bowl so that each ingredient can be presented in the best light, instead of being dished out as a heaping mound of mixture. The outcome of such labor-intensive fussiness is that the consumer enjoys the synthetic orchestral sound created by each ingredient playing in its own tonal quality, as it were. Taking the Japanese lunchbox as a microcosmic illustration of this Japanese aesthetic sensibility, Kenji Ekuan, a noted industrial designer, observes: “[O]ur lunchbox . . . gathers together normal, familiar, everyday things from nature, according to season, and enhances their inherent appeal. . . . [T]he aim of preparation and arrangement revealed in the lunchbox is to include everything and bring each to full life.” In short, the mission of Japanese “culinary artifice” is “to render fish more fishlike and rice more ricelike.”

These accounts from classical treatises and today’s practitioners together indicate that one of the enduring themes of Japanese artistic practices is respecting the material or the subject matter’s specific characteristics. This requires carefully listening to the other’s voice by emptying one’s mind. “The other” here does not have to be natural objects such as rocks and plants. Some noted contemporary designers adopt the same stance toward materials that have been manufactured. For example, Tadao Andō’s architecture often emphasizes the concrete-ness of concrete, while Issey Miyake explores synthetic materials and rubber in his apparel design.

The other-regarding attitude in art-making is directed not only toward the materials used in creation but also toward the experiencing agent. In addition to the principle of “obeying the request” (of each rock) articulated in Sakuteiki, another principle of garden-making advocated by Toshitsuna is suji kaete, changing the axis, meaning avoiding symmetry. Reminding us of Alexander Pope’s criticism of European formal gardens that adhere to strict symmetry where “Grove nods at Grove, each Ally has a Brother, And half the Platform just reflects the other,” absence of a central axis recommended in Sakuteiki is meant to honor and enrich the owners’ and visitors’ experience of walking through the garden.11 By avoiding symmetrical design, the garden provides continuous sources for nourishing stimulation and imagination, such as meandering paths, gradually unfolding views, and partially hidden vistas.

Probably by far the most eloquent expression of being respectful of the experiencing agent is the art of tea ceremony. Established in the sixteenth century under the tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) and still widely practiced as a mode of cultural refinement by many, this participatory art embodies consummate thoughtfulness and care expressed by the host toward the guest. This expression takes place nonverbally through the host’s elegant body movements and her selection, arrangement, and handling of various implements and preparation of the tea hut. While there are basic rules to guide these considerations, the ultimate decisions are made by the host according to the specific occasion and particular guest. Orchestrating various aspects of the tea ceremony to render a memorable experience of one-time event, ichigo ichie, requires the utmost sensibility, flexibility, and improvisational skills. Described as the expression of care, respect, and thoughtfulness, the aesthetics of tea ceremony promotes “vigilant consideration of others.”

For both modes of respecting the other, the materials, and the recipient of creation, minimizing one’s self and ideas is paramount. Emphasis is placed on being open- or empty-minded so that the creator can listen to the other and to imagine what the experience will be like on the receiving end. Creativity comes not in the form of preparing some idea beforehand and imposing it upon the materials or the recipient, but rather from collaboratively working with the other. Instead of a lone genius engaging in self-expression, the ideal stance taken for artistic creation is that of a humble partner.

Sakuteiki predates the introduction of Zen Buddhism to Japan in the late twelfth century to the early thirteenth century by priests Eisai (1141–1215) and Dōgen (1200–1253). However, it is no accident that the practitioners of other arts were often Zen adepts, and they practiced art-making as a form of Zen discipline.12 Zen teaches the thoroughgoing
rejection of egocentric and anthropocentric worldviews, as stated by Dōgen: "Acting on and witnessing myriad things with the burden of oneself is ‘delusion.’ Acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of myriad things is enlightenment.” He continues, "[S]tudying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things." This transcendence of ego is facilitated by recognizing and overcoming self-centered and all-too-human schemes that govern our perception. Once we succeed, Zen is optimistic about our ability to experience directly the thus-ness or being-such-ness (immo) of the other-than-self. Thus, guided by the Buddhist transcendence of ego, the Japanese artists’ practice of respectfully listening to the other’s voice and directing their creative activity accordingly is not simply an aesthetic practice but also a cultivation of moral virtue directed toward enlightenment.

This vision of artistic practice is also held by today’s leading designers in Japan. One of the major themes shared by them is avoidance of imposing their ego onto the design process. For example, Hara Kenya, whose writings indicate a deep indebtedness to the traditional Japanese arts mentioned above, characterizes his attitude toward design by the notion of emptiness:

“Emptiness” (utsu) and “completely hollow” (karappo) are among the terms I pondered while trying to grasp the nature of communication. When people share their thoughts, they commonly listen to each other’s opinions rather than throwing information at each other. In other words, successful communication depends on how well we listen rather than how well we push our opinions on the person seated before us. People have therefore conceptualized communication techniques using term like “empty vessel” to try to understand each other better.

Applied to the design process, this notion of emptiness encourages the designers to refrain from forming a preconceived design. Instead, they should empty their mind, listen to the users, materials, and similar objects that have endured the test of time. It does not mean suppression of the designer’s creativity; rather, the creativity is enacted by collaborating with these others by listening to what they have to say.

Another leading designer, Fukasawa Naoto, also states that he is against the kind of design that calls attention to itself with “expression of self” and recommends taking “ourselves a little less seriously” and “get(ting) rid of the ego that says, ‘I designed this object,’” as well as encouraging “a motivation to put the object ahead of the individual creative ego as opposed to the urge to have it noticed.” He fully embraces the seeming paradox of the creative act of “design” that is at the same time anti-design, minimizing or even erasing the sense that the resultant object was a product of human manipulation, which design is. The kitchen utensils and appliances designed by him accordingly are characterized as “quietly being there as if it was not designed and blend in with living.”

Both designers work for MUJI and the firm is said to aim for designing things that are “good enough” (kore de ii) rather than those that “are good” (kore ga ii). The former may sound as if to imply a kind of resignation and a bit of disappointment, but it is rather presented positively with an attitude of restraint and concession, that is, to give way to the other. In contrast, the latter implies some degree of egoism and dissonance. The resultant products that are “good enough” are characterized by minimalism, simplicity, and understatement, devoid of showy self-assertion, ostentation, and garrulity, while maintaining meticulous and thoughtful attention to details. However, these qualities are not a matter of styling or branding. They are rather generated in response to the cumulative wisdom of user experience and body movement associated with using the product. As such, MUJI does not identify the designer behind the product; instead, it advocates “anonymous” design.

A similar sentiment is expressed by another designer, Uchida Shigeru. In his discussion of the concept of “the ordinary,” he argues against the common understanding of “design” as something special or unexpected that stands out from the rest. Accordingly, he rejects characterizing the design profession as doing something distinct from others by creating a concept that is uniquely one’s own. Such a way of designing is self-regarding rather than other-regarding, according to him. He also challenges a rather pejorative connotation of another commonly shared understanding of “the ordinary” for being boring. By citing Okakura Tenshin’s statement in The Book of Tea (1906) that the tea ceremony is a kind of courtesy to worship beauty in everyday life, Uchida celebrates the ordinary as an understated, modest quality that is born out of the longevity of use in everyday life.

Hara explains the simplicity characteristic of products designed with an emptied mind by invoking another relevance of the notion of “emptiness.” He draws an analogy to classical examples of Japanese art: the empty spaces of many monochrome ink paintings from the medieval period, the sparse interiors of traditional Japanese rooms, the tea room being the quintessential example, and the use of only one flower or only a few flower petals to express a season. Such minimalism provides a fertile ground for engaging the imagination: “[E]mptiness provides a space within which our imaginations can run free, vastly enriching our powers of perception and our mutual comprehension.”

When applied to the interaction with the objects designed with emptiness, the user can create an individual relationship with it through using it in her daily life as she sees fit. Hara refers to it as “emptiness as limitless potential” that “can hold every possible meaning” in that “an empty state possesses a chance of becoming by virtue of its receptive nature.” In a sense, the so-called “finished” product off the assembly line is not finished at all but offers an empty vessel which continues to be filled and morphed by use.

While affording freedom for the user to fill in the empty vessel as she sees fit, this notion of design also encourages an ethically grounded interaction with the object. A typical attitude toward consumer goods today is promoted
by fast fashion and the industry strategy of planned obsolescence, both of which encourage consumers to treat various products as disposables. In contrast, these designers together advocate for consumers to cherish and honor the object by being fully engaged and developing a relationship with it. Living with the object through use involves appreciating its service to us and our continuing use facilitates accrual of the “beauty that occurs with time when an object survives constant use.”

Through repeated use, one personalizes the object and creates a (hi)story of living with this object. Fukasawa refers to this interaction as shutaku (worn or spoiled by handling), “a metaphor for something that has taken on a personality of its own, or improved with age.” In other words, “it fits comfortably in one’s hand, a metaphor for something that has come to fit in our lifestyle.” The user and the object interact to create “the deepening of a relationship” and “we may discover its beauty not just in how it ages but in how we age with it.” Today’s consumerism tends to regard an object that shows age and wear and tear negatively, a fall from grace because its condition is no longer perfect and pristine as it once was. But Fukasawa considers it as an object that shows wear and age. He adds, “in a garden oblivious to the thoughtful ways in which the architect or designer creates a (hi)story of living with this object.” Fukasawa states, “the care with which the food has been prepared and presented invites corresponding care and attention to the aesthetic gift offered to me.

The pleasure we derive from using well-designed objects thus comes with a responsibility. This attitude expected from the recipients of aesthetic gifts is another theme running through the Japanese aesthetic tradition. Commenting on Japanese food, Graham Parkes remarks that “the care with which the food has been prepared and presented invites corresponding care and attention in the handling and eating of it.” In a similar manner, a successful experience of the tea ceremony makes demand not only on the host for setting it up but also on the guest who needs to attend carefully to various details that express the host’s care. Today’s tea master Sen Genshitsu XV thus explains that the primary purpose of the tea ceremony is a tacit communication, “contagion,” whereby “the guests will feel what the host intended to ‘give’ them in and through the ceremony. An intense level of kindness prevails, and the guests learn through this enveloping atmosphere to be kind to one another in turn.” Similarly, if I hurry through a garden oblivious to the thoughtful ways in which the rocks and trees are arranged, not only is my aesthetic life most likely impoverished, but my moral life is also probably compromised to the extent that I fail to gracefully acknowledge the aesthetic gift offered to me.

Hara considers this ethically grounded aesthetic sensibility marked by respectfulness and humility as a rich resource Japan can offer to the world, compensating for Japan’s lack of natural resources needed for industrial production. I should note that, although the Japanese aesthetic sensibility thus explained has been nurtured through many centuries, it is gaining resonance outside of Japan today. There is an increasing attention to and call for “care” and “thoughtfulness” among designers and architects world over. This plea is a reaction against the prevailing design process in the West, which the designers themselves admit has not paid enough attention or respect to the experiences of users and inhabitants. They take recent designs to task for exuding the qualities of “ego trips,” such as “arrogance,” “narcissism,” “impudence,” “formal authority,” and “showiness.” Himself an architect, Juhani Pallasmaa criticizes the contemporary architectural profession as encouraging the superflummery of individual geniuses whose creations exist for the sake of self-aggrandizement, alienating the experiencing agents. Similarly, Victor Papanek writes that designers and architects tend to think of themselves as artists whose mission is to make artistic statements. As a result, he observes that “a good deal of design and architecture seems to be created for the personal glory of its creator.” Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan express a similar sentiment by criticizing the architect in Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead, depicted as a hero committed to the “pure process” that is not contaminated by any real-world constraints or needs: social, environmental, or economic. These critics offer an alternative model of design process that reflects other-regarding attitudes, such as “courtesy,” “responsiveness,” “humility,” “patience,” and “care.” These qualities are embodied in an appropriate size for humans, with a spatial arrangement sensitive to the bodily oriented experience as well as its temporal sequence, and design features that are simply delightful to the senses. The designed objects and built environments that respond to our experiences communicate a moral attitude affirming the importance of others’ experiences. “Good design,” Donald Norman writes, “takes care, planning, thought” and “concern for others.” Similarly, in discussing the importance of “care” in architecture, Nigel Taylor points out that a building that appears to be put together thoughtlessly and carelessly, without regard to our experience as users or its relationship to the surrounding, “would offend us aesthetically, but, more than that, part of our offense might be ethical. Thus, we might reasonably be angered or outraged, not just by the look of the thing but also by the visible evidence that the person who designed it didn’t show sufficient care about the aesthetic impact of his building.” He concludes by stating that “to care . . . for how something looks, and thereby for the people who will look at it, is to exhibit not just an aesthetic but also a moral concern. Or, rather, it is to exhibit an aesthetic attentiveness which is itself moral.”

Contemporary designers in different parts of the world who are concerned with various environmental problems caused by the rampant consumerism that encourages overconsumption also advocate designs that are not completely “finished,” or “good enough.” Such design promotes consumers to “live with” the object by personalizing it, creating its story with us, and caring for its longevity. Thus, the time-honored and ethically grounded aesthetic sensibility nurtured in Japan has a timely relevance and resonance in today’s world. While it is important to understand its historical and cultural situatedness, we should also take note of Japanese aesthetic sensibility’s pragmatic applicability in today’s world.
NOTES


4. Quoted by Robert E. Carter, The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 63. In this paper, I follow the Japanese order of a person’s name by placing the family name before the given name. Hence, Masuno is his family name. In cases where the person is well-known, such as Tadao Andō, mentioned below, or the person’s publication is in English, I put the given name first.


7. Quoted by Carter, Japanese Arts, 102, emphasis on “empty” added.


10. Ueda, Literary and Art Theories, 137.

11. Tsubaki Chinzan, Chinzan Shokan (Correspondence of Chinzan), from the nineteenth century, my translation, included in Nihon no Geijutsuron (Theories of Art in Japan), ed. Yasuda Ayao (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1990), 251, emphasis added.


15. It should be noted that Masuno, a master gardener, whom I cited earlier, is a Zen priest.


20. Maruo et al., eds., Mujirushi Ryōhin, 54. Outside of Japan, the company is known as MUJI, but it is an abbreviation of Mujirushi, which means “No Mark.”

21. For examples of their products and designers’ own comments, see Masaki Kanai et al., MUJI (New York: Rizzoli, 2010) and Maruo et al., eds., Mujirushi Ryōhin.


23. Uchida, Futsu no Dezain, 103, 92.

24. Uchida, Futsu no Dezain, 102.

25. Hara, White, 60.


27. Hara, prologue to White, ii.


29. Fukasawa and Morrison, Super Normal, 111.

30. Fukasawa and Morrison, Super Normal, 110.

31. Fukasawa and Morrison, Super Normal, 111.

32. Fukasawa and Morrison, Super Normal, 106.


34. Cited by Carter, Japanese Arts, 90.


38. Papanek, Green Imperative, 203.


42. Taylor, “Ethical Arguments,” 205, emphasis added.

Norinaga on the Cultivation of Mono no aware

Johnathan Flowers
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
JFLOWERS@AMERICAN.EDU

ABSTRACT
In developing mono no aware, Motoori Norinaga sets forth an aesthetic theory that would enable individuals to act with sensitivity towards one another through the understanding of the aware of things. In Norinaga's view, understanding the aware of things would allow for the understanding of aware across social and cultural worlds. Moreover, through understanding mono no aware, Norinaga believes it would be possible to reduce or eliminate social conflict, as understanding mono no aware would allow the individual to understand not only the kokoro but also the way that the kokoro is moved through its cultivation within discrete social worlds. To this end, Norinaga argues that the cultivation of mono no aware not only allows for sensitivity to the moving power of phenomena but also allows for the cultivation of more humane individuals. On this view, mono no aware is more than the cultivation of aesthetic and affective sensibilities; it is the cultivation of individuals' awareness of the aware of social and cultural phenomena such that they may engage more humanely in our social relations.

***

Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) argues that cultivating mono no aware—a term that he uses to refer simultaneously to the awareness of the aware, or affective power of things, and to the specific aware enacted by objects in the world—is crucial to developing a more harmonious society. For Norinaga, it is the embodiment of mono no aware in art through the skilled organization of the artistic medium that enables art to connect the kokoro of individuals across time, distance, and social position. Norinaga argues that the careful consideration of aesthetic works and the mono no aware embodied within them enables individuals to come to know the kokoro of things in the world. This, in turn, enables them to respond more harmoniously and appropriately to the events encountered in their lives. Thus, for Norinaga, the cultivation of mono no aware is not simply the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility; it is the cultivation and refinement of the capacity to experience and respond to the world more fully through experiencing its moving power.

Norinaga relies upon the Japanese Preface to the Kokin Wakashū, an early anthology of Japanese waka poetry authored by Ki no Tsurayuki, to ground mono no aware as an affective sensibility that drives the creation of art. In doing so, Norinaga presents the origins of Japanese poetry and aesthetic creation as a transaction between the human kokoro and the broader world. In a passage often referenced by Norinaga, Tsurayuki states,

Japanese poetry has the human heart as seed and myriads of words as leaves. It comes into being when men use the seen and the heard to give voice to feelings aroused by the innumerable events in their lives. The song of the warbler among the blossoms, the voice of the frog dwelling in the wafer—these teach us that every living creature sings.

Kokoro or the “human heart” referenced above is both the source of poetic creation and that which enables affective responsiveness to the moving power embodied in poetry. Thomas P. Kasulis elaborates this as follows:

A key characteristic of kokoro is that it involves a propensity for engagement, a sensitivity expressed as either being in touch with something else or being touched by it. Through such an engagement meaning—whether factual or valutational—comes into being. Hence, kokoro is what makes responsiveness possible.

This capacity for being in touch with the broader world and for being touched by it is what enables Norinaga’s aware to connect human kokoro across cultural and temporal distances. As the kokoro of a poet is embodied in poetry through the arrangement of words in poetic language, Norinaga argues that poetry enacts the aware of the poet’s experience as it is experienced. A poem thus allows the reader to connect with the kokoro of the poet through the aware that emerges as the “voice” of the feelings aroused in ongoing experience. Studying poetry allows readers to recognize the “innumerable events” in human experience, despite not having these experiences.

However, for Norinaga, the feelings aroused through the encounter with the world do not initially emerge as poetry. Poetic language, or the patterning of words to make present the aware of experience, is necessary to give voice to the initial response to aware in the world. This point is important given that the initial experience of aware, for Norinaga, is embodied in the act of sighing. In The Tale of Genji: A Little Jeweled Comb, Norinaga states,

[A]ware is used to designate a situation of any sort whatever about which one may feel aa hare. And, thus, when one encounters something that by all rights should move one to exclaim aa hare, and one does indeed apprehend this emotional quality, we say of this aware o shiru that one is susceptible to emotion.

The expression “aa hare,” used here by Norinaga, is an expression that indicates the verbal act of sighing. Further, the ability to be moved to “sighing,” or to exclaim aa hare, indicates the ways that an individual’s kokoro can be moved in the encounter with the world. Moreover, as aware is used to point to the moving power of a situation, any situation that can move the kokoro and result in a sigh is a situation suffused with aware.

Despite his grounding of the expression of sensitivity to aware in the act of sighing, Norinaga argues that “aa hare” is best understood as encompassing a range of exclamations in response to an especially moving aware.
In *Isonokame sasamegoto,* Norinaga argues that *aware,* when used as an expression, and *aa hare* also encompass exclamations like “ah,” “ alas,” and “oh,” as in when one is struck by the immediacy of a feeling and must give voice to it. While Norinaga agrees the initial sound of *aa hare* as “ah” or “oh” is much closer to sighing, he distinguishes sighing, as a form of exclamation, from the *aware* that prompts it. We should best interpret *aa hare* and *aware* in an enlarged sense, as also encompassing being moved by an awareness that would prompt exclamations like “oh no,” as exclaimed when struck by the beauty of an experience; or “I’m sorry,” when one is struck by the painful experiences of other people.

It is the initial, inarticulate expression of *aware* as a sigh that prompts Norinaga to argue for the necessity of *kokoro* specifically and aesthetic creation broadly. For Norinaga, when the *kokoro* is moved in experience, this movement results in the building up of emotion within the *kokoro.* If this emotion is not released, the movement of the *kokoro* becomes unendurable and is expressed through exclamations or sighs. However, these sighs and exclamations are inarticulate; they may give voice to the movement of the *kokoro* as a kind of release, but they do not communicate the experience. Poetry patterns the “voice” of these inarticulate expressions so that the content of the expression and the event that occasioned it can be clarified and released appropriately. In so doing, the elongation of sighs and exclamations, the “giving voice” to experience described by Tsurayuki, serves to embody the *kokoro* of the author and the *aware* of the experience in a form that enables others to understand it.

Norinaga’s etymology of *aware* as describing the quality of situations that move us to sigh or make exclamations provides context for Norinaga’s broader *mono no aware.* As *aware* is the quality of situations that moves the *kokoro,* it is how the *kokoro* is moved that results in the varieties of acts of sighing in response to the degree of movement. Norinaga describes the movement of the *kokoro* as “being stirred” or “being stirred deeply.” The depth of how the *kokoro* is “stirred” is crucial to understanding Norinaga’s distinction among varieties of *aware.* For example, sorrow and love “pierce the human heart more deeply than any other feeling and therefore [they are] phenomenon[a] extremely difficult to endure.” Put another way, the experiences of love and loss, for Norinaga, move the *kokoro* in a “deeper” way than other kinds of experiences and thus demand a wider variety of ways of being released. Furthermore, since love and sorrow are experienced in relatively similar ways across human experience, Norinaga argues that they are experienced regardless of individual social or cultural cultivations. This, for Norinaga, is the result of a “general and specific distinction” between the deep and shallow emotional effects. Norinaga explains thus:

The general distinction is that, as I mentioned earlier, “charm” is included in *aware.* The specific distinction is that, among the many feelings operating in a person’s heart, charm and joy stir the heart in a shallow way, whereas sadness and love move it deeply. This is why a deep feeling is labeled especially “aware” (moving)—a fact that explains why, in common parlance, the content of *aware* is believed to be only sadness.

The above distinctions between the emotional effects are what Norinaga calls “depth” and “shallowness,” referring to the degree to which the heart is moved. Such distinctions are the results of the cultivation of the *kokoro* and not necessarily a normative judgment about the aware. The increased depth of love and sorrow, as made present by the number of works that arise from their aware, serves as the basis of the universality of the sentiment. For Norinaga, “since people are not as deeply moved by joy as they are by something that wounds their heart, all poems expressing joy are not deeply moving, whereas many of those expressing the sadness and distress of an unfulfilled heart are of profound inspiration.” Unlike sorrow and love, for Norinaga, joy is dependent on the specific things that bring joy and is most often related to the cultivation of individual “tastes.” In other words, how the *kokoro* is oriented towards joyous objects in experience determines the degree to which a joyous object is moving. Therefore, while there are common situations that may be counted as joyous, and the aware of joy can be recognized, Norinaga argues that sorrow cuts across the human condition to move the heart deeply, regardless of cultivation.

Thus far, aware has been treated as describing “emotional” states in general. However, Norinaga’s brief comments on the art of painting in *Isonokame sasamegoto* extend aware beyond the simply emotional into the deeper and socially mediated affective sense that we may have upon encountering a person. Thus, for Norinaga, a painter must capture not only the external appearance of a subject but also the “attitude” of the individual:

In drawing people from the past, painters should strive to match the status and the knowledge of that person, since we do not know what those people looked like. The portrait of a nobleman should be elegant and should look like the portrait of a really noble person. A knowledgeable person should be portrayed exactly as a man of knowledge.

Like poetry, painting should strive to use the materials of the medium to capture the specific *aware* of the subject as experienced, without which the image cannot be said to appropriately represent the individual. Further, Norinaga’s assertion that the “painter should strive to match the status and the knowledge of that person” implies a connection between the attitude and other social roles taken up by an individual. To capture fully the attitude of an individual requires capturing how they embody their position in society. Hence, “elegance” as a quality of nobility, in Norinaga’s view, is crucial to making present the aware of the image of a nobleperson. Here, Norinaga implies that social status also has an aware that can be perceived by the sensitive person.

Norinaga clarifies the aware of rank in *Genji monogatari* *tama no ogushi*:
One also finds numerous instances, in chapter after chapter, of being moved by a person’s rank or position. This is something different from calculated obsequiousness or sycophancy toward the powerful and the rich; it is a natural and ineluctable sense of awe before a person of exalted station.\(^\text{14}\)

Here, the aware of rank is a combination of the cultural organization of the social rank and the individual embodiment of the rank. Put another way, for Norinaga, it is not simply the rank itself that moves the kokoro in the encounter with the nobleperson; rather, it is how that rank is embodied by the individual nobleperson that moves the kokoro. Members of the nobility may be inelegant or cruel, but the aware of “inelegance” or “cruelty” is not simply a function of their status as nobility. It is, in addition, a function of the way that they embody their status as experienced within the world.

As an example, Norinaga refers to the Suma section in the Genji monogatari, where Genji’s rank, combined with the situation of his playing the koto, moves observers to tears. For Norinaga, it is neither Genji’s rank nor his playing the koto that moves observers. It is the aware inherent in his courtly rank, together with his skill in playing the koto, that allows Genji himself to become more moving. Genji, in this moment, makes present the aware of nobility through the combination of his rank and the elegance of his playing, resulting in the “ineluctable sense of awe” before Genji’s station. Hence, the experience of being moved by the rank of an individual is dependent upon how an individual embodies that rank and subsequently enacts the aware of the rank. It is not a product of the rank alone.

As discussed above, aware is the movement of the kokoro in experience. However, mono no aware refers both to how the kokoro is moved in experience and to the specific aware of the experience itself. For Norinaga, “to be moved by all sorts of feelings, and to be able to have deep thoughts, whether one is happy or sad, are all examples of ‘being stirred.’ Therefore, ‘to be stirred’ is nothing but the knowledge of mono no aware.”\(^\text{15}\) While Norinaga’s definition of mono no aware uses the same language as his description of aware, there are some subtle differences because of the addition of mono. In Genji monogatari tama no ogushi, Norinaga defines mono in the following: “The mono is the mono that is added in order to generalize the reference of a word—as when iu [speak] becomes mono iu [discuss], kararu [tell] becomes monogatari [tale], or, in monomōde [pilgrimage], monomi [observation], monoimi [abstinence].” Put another way, the shift from mi (see) to monomi (observation) reflects a change in the specificity of the activity. Seeing is the general function of vision, whereas observation suggests a more focused use of the eyes. On this reading, the attachment of mono to a word seems to imply a focusing of the activity indicated by the word, but a focus with a certain generality, namely, without specifying a subject of that activity. Combined with aware, mono no aware is the individualized aware that “stirs” the kokoro in experience. Put another way, mono specifies an affect understood as “knowledge of mono no aware.”\(^\text{2}\)

The generalization of mono means that it refers to the “external world” or the whole field of experience. This should be understood to include events and concepts. For Norinaga, “events and words are things in reciprocal response,”\(^\text{16}\) by which Norinaga intends a close relation among events (koto), words (kotoba), and things (mono). It is this closeness among words, events, and things that grant words the power to convey the reality of events and things as they are experienced.

Norinaga’s hermeneutic reading of the Kojiki, where the first kanji in kotodama 言 is used interchangeably with the first kanji in kotoba 言 to create the compound of kotodama, supports this close relation between events and words. The correlation between the first kanji used to represent koto “word, speech” and the second kanji used to represent koto “thing, experience” allows Norinaga to argue that “kotoba” are the “leaves” of “koto,” thereby grounding words in the events that give rise to them. Norinaga develops the connection of mono to events through his reading of Tsurayuki’s Preface. As Japanese poetry has the human heart, kokoro, as seeds, and words, kotoba, as flowers, Norinaga interprets Tsurayuki’s statement to indicate that poetry has the capacity to relate the movement of the kokoro in response to the external world through making present the aware and the kokoro of the event. For Norinaga, to be moved in the encounter with the world and the events in it is to know mono no aware.

In keeping with the above, “knowledge of mono no aware” is the cultivated sense of the moving power of aware in general and the moving power of the specific aware of an object. Beyond being sensitive to how the kokoro is moved, knowledge of mono no aware also involves “knowing the essence of things and knowing the essence of events.”\(^\text{17}\) Essence here does not refer to an unchanging quality of an entity. Rather, it refers to the affective quality of the encounter that “stirs” or moves the kokoro in a particular way. Thus, for Norinaga, the experiential nature of knowledge of mono no aware is always primary; the capacity to discern the nature of the world develops through affective responses to the encounter with the world as events and things are experienced. The more phenomena encountered in experience, the more an individual can come to know the essence of the phenomena through their affective response to it. On this view, the “essence” of phenomena in the world is not restricted to their atomistic composition. Nor is it solely the province of the material constitution of a thing or event. It is how that thing or event evokes an affective response that determines its nature or essence. Thus, for Norinaga,

When one encounters something for which he should be happy and has happy thoughts, his happiness derives from the understanding of the essence of that very thing about which he should feel happy. Likewise, when one encounters something for which he should be sad and has sad thoughts, his sadness derives from the understanding of the essence of that very thing about which he should feel sad. Therefore, “to know mono no aware” is to discern the nature of happiness or sadness while experiencing the
world. When we do not understand the nature of things, there is no feeling thought in our hearts, since we are neither happy nor sad. 18

For Norinaga, the “knowledge of the essence of things” is circumscribed by the social and physical world that the individual inhabits. Norinaga, therefore, takes it to be the case that knowledge of mono no aware takes on different forms based upon the social and physical environments in which mono no aware is cultivated. For Norinaga,

In the first place, it is said that human feelings [hito no kokoro] never change, whether past or present, high or low; yet they are not without slight differences among them, resulting from differences in the worlds that each and every individual inhabits, such as the customs of their age and their station in life. 19

Put another way, immersion in a particular social environment cultivates the kokoro and the mono no aware in line with the encounters with a given world as structured by the customs of that world. Thus, the kokoro of different individuals come to express the differences in their knowledge of mono no aware not because of a fundamental distinction in the kokoro in question. It is only the “things and events” that an individual encounters and how those things generate knowledge of mono no aware that results in the differences between kokoro and knowledge of mono no aware. Norinaga, therefore, argues for a universal receptivity to the moving nature of the world, cultivated differently depending on the social world occupied by the individual.

Norinaga is clear that all humans have a minimal understanding of mono no aware. Distinctions only emerge through comparing the depth of the knowledge of mono no aware. As the depth or shallowness of knowledge of mono no aware is a result of the experiences within the “world” occupied by a given human, the differences among knowledge of mono no aware are a product of the encounters within that world. As a result of these encounters with the social world, the kokoro becomes sensitive to the aware of matters within that world, and “anything that does not directly concern us, that we do not constantly see and hear of, is unfamiliar to us, and our interest in it is slight.” 20 This is the source of the disinterest in the affairs of other worlds, as there is no direct encounter with the events in other worlds and thus no understanding of the aware of the events within different worlds. Because there is no understanding of the aware of other worlds, there is no understanding of how to respond to the events in those worlds. Despite this, Norinaga does not make any normative judgment about the feelings and events within the worlds in question. Rather, his focus is on the universality of the human kokoro and its ability to know mono no aware. To be clear, while all humans have the capacity to understand mono no aware, it is also the case that the different worlds occupied by humans result in differing depths of knowledge of mono no aware in humans.

These differences in depth of knowledge of mono no aware have specific effects on society. As mono no aware enables an understanding of the essence of things, including the myriad events in the various worlds occupied by humans, the degree to which an individual has cultivated their mono no aware affects the kinds of social relationships formed. Where humans occupy their discrete worlds, with little interaction with the worlds of other humans, their lack of exposure to events from outside of their worlds results in a mono no aware that is shallow in comparison to those who encounter events beyond their worlds. More seriously, as understanding the nature of things where other humans are concerned consists in understanding the kokoro of other humans, the distance between worlds reduces the empathy felt for others beyond one’s world because of the inability to know the aware within other worlds. Thus, for Norinaga, “those who do not know mono no aware show no considerateness in anything and are often hard-hearted and cruel. Because they have no encounters with various matters, they do not understand them.” 21 “Heartless” responses to events in the world are a result of a shallow mono no aware cultivated through limited encounters with the “various matters” beyond a given world. Because the distance between worlds typically denies individuals access to the “various matters” in other social worlds, they do not understand the nature of things within those worlds, making it difficult for individuals across worlds to be moved by the nature of things within worlds that they do not occupy.

A deeper knowledge of mono no aware can help to transcend the separations between worlds. That separation inevitably leads to the mistreatment of others and inhumane exercises of authority.

Norinaga is specifically concerned with the cultivation of mono no aware to enable humane governance. Humane governance, for Norinaga, is governance that responds appropriately to the aware of the situations experienced by the governed and is not simply directed by the needs of social organization. On this point, Norinaga states,

[W]ere they [the governors] to empathize with all the labors of the peasantry and the travails of their servants, surely there would be no inhumane lords in this world. But the fact that there are inhumane lords and unfilial children in this world, in the final analysis, is because they are insensitive to human emotion [mna o shiraneba]. 22

Here, empathy emerges through the cultivation of knowledge of mono no aware, specifically insofar as this knowledge encompasses the knowledge of the aware experienced in the world occupied by servants and the peasantry. Generalizing Norinaga’s assertion here, to know the aware of these worlds is to understand the essence of these worlds, the contexts in which the aware arises, and to understand how to respond appropriately to that aware. This empathetic understanding, in Norinaga’s view, should necessarily lead to the cultivation of lords who seek to organize a world to reduce the suffering of their subjects. Actions in accord with social responsibilities that do not proceed from mono no aware ultimately result in heartlessness and the cultivation of heartless subordinates, specifically when those actions are taken by individuals in positions of power and influence. It is in this mode that
Norinaga's treatment of *mono no aware* serves to enable his extension of *mono no aware* beyond a mere thesis of affective experience and intersubjective communication, and into a broad social project wherein human society is enriched through the cultivation of *mono no aware*.

Thus, for Norinaga, knowledge of *mono no aware* leads to more compassionate actions and enables the harmonious functioning of human society through cultivating knowledge of the experiences of other people. While Norinaga's formulation of *mono no aware* is traditionally taken up as an aesthetic or literary theory, *mono no aware* serves to cultivate more humane individuals through engaging with the experiences represented through literature. More than an aesthetic theory, *mono no aware* is a theory of self-cultivation aimed at more humane governance and social organization. To this end, for Norinaga, "when people deeply understand the hearts of others, they naturally act so as not to harm society or other people. This is another benefit of making people know *mono no aware*."

### NOTES


### SAVING BEAUTY: ART MUSEUMS, EMPATHY, AND IMPERMANENCE

**Peter L. Doebler**

**DAYTON ART INSTITUTE**

**PDOEBLER@DAYTONART.ORG**

### ABSTRACT

This essay explores how key ideas in Japanese aesthetics may enhance the current interest in the intersection of empathy, art, and museums. First, I provide a brief discussion of empathy, focusing on how it attenuates an egocentric perspective by providing an experience of otherness, leading to an awareness and appreciation of human interconnectedness. Second, I explore how the appreciation of impermanence in Japanese aesthetics may elucidate the interconnectedness and fellow feeling that empathy implies. In particular, I discuss the aesthetic concepts of *mono no aware*, *wabi*, and *sabi*. Third, I consider one example of how empathy and impermanence relate to the experience of visual art through a discussion of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi’s woodblock print series *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon*.

### INTRODUCTION

When was the last time you went to an art museum? What did you see? What do you remember from that day? Art museums can do many things: inform us about important people in art history, train visual literacy, function as places to meet with friends in a special space apart from daily life. But can they be agents of change, both for our individual selves as well as our communities?

Art museums are long-standing institutions—many US art museums, including my institution, the Dayton Art Institute, are now over one hundred years old—and throughout they have often claimed to provide a necessary social service, but exactly what constitutes this is not always made clear. To simply elevate the “taste” of the common person? To instruct in the loftiest of human ideas and artifacts? Even before the social justice movements of the last few years
and the COVID-19 pandemic, art museums have been working to refine how they can best serve the communities of which they are a part. There has been a trend away from traveling blockbuster exhibitions to focusing more on using the museum's own collection in creative ways. Also, museums are assessing the limitations of the standard geographic and chronological paradigm of laying out the galleries and presenting objects.

In light of this, we may think of art museums as “gyms” for cultivating aesthetic value, not purely in a disinterested, formalist sort of way, but one that is bound up with ethical considerations. Just as you go to the gym to focus on exercising for overall bodily excellence in daily life, museums can be a place to reflect more intentionally on the role of aesthetics in fostering human flourishing. Here I would suggest that a central ability that art museums can develop is empathy. I am not alone in this, as others working in art museums have also been researching and promoting this, one example being the Minneapolis Institute of Art’s Center for Empathy and the Visual Arts. By providing direct encounters with artworks, museums present curated, concentrated experiences of otherness—from different times, places, and backgrounds—opening our horizons to those outside of ourselves. At the same time, they can create a feeling of solidarity, confirming that we are not alone in our joys and sorrows. Through this, they can serve as catalysts for creating a more hopeful future. In short, art museums may serve as sites for cultivating empathy and thereby contribute to positive change. 

In this essay, I will explore how key ideas in Japanese aesthetics may enhance the current interest in empathy, art, and museums. First, I will provide a brief discussion of empathy, focusing on how it attenuates an egocentric perspective by providing an experience of otherness, leading to an awareness and appreciation of human interconnectedness. Second, I will consider how the appreciation of impermanence in Japanese aesthetics may elucidate the interconnectedness and fellow feeling that empathy implies. In particular, I will discuss the aesthetic concepts of mono no aware, wabi, and sabi. Third, I will provide one example of how empathy and impermanence relate to the experience of visual art through a discussion of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi’s woodblock print series One Hundred Aspects of the Moon.

EMPATHY AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Empathy may be broadly understood as “our basic capacity to recognize and understand others as minded and expressive creatures.” Modern research on the topic goes back to the end of the nineteenth century when the German philosopher Robert Vischer (1847–1933) coined the term Einfühlung (“feeling into”) and used it within aesthetics to understand how we may attribute emotions to art objects through the projection of our own feelings, treating things as if they are sentient. Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) then made the transition from empathy as feeling into objects to interpersonal human empathy, the ability to understand the feelings of others through our perception of them. The term was then translated into English as “empathy” by the psychologist Edward Titchener (1867–1927) in 1909.

Current understandings of empathy focus on how it enables us to understand the feelings and minds of others through (internal) bodily simulation and imaginative projection. The increase in interest in empathy over the past few decades has been supported by advances in neuroscience, such as the discovery of mirror neurons. Often research tends to split into two areas of focus: “low-level empathy,” a pre-conscious, bodily activity where we mirror another person’s gestures, facial expressions, and such, and “high-level empathy,” which is more complex and depends on imagination and perspective-taking. These can also be called “primary” and “extended” empathy. 

At its most expansive, empathy research offers a vision of the integration of body, cognition, and emotion that fosters understanding, compassion, and even metaphysical insight. For example, Emily McRae considers how Indo-Tibetan Buddhism employs imaginative projection, such as visualization practices, to grasp the feelings of others and to cultivate key virtues in Mahayana Buddhist ethics, including compassion and “exchanging self and other.” However, this goes beyond simply providing a model for altruistic behavior. “It is a transformative practice that uses empathic imaginative projection to chip away at self-clinging by softening the boundaries of self and other.” In this way, the view of self is fundamentally reoriented and opens out towards others, training one to be aware of and alleviate suffering. For McRae, “[a]n appreciation of the myriad ways in which beings suffer and having an adequate response to that suffering is not a basic set of moral skills in Buddhist ethics; it is a rare moral accomplishment that requires a major transformation of our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Empathy is one of the main ways by which this transformation can occur.” Empathy, in other words, helps develop our capacity to respond appropriately to the many varieties of suffering that afflict the world.

McRae’s description of empathy “softening the boundaries of self and other” speaks to the power of empathy to unite, crossing divisions by creating awareness of the variety of human experience and feeling, and the fundamental interrelatedness of human life. This is also highlighted in Elif M. Gokcigdem’s extensive work on museums and empathy, where she employs the idea of “oneness,” “the ancient recognition of our interdependence and interconnectedness; a realization that we as individuals do not live and operate in silos.” Museums are effective platforms for increasing an awareness of oneness in people, especially through the ways they foster empathy. “Museums provide a readily available platform for cross-pollination of ideas and the exploration of empathy. They are natural storytellers that can show and tell us how all things are interconnected, and let us feel the wisdom inherited in ancient narratives about our oneness, while discovering new ones through science and exploration.” Museums, then, may serve as training centers, gyms, where our self-centered “habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” are attenuated, and we strengthen our empathic muscles and our facility to see and sustain interconnectedness.

Central to this interconnectedness, as McRae notes, is our ability to be aware of suffering and have a response to
The arts in Japan—whether literary, visual, or performing arts—often explore the theme of impermanence.

**IMPERMANENCE IN JAPANESE AESTHETICS**

One of the classic books in medieval Japanese literature is Yoshida Kenkō’s (1283–1350) *Essays in Idleness*.

There, he comments: “If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in the world, how would things lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty.”

Referring to Adashino, a graveyard near Kyoto often used as a poetic symbol of impermanence, Kenkō suggests that the fact common to all creatures—death—charges daily experience with a vitality in its uniqueness.

“The power of things to move us” here is a translation of the phrase *mono no aware* (もののあはれ), an essential term in Japanese aesthetics. Often translated as “the pathos of things,” the expression dates back to Heian court aesthetics, around 1000 CE. It was later identified as a defining characteristic of Japanese culture by the philosopher Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). The term denotes an intuitive understanding between a person and thing. Indeed, according to Motoori, “If I need to be more detailed about it, I would say that ‘to be stirred by external things’ is an exact definition of knowing *mono no aware*.”

Mono no aware may include transferring one’s emotion onto a thing in order to, as Yuriko Saito notes, “appreciate the way in which natural objects and events reverberate with our emotion.”

On the other hand, we may “intuit the kokoro (essence, spirit) of the object or situation and sympathize with it.” The border between self and other is porous and bilateral. At the heart of this emotional exchange is a deep awareness of a sharing in common impermanence, that we, like the fragrant cherry blossoms, are here for a moment and will pass away. Mono no aware, then, is characterized as a bittersweet, fleeting beauty.

This appreciation of impermanence is rooted in the experience of the natural world and also shapes how nature is aesthetically appreciated, particularly the passing of the seasons, which plays such an important role in all aspects of Japanese life. The arts in Japan—whether literary, performance, visual, or more integrative such as the tea ceremony—have always been closely connected to the appreciation of nature, in particular drawing on nature as subject matter or, perhaps more accurately, as co-creator, integrating nature into everyday life. What supports such an integrative practice is a foundational orientation that views nature and human as of a piece rather than starkly different, and that nature can serve as a means for uniting humans in fellow feeling.

The primary spiritual traditions in Japan, Shintō and Buddhism, have further refined the close relation of humans and nature, particularly in the shared feature of impermanence. Shintō is based on a reverence for kami (神), or spirit, an impersonal force that pervades nature but is not identical with it. This belief in kami throughout all things in nature means each thing may possess a sacred aura or even revelatory quality. Also, the dynamic character of kami—an ever moving, coming and going—highlights the temporal features of process and change in nature. Sensitivity to this movement is one factor in the formation of the Japanese emphasis on the four seasons.

Likewise, Buddhism teaches that all things are connected and constantly changing. The basic fact of existence is impermanence (無常, mujō) and humans are not exempt from this fact; rather, much of our suffering comes from trying to deny it, to give permanence to our lives, our sense of self, and seeing ourselves as distinct from, and superior to, nature around us. What is needed is a way of changing our thinking, of transcending the self in order to see the world, including ourselves, as it really is. This can be summarized by the thirteenth-century Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253): “[S]tudying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things.” Dōgen also refers to this state as “without-thinking” and others have referred to it as “nothingness.” But as the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Kawabata Yasunari points out, it would be a mistake to see such a nothingness as a version of Western nihilism. “It is rather the reverse, a universe of the spirit in which everything communicates freely with everything, transcending bounds, limitless.”

Appreciating impermanence, especially as expressed in nature, in turn guides artistic practice, creating a sensitivity to the unique features of natural materials and their experience in time. The goal of art is not to express the artist’s ego, in dominance of the material, but to bring the self into harmony with the material, to let the thing fully live, be it a flower arrangement, a ceramic plate, a painted scroll, a wooden sculpture, or a printed page.

So, mono no aware names that emotional feeling of the transience of life we share with the world around us. Other key concepts in Japanese aesthetics also express this. These include wabi (侘び) and sabi (渋び). I will touch on each briefly.

Wabi is especially associated with the tea ceremony as developed by the master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). This form of tea ceremony placed a high value on mundane, misshapen, or even broken implements as expressing wabi, a form of beauty marked by age, imperfection, and austerity. Apparently damaged or deformed ceramics were given a place alongside more refined artworks, a sort of egalitarian aesthetics rooted in this deeper philosophical perspective of impermanence and continuity with nature. Experiencing the wabi tea ceremony was a way to train oneself, as it were, to understand this truth.

Another key term in Japanese aesthetics is sabi, or loneliness. Often wabi and sabi are used together. Sabi is...
especially associated with the seventeenth-century haiku poet Bashō (1644–1694). For Bashō, the job of the poet is to penetrate into any object and grasp its inner life, the profound feeling that each thing shares with the universe. When the poet captures and expresses this, a poem will evoke sabi, but it is a loneliness that is in the world, objective and impersonal, and thus supersedes subjective emotion. As Makoto Ueda comments,

Basho conceived loneliness as an impersonal atmosphere, in contrast with grief and sorrow, which is a personal emotion. The contrast cannot be over-emphasized, because loneliness thus conceived lay at the bottom of Basho’s view of life, pointing towards a way in which his plea “return to nature” can be fulfilled. . . . There is no escape for men from sorrow, since it is inherent in humanity. If there should be an escape, it would be only through a denial of humanity, through men’s dehumanizing themselves. They can escape from sorrow only when they transform it into an impersonal atmosphere, loneliness. By going beyond the egocentric self and understanding a deeper continuity with nature, one can better assess and respond to the suffering that humans endure.

Mono no aware, wabi, and sabi. These are three key terms in Japanese aesthetics, and I have suggested that each expresses different aspects of the basic fact of impermanence linked to the constant transformation in nature. Together, they express the truth that all things are simultaneously co-arising and have their place in the flow of life, which each of us are privileged to share in at this specific place and at this specific moment, never to come again. The discussion has focused on the human experience of nature and how this finds expression in artistic practices, such as poetry or the tea ceremony, which may function as aids to help the individual empathize with nature. This may seem to go back to the early understanding of empathy as projection onto objects. However, these ideas from Japanese aesthetics remind us that empathy may go beyond only being between humans, and at the same time our understanding of nature may deepen our understanding of and solidarity with other humans. It need not be either/or.

My suggestion here is not that empathy is reducible to impermanence, but that it may be a more overarching insight that our experiences of the emotional lives of others in their diverse expressions gesture towards. This can further flesh out Elif Gokcigdem’s discussion of empathy as oneness and interconnectedness, and also speak to Emily McRae’s challenge that empathy should not only make us aware of the myriad of human suffering, but to have a response to it, ultimately with compassion. Training ourselves to be more sensitive to this is something art can support. Art may provide empathetic encounters, but in such a way that suffering is made impersonal, in Bashō’s sense, aestheticizing it, but not cutting it off from the ethical; rather, intensifying it. To consider this further, I would like to close with a discussion of a particular artwork, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi’s One Hundred Aspects of the Moon.

EMPATHY AND IMPERMANENCE IN YOSHITOSHI’S ONE HUNDRED ASPECTS OF THE MOON

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892) was one of the most prolific and popular print artists of his generation. Throughout his career, he produced prints in different genres, including beautiful ladies, historical figures, kabuki actors, and contemporary events. Toward the end of his life, from 1885 to 1892, he completed One Hundred Aspects of the Moon. Made during a time of drastic social change in Japan, the series is a wide-ranging look back on centuries of Japanese history and culture. Each print relates to a single story, but all are linked by the theme of the moon. Sometimes the moon is visible, other times it is referenced in a poem; yet it is always there, as if to remind us that each human life, with its unique experience and emotion, is transient. Here I will only focus on three examples: Gravemarker Moon, Moon above the Sea at Daimotsu Bay – Benkei, and Moon of Pure Snow at Asano River – Chikako, the Filial Daughter (Figures 1, 2, and 3).

What is immediately striking when looking at the series is the range of emotion Yoshitoshi depicts and the directness he does it with through his formal designs. This speaks to an important observation in research on empathy and visual art. At the beginning of this essay the distinction between low-level and high-level empathy was noted. Low-level empathy deals with the automatic process by which our bodies mirror, or simulate, the bodies of others and the feelings their gestures and expressions imply. Applied to visual art, it speaks to the way we can grasp an image even without extensive cultural knowledge. As David Freedberg notes, “The possibility that gestures and emotions might be understood through embodied simulation suggests a form of translation not necessarily constrained by cultural bounds. You understand the emotions such movements entail because you have a body, not because you know the story.”

When asked about the emotions of the figures in these three prints, responses may include the following: the figure’s rigid pose and neutral face in Daimotsu Bay expresses resolution; the contorted figure and furrowed brow in Asano River, worry; the seated, sedate figure in Gravemarker,
Yoshitoshi depicts and the directness he does it with through his formal designs. This speaks to the perennial concerns and hopes of all. I provide singular opportunities to exercise empathy, but through the museum’s diverse collections, works can be actively curated and presented in such a way that encourages making connections and forming a broader perspective that speaks to the perennial concerns and hopes of all. I have here drawn on ideas in Japanese aesthetics related to impermanence, but this could be done from other aesthetic, religious, and wisdom perspectives, providing further insights for reflection and mutual dialogue.

NOTES

2. For a similar perspective, see Zorana Ivcevic and Fundación Botín, “Introduction,” in Designing for Empathy: Perspectives on the Museum Experience, ed. Elf M. Gokcigdem (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2019), 1–2. At one outset, it is important to note that while I present a relatively optimistic view of the relationship between empathy and ethics and of the potential for museums to support this, I do not want to discount the complexities surrounding both. Empathy alone is not enough to
produce change, and there are criticisms of empathy’s relation to morality that should be kept in mind. For an overview of some of these topics, see Heidi L. Maibom, “Introduction: (Almost) Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Empathy,” in Empathy and Morality, ed. Heidi L. Maibom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–40. At the same time, even if museums engage audiences with empathy, the museum environment and the particular kind of experience it creates, and whether this leads to effective ethical action is a subject for ongoing consideration.


8. McRae, “Empathy, Compassion,” 127. This may resemble Edith Stein’s idea of empathy as “ethical,” where I empathically grasp how you perceive me and thereby experience my self as an object for you, providing “a non-egocentric and intersubjective view of our own lived body in the public world.” See Fuchs, “Levels of Empathy,” 41–42.


12. Regarding the order of Japanese names, if the work was written in English, I have used the English order. If a work was translated from the Japanese, I have retained the Japanese order.


14. See Kenkō, Essays in Idleness, 8, note 1.

15. See Kenkō, Essays in Idleness, 8, note 3.


28. The full series within the Dayton Art Institute’s collection can be viewed at http://collection.daytonartinstitute.org/search%22One%20Hundred%20Aspects%20of%20the%20Moon%22. For a print version of the series, see John Stevenson, Yoshitoshi’s One Hundred Aspects of the Moon (Leiden: Hotei, 2001).


31. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that within the series Yoshitoshi includes a print of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion.

III. METAPHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

From Speculative Realism to Ki-Realism: Or, Reality as Realization in Japanese Aesthetics

Leah Kalmanson
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
LEAH.KALMANSON@UNT.EDU

ABSTRACT

Recent trends in speculative realism and new materialism call for renewed investigation into overlooked European discourses such as vitalism and panpsychism as possible responses to the perceived intractability of the dualistic legacy of modernity in its approach to questions of mind, matter, and meaning. In this vein, in his 2014 book The Universe of Things, Steven Shaviro calls for a turn toward
a “speculative aesthetics.” Here, I consider the resources offered by Japanese aesthetics to any such critical turn. We move first from contemporary speculative realism to a “qi-realism” rooted in Song-dynasty Chinese discourses; then we follow this path to the “ki-realism” expressed in Japanese arts and artmaking practices. These ki-based aspects may receive less attention due to the prevalence of Zen in academic discourses on Japanese aesthetic theory, but the two are not opposed—the ki-based explanatory model works alongside Zen doctrine, lending complexity to claims about an artwork’s aesthetic efficacy and the art practices that produce such efficacious works. Overall, the ki-based dimension establishes fruitful lines of conversation with critical projects such as Shaviro’s by underscoring artmaking as a fundamental part of the dynamic exchange that builds our shared reality.

***

Recent trends in continental philosophy and critical theory have called for renewed investigation into overlooked European discourses such as vitalism and panpsychism, which constitute historical countercurrents against the dominant paradigms in metaphysics and ontology. Fields such as speculative realism, new materialism, and object-oriented ontology direct themselves to the perceived intractability of the dualistic legacy of European modernity in its approach to questions of spirit, mind, and matter. Accordingly, they call for attention to the dynamic, perceptive, and agentic aspects of phenomena outside human consciousness.

As I have argued elsewhere, these recent trends are only “new” in the limited context of European intellectual history; taking a broader view, we find complementary approaches to questions of mind, matter, and meaning in East Asian sources. The current essay engages Steven Shaviro’s recent book The Universe of Things, in which he calls for theorists in speculative realism and new materialism to consider a turn toward aesthetics. Here I hope to show that the existing field of Japanese aesthetics as an academic area—a rich heritage of scholarship dating back to the Meiji (1868–1912)—has a wealth of theoretical and practical resources to offer any contemporary critical aesthetic turn. However, the aspects most relevant to a possible conversation with Shaviro’s “speculative aesthetics” remain partially obscure due to the centrality of Zen thought in Japanese aesthetic discourses. Thus, my related task in this essay is to draw attention to some of the Zen-adjacent, as it were, aspects of Japanese aesthetics, which preeminently position it as a resource for contemporary theory.

**SPECULATIVE REALISM AND THE AESTHETIC TURN**

Fields such as speculative realism and new materialism offer critiques not only of the dualistic metaphysics and substance ontology that mark European philosophy traditionally, but also of more recent work in areas such as phenomenology, which is itself opposed to the historically dominant paradigms. For example, Quentin Meillassoux associates the phenomenological perspective on non-dualism with what he calls the problem of “correlationism.” In short, as the argument goes, ever since Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) made the distinction between noumena and phenomena, philosophers have accepted the thesis that our understanding of reality is correlated with our own perceptual and cognitive abilities and limitations. Meillassoux makes the even stronger claim that philosophers (especially phenomenologists) correlate being, or existence itself, with the experience of being, which produces, as he says, what “could be called a ‘species solipsism’, or a ‘solipsism of the community’, since it ratifies the impossibility of thinking any reality that would be anterior or posterior to the community of thinking beings.” As a result, we lose access to the “great outdoors,” which is to say, we lose the ability to make any sense of mind-independent reality. Here, Meillassoux’s speculative realism calls for a renewed investigation into the great outdoors—i.e., speculation—without returning to the assumptions of a naive realism in which we simply have unimpeded access to what we know and perceive.

Such speculative trends in the work of Meillassoux and others are related to a renewed interest in panpsychism as a philosophical position. As Steven Shaviro says in The Universe of Things, “When we step outside of the correlationist circle, we are faced with a choice between panpsychism on the one hand or eliminativism on the other.” That is, either we accept the nihilistic elimination of all the qualities that the mind apparently grants to experience (value, morals, meaning, and so forth), or instead we challenge the presumed dualism between the psychical and physical. Shaviro, for his part, sides with panpsychism and argues convincingly that many of the speculative realists’ concerns can be addressed through the existing philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and William James (1842–1910). Shaviro’s openness to panpsychism is echoed by others in the related fields of object-oriented ontology and so-called new materialisms. For example, Jane Bennett proposes the theory of “vital materiality” as a direct antidote to the disenchanted view that matter is supposedly inert and thus fundamentally devoid of the vitality and agency that marks biological and sentient life. She suggests that we might hesitantly indulge in anthropomorphism—that is, to allow ourselves to believe in the sentence of material things—as a way to overcome the old habits of modernity and its dualisms.

Nonetheless, in Shaviro’s conclusion, he acknowledges that the question of correlationism is not answered simply by asserting that all existing entities “have insides as well as outsides.” That is, even a sophisticated panpsychism does not necessarily solve the solipsistic dilemma in which individual sentient entities may find themselves. As a result, Shaviro takes an aesthetic turn: “My own version of speculative realism therefore focuses not on epistemological questions at all but rather directly on aesthetics, for aesthetics is the realm of immanent, noncognitive contact.” On the final page of his book, he says, “[T]hrough aesthetics, we can act in the world and relate to other things in the world without reducing it and them to mere correlates of our own thought. This is why I propose a speculative aesthetics. . . . Such a speculative aesthetics is still to be constructed; Kant, Whitehead, and Deleuze only provide us with its rudiments.” As I discuss
in what follows, many of the ideas that Shaviro identifies as latent “underground motifs” in Western philosophy are front and center in East Asian traditions. We begin below by moving first from speculative realism to a “qi-realism” rooted in Song-dynasty Chinese discourses, and then following this path to the “ki-realism” expressed in Japanese arts and artmaking practices.

**QI-REALISM IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY**

The central term in this discussion, i.e., qi 氣 (Jp. ki), has been translated into English variously as “vital stuff,” “psychophysical stuff,” and “lively material.” By the time of the Song (960–1279), it had come to be thought of as the matter-energy matrix that accounts for all that exists, whether we mean what is condensed and palpable, as in physical objects, or what is dispersed and ethereal, as in the mental energies of human thoughts and feelings. Contemporary philosopher JeeLoo Liu coins the term “qi-realism” to capture this sense in which qi “constitutes everything and is responsible for all changes.”

Under qi-realism, the Chinese tradition arguably avoids what Western philosophy refers to as the “fact-value distinction.” Because qi possesses its own dynamism and agency, so-called facts are always value-laden—the efficacious functioning of the cosmos is “good” just as the efficacious functioning of the human heart-mind is “good,” and both senses of “good” have a moral valence. Or, as the contemporary historian Tze-Ki Hon comments, “As part of the ceaseless flow of qi in the universe, morality is understood metaphysically.” Whether we speak of chemical reactions, biological processes, moral values, or aesthetic impact, we can express it all through the nature and functioning of qi, such that anything that exists can be considered axiologically significant.

To understand how this qi-realism frames our discussion of aesthetics will require a closer look at (1) the recursive behavior of qi, or its ability to interact with itself in its different phases to produce increasingly complex manifestations of structure (li 理); and (2) the resonant power of qi, or the ability of similarly structured manifestations to mutually influence each other, like tuning forks vibrating in harmony. Together these two aspects account for both novelty and stability—qi-based phenomena are capable of intermixing to produce new and increasingly complex forms, while at the same time establishing patterns of interaction that can be observed and tracked.

The first aspect is rooted in the general pattern expressed in qi-based cosmologies: First, there is the undifferentiated field of primal qi (yuanyiqi 元氣); next, there is the initial distinction into the polar forces of yin (陰) and yang (陽); and, then, from the increasingly complex interactions of yin and yang arise the myriad things of the cosmos as we know it. In general, yin refers to forces that settle and sink, that are dark and heavy, and that tend to condense; and yang refers to forces that rise or flow, that are clear and light, and that tend to disperse. No single phenomenon is yin or yang on its own but only in relation to other phenomena in specific contexts; moreover, all phenomena have their own yin and yang characteristics, allowing for increasingly fine-grained analyses. Or, in the words of the famous Song-dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200), “any given yin and yang has its own yin and yang [陰陽中又各自有陰陽也].”

Primordial undifferentiated qi is not only a feature of our cosmological origins but a force that remains with us in the present. In other words, all existing forms emerge (sheng 生) from undifferentiated qi, whether we are speaking of the first forms at the inception of the cosmos or the myriad forms around us now that continue to live out, in the present, ongoing processes of materialization, persistence, and eventual disintegration. And, under the right conditions, this primordial qi is available to us as a raw material, as it were, from which we can manifest or realize new forms, events, or processes. The ability to draw on this primal material is often portrayed as revitalizing, refreshing, and healthy.

Song-era philosophers referred to various methods for “daily renewal” (rixin 日新), including meditative techniques such as “quiet sitting” (jingzuo 靜坐) for calming and concentrating the mind, the method of reverence (jing 敬) for moral cultivation, and scholarly study for “investigating things” and “extending knowledge” (zhizhi 賢知 and gewu 格物). In particular, the method of quiet sitting was meant to relax the heart-mind into its primordial formless state, for the sake of reinvigorating the mind’s own productive and creative powers. As such, it was seen as a necessary precursor to scholarly study, especially reading the classic texts. Or, as Zhu Xi says, “Now, when you want to read books, you must first settle the mind so that it becomes like still water or a clear mirror [今且要讀書，須先定其心，使之 如止水，如明鏡].”

These comments on settling the mind reflect the idea that, in a qi-based framework, the heart-mind can be clear and bright or cloudy and agitated, depending on its state of cultivation. In other words, human consciousness is here understood according to the same “qi-realism” that explains the behaviors and tendencies of other phenomena. As Zhu Xi says, “The capacity for awareness is the luminous aspect of qi [能覺者，氣之靈也].” On the yin-yang model, the condensed or turbid qi of physical matter is a yin force in relation to the yang force of the ethereal or refined qi of human thoughts and sensations; and, taken on its own, human consciousness has its own yin and yang aspects, depending on levels of cultivation. The most purified or rarefied qi-consciousness is called “spirit” (shen 神). As contemporary scholar Joseph Adler explains in a study of “neo-Confucian” spirituality: “In human beings, spirit is a quality of mind—specifically mind-qi in its finest, most free-flowing state.” This point gives concreteness to our point about the recursive and interactive behavior of qi. Another contemporary scholar, Yung Sik Kim, explains that the recursive interactions of qi mean that an individual’s mental life is not simply an internal experience, nor is it restricted to the confines of her physical body:

Mind, for Zhu Xi, was really nothing but qi, its “essential and refreshing” (jingshuang 精爽) or “luminous” (ling 靈) portion, to be more specific. Thus, qi was endowed with qualities of mind, and could interact with the mind. The mind-qi interaction was not restricted to man’s qi and...
his own mind, but was extended to the qi of the outside world and to the minds of others.18

Here, the transpersonal significance of self-cultivation practices, such as quiet sitting, comes into sharper focus. The well-developed heart-mind was believed to directly influence other people, our shared social world, and even the physical environment.

The mechanism by which the well-cultivated heart-mind and the well-ordered world mutually sustain each other takes us to another qi-based theory regarding ganying (感應), translated literally as “response-stimulus,” referring to the “mutual resonance” of similarly structured phenomena. The idea of ganying underlies what is often referred to as the “correlative cosmology” of the qi-based worldview.19

According to this idea, certain correspondences can be mapped between phenomena of similar structures or constitutions. In particular, the five phases (wuxing 五行) of water, fire, wood, metal, and earth were often associated with specific bodily organs, seasonal changes, human affairs, and so forth, influencing practices as diverse as medicine, agriculture, politics, and pedagogy.

As the yinyang dynamic plays out across increasingly complex and fine-grained associations, we can see that various energies respond to each other according to relatively predictable tendencies. For example, as Yung Sik Kim discusses, Zhu Xi explains that summer is both the response to spring and the stimulus for autumn, and thus the seasons turn in regular rotation.20 This pattern of stimulus and response can be used to explain all manner of phenomena, from the stretching and contracting involved in animal locomotion, to seasonal hibernation periods, to overall ecological health.21 As Zhu sums it up, “What has responded (gàn 賜) in turn becomes stimulus (yíng 應); what has stimulated in turn becomes response. . . . This is the necessary pattern-principle of contracting and expanding, going and coming, and stimulus and response.”22

In the dynamics of qi-based correlative thought, the heart-mind of the sage solicits a predictable response in others. We ordinary people attune ourselves to a sage’s power like tuning forks resonating in harmony. In a telling passage, Chan-liang Wu emphasizes the transpersonal scope of this correlative framework: “This is a holistic worldview that puts the utmost emphasis on intra-subjectivity—each subject’s existence intermixes with and penetrates into other subjects’ existence, and is reflected in the Chinese ideas of family and society.”23 Building on these points established so far, we can say that this same intra-subjective scope and dynamic vitality of qi is reflected in East Asian art theories and practices, as well.

In his 2015 essay “The Aesthetics of Qi,” Nicholas S. Brasovan describes how the intermixing of qi operates in the arts and art-making practices according to Chinese discourses:

The work of art is an intentional transformation of qi into a dynamic structure. The term qi refers to energetic and material modes of being; so, it is at times translated as “material force.” However, qi is not just matter. Qi is numinous, qualitative, and vital energy. The transformation of qi is continuous from the artist’s thoughts and feelings, through the artist’s body, into the medium. The entire process is circumscribed under the concept of “work.” It begins with an inchoate feeling, intention, or disposition to create, express, and communicate. The initial disposition is developed through the artist’s work with a medium. The original intention finds consummation in a concrete, formalized, meaningful presentation and its attendant experience. The aesthetic object continues to do work in the presence of prepared appreciators.24

As is evident in Brasovan’s description, the dynamic intermixing of qi-based energies reaches across phenomena conventionally divided into “subjective” and “objective” in Western discourses, drawing together art theories regarding the expressive aims of the artist with those regarding the formal qualities of the artwork. Not only are feelings transmitted from person to person via artworks, but the works themselves retain the agentic vitality of qi, continuing to “do work” thanks to their own dynamism. This is the thread that we follow to ki-realism as reflected in Japanese art theories and practices.

KI-REALISM AND JAPANESE ARTS

When we speak of “realism” in art, a lot depends on what we mean by “reality.” Traditional Chinese art theories are distinctive for analyzing artworks that convey the spiritual qi (shenqi 神氣) of their subject matter, and hence such theories prioritize the attainment of qi-resonance (qiyun 氣韵) over formal likeness.25 At various points in the history of Chinese art theory, qi-resonance has focused on the dynamic power of art objects themselves (as Brasovan indicates above) or, instead, on the spiritual character of artists, which can be transmitted through their works.26

In her contribution to New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, the art historian Mikiko Hirayama discusses the influence of these traditional Chinese art theories on the artist Kishida Ryûsei (1891–1929) and his theory of realism in painting. By his lifetime, the Japanese terms shajitsu 写実 or shajitsushugi 写実主義 were translations referring to Western artworks in the style of “realism,” as exemplified by the medium of oil painting and its photorealist capacities. As Hirayama discusses, Kishida sought to merge this Western heritage with the techniques and philosophical priorities of traditional Chinese art theory: “Kishida Ryûsei’s statements on Inner Beauty and the Spiritual Realm reveal that his realism was by no means confined to superficial physical likeness. He strove to express something that was not readily perceivable to the eye, and traditional Chinese aesthetics played a crucial role in this endeavor.” In short, he promoted art that captures a reality deeper or more fundamental than what everyday perception conveys. Toward this end, as Hirayama says, he even advocated realism via a “lack of realism,” by which an artist resists naturalistic depictions in order to convey what is spiritually real.

Kishida himself was inspired by Western mysticisms and especially the Christian mysticism of William Blake.27 However, alongside this reference to Christian mysticism,
I suggest here that his views on realism in art can be fruitfully understood via a “ki-realism” that draws on Chinese precedents but reflects Japanese contributions and developments. In the Song-dynasty approach to qi we considered earlier, we focused on qi as an all-inclusive matter-energy matrix that accounts for material as well as mental and spiritual phenomena. But in specific contexts, various modes of purified or rarified qi are often spoken of as spiritual energies operating separately alongside other bodily, mental, and ecological processes. This sense of qi comes to the fore, for example, when an acupuncturist speaks of the meridians along which qi flows through the body, or when a fengshui practitioner speaks of facilitating or impeding the movement of qi in a given environment. This sense of ki also comes to the fore in the work of Yuasa Yasuo, perhaps the most well-known philosophical figure in twentieth-century Japan to write explicitly on ki as the foundation of a theory of bodily and moral self-cultivation.

In Yuasa’s writings on the body, he refers to Japanese aesthetic and martial traditions to explain how training in the arts relates to moral and physical development, comparing this training to contemplative methods such as Zen “seated meditation” (zazen). Although he notes that the dimension of ki comes to the fore especially in Daoist meditation styles, he maps all body-mind cultivation techniques onto a ki-based framework, Zen included. In particular, he attributes the Zen enlightenment experience of satori (悟り) to the transformation of ki in the body as it attains increasingly rarefied states. In other words, Yuasa explains satori via a “ki-realism” that readily invokes the operation of ki to account for causal relations. On the model of ki-realism, the experience of the “Spiritual Realm” that Kishida describes is perhaps quite different from a Christian mysticism where “mystical” means absorption into a transcendent absolute. Rather, like Yuasa, we might understand this spiritual insight on a ki-based causal model regarding transformations of consciousness very much rooted on the side of immanence; or, perhaps it is better to say that ki-realism avoids the transcendent/immanent distinction altogether. Either way, through ki-realism, we open a line of conversation between Kishida’s Spiritual Realm and Shaviro’s understanding of aesthetics as “the realm of immanent, non-cognitive contact.”

CONCLUSION: KI-REALISM AS KI-REALIZATION

Generalizing from the case of Kishida above, this brief essay draws a modest conclusion: The field of contemporary Japanese aesthetics tends to be dominated by a Zen-based philosophy and worldview, but ki-based assumptions regarding experience and reality are relevant to understanding both aesthetics and Zen in Japan. In English-language literature, the Zen aspects of Japanese aesthetics tend to be parsed according to two related Buddhist themes: impermanence and interdependence. That is, a wide range of Japanese aesthetic terminology focuses either on the aesthetic appreciation of impermanent phenomena or on art-making practices aimed at attaining a sense of oneness with the artist’s subject matter. It is in this latter aspect that the assumptions of a ki-based worldview are especially relevant.

In Yuriko Saito’s introduction to New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, she references the well-known advice to artists, across many Japanese art practices, to become one with their subjects:

For example, Bashō instructs his disciples to “listen to the pine tree” and “enter into the bamboo” when composing a haiku about them. . . . If one captures the heart of bamboo into the paint brush, the nineteenth-century painter Tsubaki Chinzan (1801–1854) claims, the painting of bamboo will take form by itself. A similar suggestion is given with respect to acting in a Nō play: if the actor discerns and identifies with the essence of the character to be portrayed, the outward expression of imitation will follow naturally. Indeed, the actor’s preparation before the performance includes a period during which he meditates on the character of the mask he is to don.

She relates this sense in which the artist enters into or becomes the subject matter to the influence of Zen thought: “As a powerful and persistent legacy of Zen Buddhism, the Japanese aesthetic tradition considers artistic endeavor to be a secular means of experiencing enlightenment. Zen enlightenment requires, among other things, transcendence of oneself because ordinary egocentric concerns . . . hamper the direct experience of the Buddhist nature of everything.” The simultaneous experience of decentering the ego and attaining direct experience of the interconnectedness of all existing phenomena is indeed a hallmark of Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhism generally. But it is also an apt description of the permeable ki-based self, which is open to intermixing with other selves, open to environmental exchanges and interactions, and preeminently susceptible to resonant harmonizing with all phenomena across the interconnected matter-energy matrix of ki.

Some work has already been done to show the influence of a qi-based worldview on Buddhism in China, such as the use of ganying theory to explain a bodhisattva’s responsiveness to prayer and the portrayal of karma as a kind of energy produced and circulated among humans. In the Japanese Buddhist context, various Shingon and Jōdo (Pure Land) practices are described explicitly as the manipulation of ki-energy through visualization and concentration techniques. Indeed, following Yuasa, Shigenori Nagatomo claims that this confidence in the efficacy of ki-based practice is the “underpinning” of all religious and ethical thought in Japan.

In line with the syncretism that marks East Asian traditions, I emphasize that the ki-based and Zen-based aspects of Japanese aesthetic theory are not opposed to each other—rather, the ki-based explanatory model works alongside Zen doctrine, lending an additional line of credibility to claims about an artwork’s aesthetic efficacy and the art practices that produce such efficacious works. Moreover, keeping this ki-based dimension in focus when engaging Japanese aesthetics helps to underscore—and celebrate—the sense in which artmaking is a fundamental part of the dynamic exchange that builds our shared reality. Realism
means here, in other words, not a passive representation of the preexisting world but an active realization of new conditions. Thus, in answer to Shaviro’s call for a “speculative aesthetics” that allows us to “act in the world and relate to other things in the world without reducing it and them to mere correlates of our own thought,” the Japanese tradition provides a wealth of theoretical and practical resources.

NOTES

19. See Michael J. Puett, To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2004). See especially the fourth chapter for a discussion of the history of the use of this term by scholars such as Marcel Granet and Claude Lévi-Strauss.
25. Perhaps most famous are the six principles of painting by Xie He 謝赫 (sixth century), the first of which regards qiyun. See, for example, Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, Early Chinese Texts on Painting (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), esp. 14 and 23.
30. Shaviro, The Universe of Things, 156.
36. Shaviro, The Universe of Things, 156.
Kuki Shūzō: Art and Existence as the Play of Contingency-Necessity

Mayuko Uehara
KYOTO UNIVERSITY
UEHARA.MAYUKO.6E@KYOTO-U.AC.JP

ABSTRACT
Recognizing the “contingent” nature of art, Kuki Shūzō focused on the fundamental and intrinsic relationship between the work of art and the “human existentiality (人間的実存性 ninentekeki jitsuzensei) of the artist.” For Kuki, who was sympathetic to the views of Paul Valéry and Oskar Becker, the very “heartbeat of life” of the poet is symbolically expressed in artistic creation, and the beauty of the work of art stems from the fragility of this “heartbeat.” Kuki’s philosophy of contingency comprises three “logical modes” (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive) and possesses a dialectical structure of “contingency-necessity.” By focusing on Kuki’s understanding of the “contingent” nature of artistic structure and the tendency of art to “locate contingency in the content of objects,” this paper examines the fundamental relationship between the work of art and “the human existentiality of the artist” from the perspective of the dialectical interplay of contingency-necessity that exists within the very structure of the work of art.

I. INTRODUCTION
The creation of a work of art results from the coincidence of two dimensions: the deliberate or intentional act of creativity of the artist and the effects that are the result of unintentional factors. This dual nature of artistic creation is both well-known and often discussed. Paul Valéry, for instance, mentions it in his “First Lecture in Poetics” given at the Collège de France. In the creation of poetic language, Valéry writes, “words are no longer associated with the same kind of attractions [as everyday words].” Poetic language simultaneously exhibits “two values” in equal measure: “sound and momentary mental effects.” However, the two values are only “occasionally” brought together in the desired way. For Valéry, the unification of “sound” and “mental effects” takes place “moment to moment” from person to person and always in an “uncertain” manner and in “unequal” proportion. The creation of poetic language, therefore, occurs in a place and at a moment that escape planning or the intentions of the artist and, thus, we can only wait for that place and that moment to present themselves.

Let us consider another example taken from Kichizaemon (1949–), the fifteenth head of the Raku family of Japanese traditional artisans. Reflecting on the tea bowls he has created, Kichizaemon writes:

[To speak of them] as daily tools, or to [refer to] the “beauty of use” does not [fully] encapsulate them. They break-through and transcend everyday life, going far beyond language or understanding. But where is it that they move? This movement takes place in the midst of phenomena as they repeatedly change from moment to moment and is directed at some far beyond that even I myself do not know.

Kichizaemon’s account alludes to a place “far beyond” “everyday life,” “language,” or “understanding,” a place he himself does not “know.” It points to the fact that the work of art exceeds the artist’s intentions and recognizes that there is an aspect of the work of art that cannot be predicted. Kichizaemon is speaking from the perspective of an artist reflecting on the objectivity of his own work and not specifically about the creative process per se or about the nature of the place where creativity itself takes place. What Kichizaemon is doing is telling of the “destiny” of his own intentions in the creative process: for instance, the artist’s desire to realize a certain glaze or texture on the tea bowl when it is fired in the kiln.

Kichizaemon’s reflection makes clear the connection between the duality of artistic “intention” and that which “transcends intention,” on the one hand, and the issue of contingency, on the other hand. In “Contingency and Art,” which appears in The Problem of Contingency (偶然性の問題 Güzensei no mondai, 1935), Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941) refers to the phenomenon of how earthenware changes its color in the process of being fired as an example of contingency of the work of art maintaining its independence from the intentionality of the artist.

To provide a complete account of the role of contingency in the creative process of a work of art, a great number of related, even interrelated, factors would have to be considered—the nature of the subject that creates, the material used as a means of creation, the environment and world in which the creating takes place and in which the created object exists, the people who appreciate the created work, to name a few. For Kuki, this analysis of the rule of contingency in the creative process would also necessarily concern a consideration of Nishida Kitarō’s (1870–1945) logic of “acting intuition” (行為的直観 kōteki chokkan), which is a logic of poïēsis (ποίησις) for “making a thing” (物を作る mono o tsukuru).

As an initial step towards such a complete philosophical inquiry, this paper investigates the problem of contingency in the creative process by focusing on what might arguably be the most important of these factors: “the human existentiality of the artist” and, by extension, the connection between art and human existence. This paper develops Kuki’s understanding of “the human existentiality of the artist” (人間的実存性 ninentekeki jitsuzensei). I attempt to clarify Kuki’s concept of contingency and its role in artistic creativity.

II. “THE HUMAN EXISTENTIALITY OF THE ARTIST” IN KUKI

In The Problem of Contingency, Kuki writes about the character of contingency in the creative process and its ground in the existentiality of the artist:

First, as I have said, there is an internal relationship between the work of art and contingency such that the character of artistic structure is itself contingent.
Secondly, art prefers to locate contingency in the content of objects. However . . . , it seems that these two points have their common roots deep within the human existentiality of the artist.7

Although Kuki only briefly alludes here to “the human existentiality of the artist” and does not develop this idea further, it forms the core factor in the creation and character of the work of art. In order to understand the relationship between the work of art and the existentiality of the human being in Kuki’s thought, we need first to consider the logic of contingency as it was developed by Kuki.

III. THE LOGIC OF CONTINGENCY

In The Problem of Contingency, Kuki distinguishes between three “modes” of necessity: “categorical necessity,” “hypothetical necessity,” and “disjunctive necessity.” Each mode of necessity has its own negation. These negations yield three forms of contingency: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive. Kuki develops this conception of contingency by reference to Aristotle and Cournot. According to Kuki, contingency belongs to modal logic.8

“Disjunctive contingency” is discussed in chapter three and it is here, in a section titled “Contingency and Art,” that Kuki speaks of “the human existentiality of the artist.”9 For Kuki, “art” must be regarded as “the expression of existence itself” and therefore understood as a particular undertaking of existence within the mode of “disjunctive contingency.”10

For Aristotle, the law of excluded middle forms an exclusive logical and even metaphysical disjunction that is the expression of identity: that which cannot not be is logically and metaphysically necessary. Necessity, then, is the manifestation of logical and ontological identity, arising from the disjunctive form of the law of excluded middle. In contrast, disjunctive contingency, says Kuki, is by its very nature the negation of necessity.”11 In other words, the fundamental nature of the contingency is the “extreme being that intervenes in the surface where being (有u) and nothingness (無mu) contact.”12 Consequently, it is the “reality bearing a character of nothingness” as the impossibility of being.13 Disjunctive contingency itself is a logically necessary consequence of disjunctive necessity: whatever is not necessary is necessarily contingent.

Let me contrast disjunctive contingency with Kuki’s other two forms of contingency. “Categorical contingency” occurs when “the predicate signifies the non-essential sign of the subject.”14 In such a case of contingency, any judgement assigning such a predicate to that subject would lack certainty. The core meaning of categorical contingency relies on “each phenomenon as well as the individual” and not on “the general concept.” That is, “categorical contingency” means that the predicative judgement is itself contingent. When we say, for instance, that S is P, and the P being spoken of S is not essential to S, but accidental, then “S is P” is categorically contingent.15

“Hypothetical contingency,” which is “exterior to the causal relation of the hypothetical judgement,” is located in the causality found in experience. In our everyday experience of the world, we experience events that are associated together that have no logically necessary connection. “I” experience event A coming after event B and link them through a judgement “B causes A.” This is a hypothetical judgement because we do not experience the necessary connection between these events, but only the series of events that is, strictly speaking, contingent as regards the relation between the events in the series. The hypothetical contingency is the “structure of the encounter between one series of events and another series.”16

Compare these to “disjunctive contingency”, which, Kuki says, concerns the “relation existing between a whole and parts.”17 Being, taken as a whole, is “self-identical . . . as far as it is determined as completed” and accompanied by “necessity.” By contrast, each “part” qua part of the whole lacks an “absolute self-identity”: each part is “predicted to the other parts.”18 That is to say, the part has in itself the nature of being able to be a part of (a different whole) other than the part that it is: in this consists the contingency of the part. In other words, disjunctive contingency expresses a relation between a part and a whole such that the membership of the part in the whole is contingent and not necessary. Thus, the part can be a member of another whole insofar as its membership in any given whole does not determine or exhaust its self-identity. In short, the relationship between the part and the whole of which it is a member is thoroughly contingent. Each part is contingent in relation to the self-identity that is inherent in the whole of this disjunctive structure. The core meaning of the disjunctive contingency is characterized by the impending of the “possibility of nothing” over the “necessity of nothing (無いことの必然 naikoto no hitsuzen).”19

For Kuki, these three modes of contingency are inseparably fused. One can see “each phenomenon as well as each individual” within the “core meaning of categorical contingency,” but this latter is nothing other than the “encounter between one series and another series” from the standpoint of hypothetical contingency. Furthermore, the “core meaning” of the “encounter between one series and another series” consists in the “possibility of nothingness,” for the “non-encounter is possible too.”20 As a consequence, contingency exists where there is no conviction of a self-identity and where, as a result, “there is a duality of the one and the other.”21 How are we to understand art as the “expression of existence itself” in terms of disjunctive contingency? As we saw in the previous section, for Kuki, there exists an “internal relationship” between art and contingency: both in that “the nature of artistic structure is itself contingent” and in that “art prefers to locate contingency in the content of objects.”

IV. THE NATURE OF ARTISTIC STRUCTURE IS ITSELF CONTINGENT

Let us consider in more detail what Kuki means by “the nature of artistic structure is itself contingent.” As a first gloss, Kuki says that “art, partially and in an independently-existing manner, enriches and completes itself.”22 As a completed state (完成態 kansaitai), the work of art is separated from “its relationship with the others (他者 ta)23 within what Kuki calls a “microworld structure.” Here, “the structural character of art itself is contingent” and art is
taken as “the end form of contingency.” This claim relating to artistic existentiality is not sufficiently developed in The Problem of Contingency. To understand Kuki’s claim, then, let us look at some of the texts on which Kuki draws.

The idea of a “completed state” guarantees the work of art its independence as a “microcosmic structure.” Kuki supports his claims with reference to Oskar Becker’s argument in “Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers” (1929) that the work of art is “completed” and forms a microcosm, and that “art is a complete form” that “emerges and is watched.” Becker himself insists on these ideas on the basis of György Lukács’s article, “Die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung in der Ästhetik.” Becker explains the meaning of the completed artistic work as a microcosmos in the following way. The “aesthetic object” itself has only latent power as “energiea.” That latent power becomes “reality in the experience of beauty for the first time.” According to Becker, the “grasping” of “aesthetic existence” can be conceived only as a “leap.” By a “leap,” Becker means that this “grasping” is “isolated” from the “everydayness” and the “primary Dasen.” In making this leap necessary for grasping a work of art, Becker preserves the “fragility” of “beauty”—an idea to which Kuki is sympathetic.

For Kuki, art is to be understood as cultural, historical, and human, and these three are subsumed under his concept of existence. Finally, it is important to note that Kuki defines art as “the expression (intuition) of existence itself.” We can outline Kuki’s framework for understanding art as follows:

```
  Nature
  | Existence
  |  | Culture/History (Humanity) -- Art -- Literature
  |  | Morality Religion Scholarship (Science and Philosophy) Art
  |  | Painting Sculpture Architecture Music Dance Literature
```

In order to clarify the relationship between real existence (実存 jitsucon) and art, we need first to consider the distinction between philosophy and art. For Kuki, “Philosophy [conducts its] primary negotiation with existence from the position of cognition, whereas art does so from the position of expression.”

We can explain this claim that “the nature of artistic structure is itself contingent” by situating it in the “horizon of time.” For Kuki, “artistic works” are “completed states” that “partially, and [in an] independently-existing [way] enrich and complete themselves.” This points to the chronological character of art. It is because human existence is chronological as Kuki claims that “human beings have history.” Similarly, the above schema suggests that culture necessarily contains art as a moment within its own self-formation. Art has the character of being the “intuition” or intuitive expression of existence itself, and this is only possible in the present.

This present corresponds to the Augustinian “present of present,” which is to say that it is an “enduring intuition.” For Kuki, real existence is fundamentally rooted in time, as it is for Bergson, Heidegger, and Husserl. However, in contrast to Bergson and Heidegger, and more akin to Augustine and Husserl, the present and the “now,” for Kuki, “is not static, but draws circles” and “is infinitely profound,” the “ewige Wiederkunft” as it is for Nietzsche with the idea of eternal recurrence. According to Kuki, time characterized by this dynamism is called “metaphysical time” and comparable with “a kind of recurrent time.”

The above-mentioned concepts, “culture / history (humanity),” are subsumed under “existence” and subsume the concept of “art.” This can be explained from the perspective of time. Art is the “existence of the time” and “itself occupies in the ‘present’ and has the feature of ‘intuition’ (Anschauung),” thus giving rise to Kuki’s conception of “metaphysical time.” Kuki writes that it “is in this ‘present’ that ‘intuition’ is conditioned to emerge (現前 genzen).” Metaphorically speaking, the “emergence” of “intuition” is a “surface intersecting at the right angles to history that moves in a fixed direction.” In other words, the so-called self-projection of history that casts itself over the surface of the present (現在面 genzaimen) is art. This is the “emergence” that is art. The emergence as art is also “what history matured and completed.” By analogy, we can interpret “completed state” to signify a “microcosmic structure.” It is a “completed state” situated at the end of disjunctive contingency.

V. ART PREFERENCES TO LOCATE CONTINGENCY IN THE CONTENT OF OBJECTS

For Kuki, the artwork is the “maturity” or the “crystallization” of the “stream of time” over the “surface of present.” As he observes, “true art does not come into being without the profound living of personality (個性 kosei) and social nature.” Let us interpret this passage in reference to Kuki’s philosophy of contingency in order to develop Kuki’s insufficient explanation regarding the problem of “the content of objects” of art as contingency. Of the problem of “the content of objects” of art as contingency, Kuki writes:

The contingency of natural phenomenon is something unpredictable and inseizable by law. A personality and liberty appear there. The dissoluteness (放蕩 hōatsu) of the life and the play of arbitrariness appear. These life and play are beautiful. The surprise towards the lively deviationism moves us.

We are all familiar enough with examples of natural phenomena that can become objects of art. However, for Kuki, to discover the latent—I.e., the aesthetic play in natural phenomena—is entrusted only to the “human existentiality” of the artist or his awareness of himself. On the basis of Becker’s idea, we can say that the awareness and intuition of the latent is an occasion for the artist to actualize them into a work of art. We can take, as an example, a verse from Heinrich Heine’s Die Nordsee in which the stars that the poet observed—all natural phenomena—were rendered artistically as “gold tacks” in an azure sky. Heine’s implicit awareness of the play of stars enabled him to capture—in a moment of intuition—that awareness in poetic form.
Or take, as another example, the aforementioned “earthenware changes” (黙変 yohen) in the production of pottery. An essential part of this process is the way in which “a fire of a kiln participates in the production keeping its independency of the creator’s intention.” Kuki describes this process as a contingent one: “contingency as the beauty of nature or the beauty of art.” I argue that, in such a production, there is a refined negotiation between nature and the artificial that brings the latent out into the actual. A singular contingent beauty can be discovered and consented to (by the artist) in the actualized state of earthenware changes appearing in a fired pottery ware. This is entrusted only to “human existentiality.” We cannot say that the potter realized a work that reflects solely her or his internal idea of beauty. The changes in earthenware are the actuality that is completed in the work of art. The artist must accept that they co-create with nature, knowing it is not possible to monopolize the creativity with their own personality. We already encountered this when considering Raku Kichizaemon’s philosophy of bowl. If, as we mentioned at the end of Section III, “contingency” is deep-rooted in the “dualism of the one and the other” where identity as an immovable confidence has been lost, then personality and otherness ought to live and create artistic work together quite naturally. The following and abovementioned words of Kuki should be understood in this way: “true art does not come into being without the profound living of personality and social nature.” “Social nature” can be understood in a broader sense as an inclusive and ethical occasion or situation such as nature, world, or place.

Another example presented by Kuki is “linked verse” (連句 renku). This is a genre of Japanese collaborative poetry, where a poem is composed by linking short verses sung alternately by different poets. We find here again the co-creation of the work of art. Kuki, in a gesture towards collaborative creation, takes up Watsuji Tetsurō’s explanation of renku:

Each verse in a renku has its independent world. Moreover, there are subtle connections between verses [and worlds], with one world unfolding into another world, while also constituting a whole [of the worlds] . . . one unity possessed by one creator’s creativity is intentionally renounced, and the direction of its development is consequently rather entrusted to “contingency” . . . . What results are the twists and turns which a creator cannot expect.

A monadologic space of art is opened here. However, since “there are subtle connections between verses,” the poets certainly feel and know the others who sing. Each one lives their “personality and social nature” in the artistic space (in a narrow sense) and at the same time in their lives (in a wider sense). The question is about “how to live deeply.” Different depths of life bring about different senses of the poem (as a whole) and different types of “completed state.” Needless to say, “to live deeply” does not mean to live a life of necessity, to live deliberately, intentionally, according to plan.

After all, the “human existentiality” of the artist cannot help but locate the contingent “content of objects” in the art. Involved in the field of metaphysics is the notion of contingent artistic expressions, carried into effect by “human existentiality,” where these two aspects are deeply rooted. This is what Kuki means by saying that the “nature of artistic structure is contingent.” Moreover, we must keep in mind that contingency is the “reality bearing a character of nothingness.” The coming and going on the frontiers of latency and actuality, of nothingness and being, is anticipated in the artistic act. Kuki calls this coming and going, in my view, the “internalization of the contingency.” He explains this phrase as follows: “The one being isolated encounters the other here and there out of design at a moment, while he internalizes the external other into his depth. This should have a meaning of the connection of anguish and pleasure in a whole real existence.” “The one being isolated” can be read as the artist.

The self of an artist becomes deeply aware of its relationality with the other at the moment of the encounter with one of the innumerable others that precede and are incorporated into the creation of the art object. This is an “enrichment” of the self that conceives of artistic work as a “completed state.” Inquiring into a “true contingency,” Kuki asserts the structure of “interrelationship of contingency-necessity,” since “identity” is among the “fundamental principles of thinking,” which support necessity and at the same time function as the “principles of internalization.” Self-awareness and this self-enrichment take place without thinking.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I attempt to clarify the relation between the work of art as a completed state and the artist’s existentiality by reference to the theoretical structure of Kuki’s philosophy of contingency. We have seen that works of art are “emergences” out of history in the present that is “endowed with indefinite depth.” Of course, the work of art is very often located in a place between the existentiality of its creator and the existentiality of its appreciator. Although the existentiality of each of them should be analyzed, the logic of contingency apparently does not structure society as a place for co-living (共に生きる tomo ni ikiru). When we examine the society and the world as places of artistic creation, the viewpoint of co-living—i.e., that of the inter-relationality of existences—accompanies necessarily our examination, but there is no concrete consideration in Kuki. Nevertheless, I should perhaps clarify the problem relative to my main interest by connecting it with the “interrelationship of contingency-necessity”: the play between the natural and the artificial, which is widely seen in artistic acts, takes part deeply in the artist’s existentiality.

NOTES

1. The first lecture was given in 1937. See Paul Valéry, “Variété V,” in Variété III, IV et V (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 846–47; Varéni Shūsei (A Compilation of the Works of Valéry), Volume III (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2011), 34. Valéry also states that there is no reciprocal relationship between sound and meaning. Rather, this reciprocal relationship is a deep-seated illusion we have created for ourselves (Variété III, IV et V, 846; Varéni Shūsei III, 33). This reminds us of the complex numbers of mathematicians.
The combination of phonetic parameters and semantic parameters generates various problems relating to extension and convergence, and poets solve these problems in a blindfolded state (Variété III, IV et V, 847; Variété Šûsei III, 34).


4. A reflection on the artistic act in reference to a more complex and realistic relation between environment-society-world and the self and others will be developed more effectually by relying on Nishida Kitarô’s logic of “acting intuition.” Nishida set on the axis of acting intuition his original dialectic structure, which negates a modern predominance of “subjectivity” and “subject.” He claimed the idea of “from the made to the making” (作られるものから作りものへ tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono e). However, he considered intuition to be diverse acts of the human being in a broader sense (including daily activities and practical actions in culture and society). Nishida sought to explain the “historical world” from this viewpoint. I wish to examine the problem of artistic creation and the existentiality of the human being through a comparative study of these two Japanese philosophers’ extremely systematized logic. This approach will allow me to bring deeper reflection to my concerns in another paper.

5. What initially drew my attention to this problem was François Jullien’s book, Dé-coïncidence: D’où viennent l’art et l’existence (Paris: Grasset, 2017). Jullien himself translated his neologism “dé-coïncidence” into Chinese as qù xiàng hé (去相合). It struck me that Jullien’s book might provide us with a useful and interesting starting point from which to consider the conflicting character of a work of art as the outcome of both intentional and unintentional factors and as the product of necessity and contingency. A comparison of Jullien’s dé-coïncidence with Nishida’s acting intuition and Kuki’s theory of contingency will be undertaken in a future paper.

6. Even if the term “existentiality” necessarily implicates “human” for Western philosophers, Kuki proposes the expression “human existentiality” (ningenteki jitsuzensei). This is probably because he sees the possibility of non-human existences in his philosophy on the basis of the system of contingency and stresses the “human” (ningenteki) in artistic creation. In this paper, then, we add the word “human” to “existentiality” to respect his Japanese “human” (ni). In this case, I wish to examine the problem of artistic creation and the existentiality of the human being through a comparative study of these two Japanese philosophers’ extremely systematized logic. This approach will allow me to bring deeper reflection to my concerns in another paper.

7. KSZ II, 224.

8. KSZ II, 15.

9. KSZ II, 224.

10. Lecture: An Introduction to Literature, KSZ XI (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), 23. This is a transcript of the lecture that Kuki gave in 1933 at Kyoto Imperial University (see KSZ XI, 293). This lecture can be considered as supporting the idea of contingency and art that he formulated, articulated, and defended in his 1935 book, The Problem of Contingency, as it was given during the preparatory period of the book.

11. KSZ II, 9.

12. KSZ II, 9.


14. KSZ II, 252.

15. KSZ II, 16, 251–52.

16. KSZ II, 16, 251–52.

17. KSZ II, 149.

18. KSZ II, 149.


20. KSZ II, 254.

21. KSZ II, 255.

22. KSZ II, 221.

23. KSZ II, 221.

24. KSZ II, 221.

25. He was a philosopher endowed with a high sense of beauty and developed a theory of rhyme regarding Japanese forms of poetry (haiku, tanka) in his later years, even though he did not write a book on his own aesthetics and philosophy of art because of his early death. We should not forget Becker’s aesthetics and philosophy of art, which seem to support his sense of artistic creativity based on the philosophy of contingency.


29. Becker, Fragility, 10–11.

30. Lecture, KSZ XI, 15.

31. Lecture, KSZ XI, 13. This schema is a slightly arranged one extracted from the original, which Kuki made.

32. Lecture, KSZ XI, 23.

33. KSZ II, 207, 221.

34. Lecture, KSZ XI, 137–38.


36. KSZ XI, 137–38.

37. KSZ XI, 140.

38. KSZ II, 222.

39. In An inquiry into the Good, Nishida Kitarô insists that even if an astronomer does not notice it, the truth of the reality of stars can be seen in Heine’s poetic phrasing. See NKZ I (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978), 60.

40. KSZ II, 222–23.

41. KSZ II, 223.

42. KSZ II, 223. This passage is extracted from Watsuji Tetsurô, Fûdo: A Réflexion on the Human Studies 『風土 - 人間学の考察』 (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1993), 231–32.

43. KSZ II, 256–59.

44. KSZ II, 256–59.

45. KSZ XI, 136.


The Ontology and Aesthetic of Iki: An Unbearable Lightness

Carol S. Gould
FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
CGOULD@FAU.EDU

ABSTRACT
Kuki Shûzô, in his Iki no kôzô, presents the canonical analysis of iki, a feature he considers unique to Japanese culture. Iki is an aesthetic category that can be predicated of both the subjectivity of a person and, derivatively, what he terms its “objectifications,” that is, aspects of the empirical world—a person’s attire, a garden, an interior design, or a hair style. In this essay, I examine the ontology
of *iki* in order to shed new light on it as a Japanese aesthetic category and, more so, on why it is primarily an aesthetic way of being. Here is the central problem: If *iki* is in its primary sense an intensional structure, a subjective state, then in what sense is it an aesthetic category and not simply a philosophical and psychological attitude, a *Weltanschauung*? The phenomenology of *iki* does not entail what we usually consider an aesthetic appreciation of the world, although it does not preclude it. As I argue in this essay, its aesthetic character lies in the very structure of the subjective state itself, in the person. It is an aesthetic property of a person.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kuki defines *iki* primarily as a threefold intensional state, one that ontologically emerges from an intensional structure of consciousness. It is formed by the collective Japanese experience rooted in culture and history. *Iki* emanates from a person's subjectivity and applies to inanimate things only in a sense derived from its application to the subjectivity of persons. Space does not permit me here either to do justice to the brilliant complexity of his analysis or to give a thorough ontological account of *iki*. Rather, my aim is more modest, to demonstrate how the aesthetic nature of *iki* lies in subjectivity and in an aesthetic appreciation of structure itself. At the close of this essay, I suggest some implications of Kuki's study for cross-cultural aesthetic influence.

THE ONTOLOGY AND AESTHETIC OF *IKI*

*Iki* falls into the category of what I term an "aesthetic property of persons," a feature ontologically more complex than other objects of aesthetic judgments, such as artworks and nature. Kuki Shūzō wrote his *Iki no kōzō* during his stay in France in 1926, and it remains the authoritative study today. *Iki*, Kuki contends, is a distinctively Japanese aesthetic category, distinctively Japanese yet not utterly opaque to Westerners or other non-Japanese. Given that *iki* is, on Kuki's account, primarily an intensional, subjective structure, it is heuristically valuable for understanding aesthetic properties of persons, as well as the elusive category of *iki* itself. Unlike many other aesthetic properties of persons, *iki* belongs to one distinctive culture. Consider, for example, the concept of beauty. Criteria for applying it cut across cultures, although the meaning of "beauty" does not. *Iki*, in contrast, has meaning in one culture alone. One, therefore, cannot appeal to culturally variable criteria in using it.

*Iki* is ontologically dependent on a complex phenomenological state, not simply a set of empirically perceived features; it is a way of being, of interacting with and responding to one's lived experience. Arising from the elegant floating world of Edo Japan, *iki* inherited a connotation of refined eroticism. *Iki* is not, however, what we would see as a detached, insouciant self-presentation, as some might think. In its authentic form, *iki* is deeper.

*Iki*, at its foundation, is the resignation to perpetual desire, desire ineluctably unfulfilled. Kuki notes that *iki* is frequently translated as the French, or French-derived, "chic," which itself may be derived from "chicane" or "intricate trickery." Although Kuki himself does not draw the connection, "chic" would thus have an origin in French similar to that of "glamour" in English, with both developing from earlier terms for "occult knowledge" or "power with magic spells." But *iki* cannot be the same as glamour or chic because, according to Kuki, *iki* is a uniquely Japanese mode of experience, whereas the latter notions have meaning across cultures. Moreover, *iki* is far more complex than chic. Kuki affirms that *iki* itself resists translation: "In summary, words that carry meaning similar to that of *iki* can be found in European languages, but none has the same semantic value of *iki*." In fact, the term in Japanese has a semantic intricacy and breadth that non-Japanese word can capture. As Kuki conceptualizes it, the meaning of *iki* is culture-bound. While seemingly every language has such terms, *iki* is interesting in that even the terms for its constituents lack non-Japanese correlates. Hiroshi Nara uses "coquetry" or "coquettishness" for *bitai*, one of the phenomenological constituents, perhaps the hardest of the three to pin down.

*Iki* is an inelastic category, both in its subjective and exterior manifestations. More precisely, it supervenes on the intensional structure. Although Kuki has criteria for bodily and sartorial expressions ("objectifications") of *iki*, these are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for *iki* so much as they are clear signs. As Kuki puts it,

...it is a grave error to base one's understanding of the structure of *iki* on its objective expressions. For *iki* does not necessarily exhibit all the nuances available to that expression. Objectification itself is subject to a number of constraints. That is why *iki* that has been objectified rarely embodies, both in depth and breadth, the entirety of *iki* as a phenomenon of consciousness. Objective expression is no more than symbolic of *iki*.7

Lived experience is a "phenomenon of consciousness." For Kuki, "objectifications" of *iki* do not constitute its essence. Instead, for him, such qualities are constituted by and emerge from lived experience, experience embedded in a broader cultural ecosystem and collective history. For Kuki, these include Japanese Buddhism and the historically grounded ethos of bushidō courage and loyalty. Although Kuki explicates *iki* in terms of a relation between self and a specific other and conceives of it in the context of a heterosexual relationship, it can apply equally to any dyadic erotic relationship. As we see later, *iki* extends beyond the amorous, presenting itself as a sort of casual nonchalance as one moves through every aspect of life and other types of relationships.

*Iki*'s first-person phenomenological state has three key constituents: a coquettish attitude (*bitai*), bushidō bravery, and an acute Buddhist awareness of the fleeting quality of existence. Kuki characterizes *iki* as it expresses itself in the theater of flirtation. The coquetry amounts to the felt sexual chemistry and desire to arouse and sustain it in the other. At first glance, it seems odd to conjoin coquetry with bushidō courage and monk-like, Buddhist resignation. Kuki, however, shows insight in pointing out that erotic interaction requires a certain bushidō quality. In his Pontigny lecture, "The Notion of Time and Repetition in Oriental Notions of Time," Kuki describes bushidō as
“immanent, voluntarist liberation” and a determination “to truly live.”

The coquette’s bushidō bravery is her attitude of resignation (akirame) that she maintains her power by remaining in a state of possibility. Thus, her akirame requires not only resignation to fate but also bushidō bravery to remain aloof and “detached” from the blandishments of the lover and her own desire. She recognizes the illusory nature of permanence, and so is always open to change, having “a frame of mind that . . . [remains] stylish.”[10] Iki must transcend the bonds of love to maintain its free and flirtatious spirit[11] and thus “maintain possibility as possibility to the bitter end.”[12] Therefore, there can be no consumption and no destruction of the erotic tension unless the pair drift apart or another magnetic possibility intervenes.

Kuki claims that if they consummate desire, desire would vanish. Desire includes a sense of possibility and consummation destroys that sense of possibility: The coquette aims to conquer, so it is vital that she not surrender. To do so would make her the victim, for her mystery would evaporate. Hence, iki requires an acceptance (akirame) that she will inevitably lose her charms if she succumbs. Thus, she must maintain distance, however minimal. Kuki, writing from a limited heterosexual male perspective, presumes that, after sexual union, the male will devalue the woman. Given the patriarchy that dominated both Japan and Europe, Kuki does not consider that, after a liaison, the woman might lose interest in the male. One who freely chooses iki implicitly posits freedom, lightness, as a foundational value. In his remark on “protecting possibility,” Kuki seems to be adopting what would become Sartre’s characterization of existence as contingency, except without Sartrean disgust or nausea.[14] One who accepts contingency or possibility may easily shed the heaviness of everyday life and focus.

Iki requires, then, a Buddhist sense of akirame: Understanding that erotic alliances weaken once consummated, the coquette must internally accept the necessity of detachment.[15] She must diminish the significance of the actual erotic connection to maintain a weightlessness, thus her sad insouciance. Her “lightness of being,” the source of her desirability, requires that she absorb the ephemerality of everything and the futility of desire. To acknowledge flux would make one value the sensuous and the sensual. Thus, the foundation of iki is the threefold phenomenological mode of consciousness that manifests itself in one’s aesthetic choices, as well as in her comportment.

II. THE ONTOLOGY OF IKI

Iki is, as noted, ontologically what I term “an aesthetic property of persons.”[16] To understand what such a property is, we must make two crucial distinctions: (1) between character and personality, which are sources of ethical and aesthetic properties of persons, respectively, and (2) between aesthetic virtues and vices, on the one hand, and aesthetic properties of persons, on the other hand. Turning first to character and personality, when we ascribe an evaluative property to a person, we must be clear on whether it applies to character or personality. Many philosophers maintain that aesthetic properties of persons emerge from their personalities.[17] The constellation of one’s personality traits constitutes a person’s uniqueness.[18] Each individual with iki would emit it distinctively. Interestingly, many ethical works, such as Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, can help us improve our characters, for a good character (however defined) applies broadly across human life. No analogous work could authentically guide us to develop a good personality. Although some works purport to do so, the most they can achieve is to help their readers behave more adaptively. Kuki’s text is not a guide to acquiring iki, despite his exhortation to the Japanese people to develop it, for one develops iki from one’s exclusive history and situation; it is not deliberately cultivated.

The singularity of a person lies in two things: (1) one’s subjective, phenomenological take on life and (2) the constellation of features formed by one’s unique emotional and psychodynamic history. Before saying more about aesthetic properties of persons, it will be helpful first to distinguish aesthetic properties of persons from what some contemporary philosophers refer to as “aesthetic virtues (or vices),” because the latter sound as if they would be aesthetic properties of the person qua person, but they differ significantly.

Virtue aesthetics examines the role of virtue in aesthetic discourse and offers a taxonomy of specific aesthetic virtues and vices.[19] Examples of aesthetic virtues include discernment, creativity, and artistic courage. To clarify, artistic courage[20] would include taking artistic risks by, say, creating artistically, socially, or politically subversive art. Examples abound: (1) Shioita Chiharu, Salman Rushdie, and Robert Mapplethorpe; (2) Harold Bloom’s “strong poet,”[21] that is, an author like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce who stands up to their literary predecessors in pushing the boundaries of a genre; and (3) the defiant Yukio Mishima[22] and, to use Alison Hill’s example, the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich in his compositions that so enraged the Soviets. Artistic critical acuity and musical insight are other aesthetic virtues. Insensitivity to fine musicianship or opposition to new music would be aesthetic vices. Aesthetic virtues are thick properties that carry inseparable evaluative and descriptive weight.

Three aspects of the person are sources of evaluative claims: character, personality, and sensibility. Aesthetic virtues and vices speak to one’s sensibility and/or character. An astute critic might be sensitive to artistic subtleties but arrogant towards people who are ignorant of art. Her critical sensitivity would be an aesthetic virtue, her arrogance, a moral vice. The first arises from her cultivated sensibility, the second, her character. A brilliant orchestra conductor could be condescending towards some of the players. Stories abound about well-known musicians who barely conceal their contempt for their collaborators, fans, or audiences. This is a vice of character expressed in an artistic, aesthetic context. Aesthetic virtues, however, are not “aesthetic properties of persons” qua persons. They are properties of a person qua member of the artworld or the person qua ethical agent.

In her insightful article,[23] Alison Hills explores the relation between moral and aesthetic virtue in another way.
Aesthetic virtues and vices, as Hills portrays them, are predominantly features of a person's aesthetic abilities and dispositions to create and/or appreciate artworks and other things of aesthetic interest. Being virtues, they are evaluatively positive. On her account, then, such aesthetic virtues belong only to persons who are members of the artworld—creators, critics, and appreciators, while many aesthetic vices belong to those oblivious to the artworld. In his canonical article, "The Artworld," Arthur Danto invents a character he names "Testadura," a person who does not get the point of art, who cannot enter the artworld. Clearly, Testadura embodies several aesthetic vices. Testadura's aesthetic obtuseness is consistent with Testadura's having many positive aesthetic properties as a human being: for instance, Testadura could be charismatic as a teacher, politician, or athlete. Testadura's charisma definitely would be an aesthetic property of him as a person.

Charisma embodies a passion and a magnetism that allows a person to motivate others, be it for political ideals, a subject of study, an artistic pursuit, and so forth. When we hear musical virtuosi, we appreciate their performances. But some will make us passionate about their instrument or a particular composer for whom they evince special excitement. Not all virtuosi are charismatic, however brilliant be their sound or interesting their phrasing (aesthetic virtues). A charismatic musician can change someone's life. Notice that charisma applies only within a given domain, not the more general sphere of life. A charismatic actor may be a boring person.

For now, let us note that charisma cannot be emulated by performing certain actions or uttering calculated words. There are no rules for achieving it, as there are for a painter who sets out to create a certain sort of artwork or a musician who wants to achieve a certain timbre. The observation conditions for an aesthetic property of a person may be different from, or more complex than, the observation conditions for an aesthetic property of a symphony or painting, but that does not entail that we cannot observe these properties, as we do other expressions of their thoughts, intentions, and attitudes. So, iki is an aesthetic property of persons that suffuses all aspects of their being. When Kuki speaks of the lightness that iki brings, he implies that it frees us to take an aesthetic journey through life rather than remaining tediously earthbound. The lightness of iki brings the freedom to remain aloof or "detached" from many things in which others invest so much of their egos.

Charisma, glamour, iki, and their companions all radiate from a person's subjective mode of being. When Kuki tells us that it is distinctively Japanese, he is implicitly warning that we cannot become iki through imitating someone who genuinely has it. Here we must remember that Kuki wrote this work in Paris in the 1920s, when Japonisme was still all the rage in France. Although he was quite impressed and influenced by French thought (especially that of Bergson's), he may have been ambivalent about French elegance and somewhat offended by those who incorporated (appropriated) Japanese style into the aesthetics of their everyday life.

III. **IKI AS EXAMPLE OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS**

As suggested above, one might well ask Kuki how iki, at its core, can be essentially aesthetic and fundamentally an intensional, subjective feature of its possessor. As we just saw, iki is an aesthetic property of persons that informs one's aesthetic mode of life. But it is its structure in the erotic realm that exemplifies Japanese aesthetics. "Japanese aesthetics" is ambiguous. Here my criteria are Donald Keene's well-known aesthetic categories of suggestiveness, irregularity, and perishability.

(1) iki exemplifies suggestiveness. The term "suggestive" is ambiguous, having two meanings, meanings that one could easily conflate in examining iki. First of all, it can mean "sexually provocative." Secondly, it can mean "subtle." Iki embodies suggestiveness in the second sense. Coquetry, one of the three intensional components, has a subtlety in that it "come[s] as near as possible, and at the same time making certain that nearness stops short of actual touch." This is suggestive of an erotic connection. As for its objectifications, consider the nonchalant hairdo, redolent of Robert Herrick's "sweet disorder in the dress":

Hair in a bun with random loose tendrils might suggest an undoing of the bun or the bun hastily redone. A woman may signal her iki by wearing a suggestive, translucent fabric over a chemise or an Issey Miyake column dress made of his characteristic flowing, silky pleats, evoking movement without being body-conscious or tightly fitted. Iki's manifestations or expressions include, too, the way one speaks, gestures, and carries herself. The coquetry of her bearing is never overtly seductive as he alleges it is in the West: It precludes " unabashed hip-wagging coquetry, Western style." Iki must be subtle, implying movement, in Kuki's scenario, in the direction of the opposite sex. The midriff cutouts currently in vogue would be the antithesis of iki.

(2) Irregularity applies to two intensional features of iki. First of all, the Buddhist awareness of impermanence leads to detachment, for how could one form an attachment to the evanescent? Secondly, iki as a mode of consciousness over time has an emotional irregularity and an erotic tension with weight constantly shifting between the coquette as object of desire and the lover. The coquette approaches, only to evade, the lover's touch. Through this nonlinear movement, she embraces the freedom to which she is resigned. On this erotic stage, the asymmetry lies in the structure of the relationship itself. One objectification of iki, which embodies irregularity and suggestiveness, would be décolletage, which he describes as "[symbolizing] iki because it breaks the equilibrium of a garment slightly and suggests a possible pathway to the woman's flesh." He draws an invidious contrast with the Western custom of a woman exposing her back, shoulders, or even part of her breasts. Irregularity translates into asymmetry in Japanese art and everyday life.

(3) Both the intensional structure and the objective expressions of iki exemplify simplicity, Keene's third category. Kuki describes the phenomenology of iki: "iki ignores a careless positing of reality. It boldly brackets everyday life, and engages in autonomous play in a manner disinterestedness and purposeless, as it breathes a neutral
air transcending all of life around.” Iki is an aesthetic mode of experience (“autonomous play,” “disinterestedness”) in an alliance that perpetually approaches but never reaches erotic consumption. As it involves “bracketing everyday life,” the coquette and her suitor are actors following an erotic script. Kuki contrasts it to the “boorish” experience of being in love, which is to abandon the possible for the actual. That is, there are two possible unpleasant outcomes of consummation that amount to “abandoning the possible for the real”: either one loses desire or one falls in love. Either of these possibilities destroys the aesthetic of iki. He opposes “the realistic inevitability of love and the transcendent possibility of iki.” Consummated, committed love unfolds amidst everyday demands. Whereas the intricacies of the iki dynamic are nuanced, the “script” has a simplicity to it. Through the perpetual approach and retreat, the duo sustains energy and imagination. Both parties understand the potential results of consummation: If they do not commit to love, each drifts away, the man from boredom, the abandoned coquette from resignation. If they do commit to love, they fall into the heavy earthbound state of quotidian life, leaving behind the dynamic lightness of iki.

The structure of an iki relationship has a phenomenological simplicity that allows one to remain aloof from complex emotional entanglements. Kuki speaks of the iki outlook as having a simplicity. Jimi, for instance, embodies the phenomenological element of resignation. He describes jimi as such: “...always simple and understated, [it] exhibits a certain type of sabi ‘quiet elegance’. ...jimi attaches itself to things that are notable for being refined, things whose design speaks for the modesty of the elegant but simple outlook that jimi represents.”

Speech, posture, and gesture are natural manifestations of iki that exhibit simplicity. For example, the voice has a “sabi pitch,” “never shrill.” Iki requires a certain cadence and inflection. The posture is somewhat relaxed, neither complicated nor provocative. He describes the slender iki body type, delicate, angular facial structure, and indirect gaze tending towards the sideway glance. As mentioned, iki fashion choices and comportment fall under suggestiveness. Similarly, such choices come naturally from the simplicity of taste flowing from one with iki.

(4) The connection between perishability and iki is evident, as one of the three intensional components is awareness of the ephemeral nature of everything. The tripartite intensional structure of iki not only includes the awareness of the perishable but also allows for the unfolding of shifting alliances as one floats through mature life.

A young person cannot have iki because the detachment of iki requires both life experience and a calloused spirit formed by the emotional wounds of rejection. Iki is the opposite of kawaii, the Japanese aesthetic of cuteness that is so childlike. Although Kuki’s model of iki is the mature geisha, his analysis makes evident that iki can belong to others, including males who might be more aptly described as “seductive” or “rakish” rather than coquettish. (For Kuki, sexual identity is binary.) He says, “The sincerest heart, callously betrayed over time, is tempered by that repeated pain and ceases to pay attention to deceitful targets. A heart that has lost its innocent trust in the opposite sex can hold to its resolve to love no more.”

IV. CONCLUSION: KUKI ON CULTURAL CROSS-FERTILIZATION

As noted above, Kuki wrote this during his stay in Paris when France was still in the throes of Japonisme. He evinces disdain at how he thought the French had distorted his culture’s aesthetic. Proudly contrasting the Japanese with the European aesthetic, he implicitly disapproves of the aesthetic dialectic that we now take for granted in such areas as design, art, architecture, and music—conversations that had started before Kuki arrived in Europe. What we recognize as artistic cross-fertilization may have struck him as potentially insidious or, at best, inauthentic and uninspired. The French, regardless of their sophistication, could never achieve iki, for they could not unconsciously express the sensibility formed by a Japanese “ethnic being.” He mentions specifically that the contemporaneous European artists such as Degas, Massenet, and Debussy do not exhibit nuances that qualify as iki. How could they be artistically iki if they could not possibly internalize iki in life? Kuki ignores the marvels borne of aesthetic syncretism.

A paradox surrounds Kuki’s pride in iki as uniquely Japanese: Kuki recommends that Japanese people appreciate and cultivate iki, which arises from lived experience embedded in Japanese culture. However, on examining the ontology of iki, we find that one cannot deliberately cultivate it and that it comes not only from culture but also from one’s individual, personal experience formed by the culture. If a Japanese person is not authentically iki, how can they become iki without the requisite life experience? Kuki himself would manifest another sort of paradox: Although he himself was taken by French taste and exquisite “fragrances of Paris,” and ironically would return to Japan to lecture on Bergson and European philosophy, he did not see how the Japanese sensibility had already helped to form much of the France he so greatly admired philosophically and artistically. Nor did he ask whether he was viewing the Western aesthetic through a lens tinted by his own culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Nicholas Pappas and David Levine for their comments and questions on this work. I am deeply indebted to A. Minh Nguyen for the advice he gave me on this and an earlier essay from which this one grew. This essay represents an evolution of my earlier ideas, some of which I now question. See my “iki and Glamour as Aesthetic Properties of Persons,” in New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, ed. A. Minh Nguyen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 383–96.

NOTES

2. 1603–1868 CE.
6. I am drawing here on the traditional notion of aesthetic supervenience as a type of ontological emergence.
IV. JAPANESE ARTWORKS AND ARTFORMS: PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATIONS

The Atomic Bombings in Anime: How Aesthetics Makes Actual Historic Terror Tolerable to Children (A Prolegomenon to Existential Aesthetics)

Mara Miller
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR
MARAMILLER3@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT

Two Japanese anime films, Barefoot Gen and Grave of the Fireflies, depict up-close some of the worst atrocities of World War II. The task is difficult: To present emotionally agonizing, physically terrifying, and disgusting effects of the bombs, while avoiding both emotional distancing and those “pleasures of the cinema” acknowledged as morally unacceptable for treatments of the Holocaust: the provision of pleasure in other people’s suffering, the simple relief that it was them it happened to and not us, the easy answers of transcendence for the viewer (“This was awful, but it worked out for the best in the end”), and the assurance that we in the audience would never have behaved like those morally repulsive perpetrators. In order to make films for children (and adults) that keep viewers watching, the filmmakers relied heavily on traditional Japanese aesthetics. Using aesthetics facilitates engagement with the characters and situation and understanding of the horrors of the bombings. Interestingly, it also strengthens ethical and moral growth.

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

Two Japanese anime films from the 1980s, Barefoot Gen and Grave of the Fireflies, are examples of the kind of films that are often considered controversial because of their subject matter. These films are often accused of exploiting children and violating their moral and emotional sensibilities.

Both films are based on true events and are intended to educate children about the horrors of World War II. The films depict the atrocities of the American atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the psychological and emotional effects of these events on the survivors.

The challenge for filmmakers is to present these horrific events in a way that is both true to the historical facts and yet acceptable to children. Films that are too graphic or disturbing can cause emotional distress in young viewers, while films that are too sanitized or distant from the actual events can fail to convey the full impact of the bombings.

In order to make these films acceptable to children, the filmmakers had to find a way to present the horrors of the bombings in a way that was both emotionally engaging and morally responsible. This is a difficult task, as it requires balancing the need to present the truth with the need to protect the emotional well-being of young viewers.

Interestingly, the use of traditional Japanese aesthetics facilitated engagement with the characters and situation and understanding of the horrors of the bombings. Using aesthetics makes it possible to create films that are both morally responsible and emotionally engaging.

The material is extremely difficult. Setting aside the questions of whether and to what extent the filmmakers were concerned with the emotional well-being of young viewers, the success of these very successful films depended on avoiding both disgusting or horrifying these scenes and the carpet bombing of dozens of major cities, including Nagoya (Fireflies), these films aim to educate children so that these events and their effects will be neither forgotten nor wrapped up tidily so we can ignore them later.

The films could well be simply too
scary to watch. But this makes the question of how these two films achieve their success the more intriguing.

How is it possible to make films for children that keep the viewers watching—and identifying with the characters—while showing them effects of the bombs that are emotionally agonizing and even disgusting? How can one do this while preventing emotional distancing and those "pleasures of the cinema" that are acknowledged as morally unacceptable for treatments of the Holocaust: the provision of pleasure in other people's suffering, the simple relief that it was them it happened to and not us, the easy answers of transcendence for the viewer ("This was awful, but it worked out for the best in the end"), and the assurance that we in the audience would never have behaved like those morally repulsive perpetrators?

Examination shows that aesthetics—much of it traditional Japanese aesthetics—is crucial. 2 I have argued, 3 thanks to Halle O’Neal, 4 that one of the roles of beauty in Japanese art, particularly post-War art, is to keep us engaged. Engagement is crucial to prevent distancing, although the aesthetic pleasures here are not only beauty but also other traditional Japanese aesthetic values: exuberant energy, spontaneity, and humor exhibited by the children. Beauty and these other aesthetic forces play other roles as well: aesthetic pleasures ensure identification with the characters, even as they experience the most painful events imaginable, and lift viewers’ spirits as they do the characters’, and induce us—entice us?—to consider ethical behaviors and attitudes, to see their value in the characters’ lives, and strengthen our own resolve to engage them: loyalty, kindness, generosity, perseverance, as well as attitudes we may not consider ethical but that are crucial in extreme circumstances, such as hope, optimism, intimacy, open-mindedness, empathy, and sympathy. 5

This paper has two purposes: first, to explicate the range of aesthetic and art-historical values used in the two films (which are remarkably similar in these respects) in the context of their cinematic, narrative, and symbolic strategies; and second, to show the effects, or accomplishments, of these aesthetics. Such usages of aesthetics demonstrate two existential dimensions of aesthetics (at least under such circumstances where the rejection of pleasure, or of life itself, could prevail), in the sense of making life and/or the understanding of it possible and in the sense of making living itself desirable. Such usages thus suggest that we may need new ways of understanding aesthetics—as in some cases existentially valuable, even critical. This discussion, however, must be postponed because of space constraints.

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM

Anime originated in the still pictures of manga, a centuries-old illustrated book tradition for adults covering serious subjects (Buddhist sutras, literary classics, national histories), and retains manga’s artistic and literary conventions. Because of manga’s accommodation of serious subject matter and its close links with styles from elite arts, Japanese anime has been able to take on such difficult subjects—the erotic and political and social criticism—utilizing approaches from older arts. Gen and Fireflies are shockingly realistic, showing almost unbearable images of suffering graphically and at length. The protagonists, young boys, six-year-old Gen and Fireflies’s roughly twelve-year-old Seita, witness their cities and homes getting destroyed and their family members getting injured and killed as a result of the bombings and their after-effects; Gen watches his father and two siblings burning to death in their home. After their parents die, each boy becomes a primary caregiver for his younger sibling: an adopted younger brother replacing his late biological brother in Gen, and, in Fireflies, a biological sister Setsuko, little more than a toddler, who starves to death under his care. The films depict, evoke, and accommodate a wide range of emotions: horror, terror, sadness, hopelessness—but also enjoyment, pleasure, joy, exuberance—much of which is conveyed to and aroused in the audience through the aesthetics. Both also contain a preponderance of ethical values: altruism and generosity, hard work, determination, forgiveness, amae (the seeking of nurturance), family intimacy, caring, and love.

COMPARISON OF THE FILMS BAREFOOT GEN AND GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES

It will help to consider the overall similarities between the two films and their few but significant differences. Both are Japanese feature-length anime films made for children that are readily available in English. Both are based on memoirs written by grown men recounting their childhood experiences watching their cities and homes being destroyed by American bombings, and members of their families getting injured and killed as a direct result of the bombings and their aftereffects—and trying, futilely, to save them.

Both focus on the horrors of war: early on, the terror of the air raids and stories of the deaths of neighborhood children, and, later, the devastation of the atomic and carpet bombings. The films pull no punches. Excruciating scenes are shown forcefully. Neither relies on physical distancing or turning away to buffer the effects on the audience; there are few long shots, and many close shots. Although they come nowhere close to the long “takes” Japanese film aficionados are accustomed to, they are longer than one might expect given the subject matter and the intended audience. And while some longer scenes of the fires, wounds, injuries, walking dead, and so on, are highly stylized, they are not necessarily less powerful for that.

Horror stories for children—fairy tales, for instance—commonly circumvent the terror by one of two techniques. Either the spoken/written word provides a degree of relative distancing, or the narrative or narrator reassures the child that it is “only a story,” often including specific rhetorical formulas that help the child distinguish between the made-up story and personal or social “history.” These movies, in contrast, are intended to be understood as historical from the beginning, never shirking that responsibility.

There are, however, important differences between the two films, including different locales: Hiroshima versus Nagoya,
and their consequent different kinds of bombings (atomic versus carpet bombing). These have different implications, historically, biologically, and ethically.

There's a bigger age difference between Seita and his little sister in Fireflies than between Gen and his two little brothers (one biological and soon deceased, the other newly adopted); and Seita himself is older than Gen. Although ultimately plot differences (and aesthetics) account for more of the difference in tone (Fireflies is far darker, even hopeless), Seita’s greater age allows him the survivor guilt and the incapacitating illusion that he might somehow have saved Setsuko. Gen, who is younger, comprehends less, and also has the advantage of being able to rescue the orphaned Ryuta, who functions for him as a surrogate for the brother he lost. Gen has another advantage: having had the explicit command from his father (as Gen watches him engulfed in their flaming house) that he and his mother leave them to die and save themselves and the unborn baby. Additionally, he has the moral support of his mother, even in the immediate aftermath.

Beyond that, Gen and both his little brothers end up being able to provide food for their family through their own efforts. Indeed, during the war (but before the bombing), Gen’s entire family also receives assistance from neighbors and others not morally bound to help them, but who do so out of the goodness of their hearts. Seita and Setsuko, by contrast, cannot rely on help even from those who are morally bound to help them: their aunt takes advantage by stealing their food; the doctor provides no treatment, placing responsibility for feeding Setsuko on Seita.

Gen has additional support from the ghost of his father, who appears to him as a ghost at the end, restored to life and laughing, and from the highly symbolic reappearance of wheat growing at the end of the film. The atomic bombing aroused widespread fears that nothing would grow there again; the growth of the wheat thus demonstrates that they and the world will recover. Fireflies, by contrast, begins and ends with a sense of ultimate hopelessness—in fact, Fireflies opens with the observation: “On September 21, 1945. That was the night I died”—a reference to Seita’s emotional and spiritual death after his little sister finally dies of starvation. (This crucial scene also provides one of the few flashbacks in the two films.) The symbolism in Fireflies, unlike Gen’s wheat, works against Seita and his sister: the magic box of hard candies finally runs out, the captured fireflies that light their hope die.

Still, the help Gen gets is little enough, and neither pair of children is assisted by relatives, the social system, or the health system from which they request help. This leads to important similarities in tone, moral force, and aesthetics. The tone is realism. (This realism is reinforced by artistic accuracy, in, for example, the depiction of the bomber.) In spite of the animation, the beautiful colors, and other dimensions explored below, a terrible sadness (not fear) predominates. Finally, both films convey powerful messages about the importance of love, of caring, of the intimacy of siblings, especially under difficult conditions, and of helping one another.

THE QUESTIONS AND STRATEGIES
We return to our basic question: What, then, makes it possible to show such things to children—without so traumatizing them that they and their parents emerge unable to recommend the film to others, and creating emotional, psychological devastation?

The answer is the aesthetics—but also some aspects of the world depicted (notably some helpful people), the protagonists’ agency and (limited) success, and the films’ aesthetic, narrative, and cinematic ways of depicting this world.

CINEMATIC AND NARRATIVE STRATEGIES
Most far-reaching among their cinematic and narrative strategies is the decision to make children the protagonists and the most important supporting characters. There are few intrusions of adult knowledge. Those there are, such as the announcements of the end of the war and the bombings, are presented at a child’s level of reception and comprehension. Although many of the dilemmas are the kind that only adults should have to face, others belong distinctly to kids and often contribute humor (such as Gen’s little brother Shinji’s desperate question, “Can we eat caterpillars?”). Analysis is what a child can absorb. The children’s language, with many “I” and “me” statements, is accurate Japanese children’s language, using children’s terms for body parts, family members, etc. Sentence structure and vocabulary belong to the intimate language of the Japanese family. (The Japanese language accords importance to levels of intimacy and politeness.) There is warmth within each family—love expressed between parents and children (more physically and in intonation and word choice than explicit verbalizations such as “I love you”). There is easy intimacy between the siblings, and sharing within the family. The brothers’ rivalry, at least as strong as their affection, is readily expressed and resolved. In Gen, although not Fireflies, neighbors and even employers before the bombing provide some assistance, sometimes unasked. In spite of the serious travails, this provides a bedrock of positive emotion before the bombings—that, in aesthetic terms, provides contrast with what follows, and psychologically and emotionally helps the children and audience survive the ensuing horrors—although neither film resorts to minimizing or trivializing them, or taking easy “outs” of black humor, over-intellectualization, or cutting to the next scene.

The children’s emotions are strong and varied: fun, exuberance, easy anger and release; boredom with father’s moralizing; relief; love. There are many scenes of cuddling and getting picked up, ridiculing authority figures, sibling rivalry and skirmishes. The humor is also typical of kids: much of it physical or at adults’ expense. There is no humor during/after bombing—and it is never used to undercut or provide escape from the horror.

This decision to stay with the children’s points of view (POVs) commits the filmmakers to fast pacing, with many climaxes and resolutions. This means the transitions between the emotions are swift—so viewers don’t get bogged down in one forever. The films stay on the children’s levels:
simple, emotional. They avoid the distancing that excessive cogitation affords adults. They provide explanations that children understand—with no recourse to rationalizations and justifications of adult views of war, although the bare facts are outlined in voiceovers. What the children don’t understand (how can their aunt be so cruel?) is shown without the film’s pretending to offer explanation.

Since the audiences include children, the narrative structures are simple, with only a few flashbacks (to cherry-blossom viewing with the family) or memory sequences. There are none of the “iconic memories” or “intrusions” characteristic of trauma. Other than Seita’s opening sentences, there are no flashforwards.

Although there are a few impossible POV shots—aerial views of the plane and the falling bomb from the side and from above—the children’s POVs are mostly literal, so adult viewers also identify with the children.

The plots are such that while the protagonists are incapable of achieving many of their intensely desired goals, they do achieve some of them, encouraging viewers toward hope.

Finally, the Japanese value amae is prominent in both films. Amae has been translated as “dependence.” Given the negative connotations of “dependence” in the US, however, it might better be recognized as the desirable, and typically legitimate, soliciting of affection, care, love, nurturance. As such, it is required among the young of all animal species, but in Japan it has a much broader social acceptance, including, for example, subordinates’ eliciting mentoring behavior from bosses or advisors. Gen, his little brothers, and Setsuko all demonstrate amae, making us, like Gen and Seita, find them loveable and want to take care of them.

**SYMBOLIC STRATEGIES**

Although the films handle them differently, each makes strategic use of symbols, particularly for the purpose of generating hope and joy: Gen’s wheat, Fireflies’s box of candy and fireflies, and, in both, gardens of various kinds. Hope, of course, is characteristic of the garden as a human activity and as a symbol, regardless of country of origin—and in spite of the longstanding association of Eden with despair and the introduction of suffering into our world.7 Gen’s gardens are a site of Gen’s and Shinji’s personal efficacy: they find food for their mother in a neighbor’s pond; a later garden, that of the aged invalid they care for, for which they earn money to buy food for the infant, carries a similar message. Fireflies’s vegetable gardens, by contrast, are not symbolic in this way: Seita steals tomatoes from a farmer’s truck garden, but is chased and cruelly forced to give them back.

Interestingly, there are no symbols in either film that carry overwhelming negative connotations. Negative events are treated as events, pure and simple. They affect the future, of course, but they do not prognosticate, nor explain human existence in general, but only the particular lives in which they occur.

**MORE PURELY CINEMATIC STRATEGIES**

The use of anime creates automatic distancing that prevents viewers from needing to establish emotional distance themselves; this paradoxically keeps them more vulnerable. Seeing the cartoon figures, we let our guard down, forget to put ourselves at a distance—until it is too late.

The most obvious aesthetic, definitive of anime, has little to do with classical artistic values. This is kawaii, cuteness or charm: the enormous eyes, exaggerated facial expressions, and large bowed head coupled with the sideways and upwards look that characterize infant and immature mammals and that signal helplessness (and both define and trigger amae), making babies attractive to adults even across species.

Kawaii encourages viewers to feel compassion and a desire to nurture—as indeed Gen and Seita do toward their younger siblings. While in many films (and television productions) the manipulation of the audience’s feelings by making characters or props cute is criticized as reprehensible, here it is appropriate, for the audience needs to feel both the urge to nurture and the outrage the children themselves felt at their abandonment by adults.

The children’s voices, too, are “cute.” And their immature behaviors—their inability to realize just how bad their situation is, their quick laughter and excitement at having fun even when it doesn’t help them solve their problems—replenish our spirits even as they increase our sense of foreboding.

During and just after the bombings themselves, sound stops: something that can only be accomplished in film, theater, or music. The silence not only signals the shift in fundamental realities but also underscores the solitude of characters’ new plight. It is also a form of realism, as our attention during crises often prevents sounds (and other sensory qualities) that are irrelevant to our survival from penetrating our consciousness. The slow-motion effects at this point are also a form of psychological realism, as subjective experience distorts our sense of time.

The children’s POVs are maintained by the camera angle. We watch the films from the height of the children themselves, echoing director Yasujirō Ozu’s cameras, which were fixed at the height of Japanese sitting on the floor, albeit with a different motivation and different effect, though both cases reinforce traditional relationships and values. Most exceptions are from below the children and looking up.

**NARRATIVE STRATEGIES**

What could have been in each case a devastating decision—to restrict the films’ POVs to the first person, and particularly to the first-person POVs of children, who are relatively helpless and ignorant and therefore more readily confused and terrified—is balanced by three decisions that counterbalance these vulnerabilities.

First, while doctors in both films turn the starving children away without treatment or a kind word, and no one offers them food, the sibling relationships are extremely close
Although my analysis—so ingrained that they appear readily widespread in aesthetics, people without such specialized knowledge derives from years of studying Japanese art history and aesthetics of tea: a minor aesthetic in Japan for over a thousand years); aware the Buddhist awareness of transience, that in beauty, but also a wide range of Japanese "categorical" beauty, not only Westerners' familiar (and deservedly beloved) results from evil or suffering, but a recognition that evil need not be unrelied, an awareness of the possibility of sustenance and meaning even under terrible circumstances.

Second, although we see in their reactions much of the toddlers' POVs, both films rely primarily on the older child's POV—on the sibling who is stronger, more capable, the one who can experience the utmost agency permitted him by the wartime chaos. These older brothers are able to provide a coherent view of the topsy-turvy of war and the violation of expectations, with implications for ethical agency as well.

Third, both films focus strongly on opportunities for celebration, exultation, and joy. (Admittedly, the younger siblings' willingness to indulge in hope and joy backfires, excuriatingly at times—and is the harder to bear because we see these moments through the eyes of the older child, who understands more fully.) A corollary provides one of the most important features making these films tolerable: all the children, even the toddlers, are active agents, contributing to their own and others' survival. In spite of their constraints, both films allow the children a sense of efficacious action.

ART-HISTORICAL AND AESTHETIC STRATEGIES

Artistic and aesthetic values are crucial to making these films bearable. The visual and aural languages derive from ancient and recent artistic forms, and encompass not only Westerners' familiar (and deservedly beloved) beauty, but also a wide range of Japanese "categorical" aesthetics. These include aware/mono no aware (物の哀れ) (an awareness of the poignance of things, based on the Buddhist awareness of transience), that in mono no aware becomes almost celebratory, and that has been a major aesthetic in Japan for over a thousand years); wabi (powerlessness, loneliness, shabbiness, wretchedness); sabi 殺 (the beauty accompanying loneliness, solitude, quiet); shibui 洗い (an ascetic quality or astringency, literally the sensation afforded by a pomegranate, found inter alia in wood stains, etc.); mingei 民芸 (folk art, craft); and aesthetics of tea: wa 和 (harmony), kei 敬 (respect), sei 清 (purity), jaku 寂 (tranquility), etc. Although my analysis derives from years of studying Japanese art history and aesthetics, people without such specialized knowledge are nonetheless readily affected by their use in arts, and Westerners for over a century have found compelling many of the artworks and aesthetics that are sources or exemplars for these films.

Zen-based characteristics of the Japanese sense of beauty—identified by Shin'ichi Hisamatsu as "asymmetry, simplicity, austere sublimity or lofty dryness, naturalness, subtle profundity or deep reserve, freedom from attachment, and tranquility"—are so ingrained that they appear readily in everyday life, and thus are ubiquitous in each film. Implicit in Hisamatsu's list are mindfulness, presence-in-the-moment, and exultation in and taking sustenance from nature. These features are found in abundance in each film.

A primary visual compositional device is the use of aerial view with roof removed (fuki-nuki yatai), widespread in illustrated handscrolls from the Heian period (784–1156). This allows a maximal view into the house, without committing either to the POV of a single individual or to the enforced perspective of an ideal observer (as happens with, for instance, one-point perspective); it might be considered the visual equivalent of an omniscient narrator.

As in Heian handscrolls, diagonal lines, especially floor (tatami mat) lines, are used to make situations feel emotionally precarious (see the circa 1130–1150 Illustrated Handscroll of the Tale of Genji), as when Gen's mother's collapses at home. In such cases, the sharp diagonals, contrasting with flat horizontal lines establishing security, imply insecurity and potential for pain of characters whose world is literally and visually incapable of supporting them.

Graphic depiction of disease and the effects of warfare on characters whom we identify with (far more explicit and detailed in Japanese than in Western art, at least until the most recent film and television) are well attested in painting as early as the Kamakura period (1185–1333), when handscrolls illustrated war, illnesses, and the hells specific to particular kinds of sin. The frenzied crowds, rolling smoke and flames, and the violent action, rapid motion, and intensity compellingly depicted are familiar from the circa 1250–1300 Burning of the Sanjo Palace handscroll.

Early Modern woodblock prints of the Edo/Tokugawa era (1600–1868) contribute techniques to both films: a reveling in the detail of daily life, intimate scale, a certain use of landscape that underscores social and emotional life.

Also indebted to the Edo woodblock prints is the films' composition. We've noted the exploitation of the strong, recurrent, horizontal lines and grids of Japanese architecture and interior design as a device underscoring either stability or, when they are skewed or sharply angled, traumatic disruption. In addition, unusual POVs used in Gen are taken from master woodblock artists such as Katsushika Hokusai, who famously showed Mount Fuji through the spokes of a wheel. The tiny lone figure walking under an umbrella along a narrow path through a rainy landscape is also familiar from woodblock landscapes. Other compositions, such as Setsuko's curved body facing an open window through which she gazes at the larger landscape of physical, emotional, and social freedom, echo beloved tropes of scholar-officials or enlightened poets gazing at mountains and rivers that symbolize the Dao or "Way," as in Ikeno

(as is common within abusive and neglectful families), and the desire to save the younger child increases the older brothers' determination to survive and keeps them from falling into despair, helplessness, and depression. They bring everything they have to bear on their task: all the ingenuity, intelligence, cunning, and strength they possess. They revel in the little ones' ability to giggle, to take delight in small comforts (a box of candy, fireflies), as well as their own childish irreplaceable capacity for joy, comfort, and laughter, making the films pleasurable even through the pain. In addition to the aesthetics, their kindness, generosity, and ability to empathize with the little ones sustain the adult viewer, while preventing children in the audience from experiencing the full despair that parental deaths and cruel adults otherwise entail. It is not a sense of transcendence, which implies that good results from evil or suffering, but a recognition that evil need not be unrelied, an awareness of the possibility of sustenance and meaning even under terrible circumstances.
The use of color, especially during the pre-bombing sections of the first half-hour of Gen, where it relies heavily on a few bright primary colors and simple bold drawing without the distraction of unnecessary patterning, is drawn from today's popular thinking about what appeals to children: bright primary colors and high contrast. But different as the two films' uses of color are, each has distinctive uses of color, with broad palettes, that is subtle and intense, even exuberant. To a large extent this comes from techniques of ukiyo-e and other woodblock prints: gradations of color, use of color that suits the emotion rather than objects represented, exploitation of emotional (not realistic) atmospheric qualities that are overwhelmingly beautiful, whether what they portray is good or bad, pleasurable or painful, morally sustaining or ethically indefensible. The fact that ukiyo-e was one of the original sources of Impressionism allows a fusion of aesthetics here, affording the immediacy and the intense emotionality of an individual's view of his surroundings (drawn historically from both mindful Zen appreciation of the moment and haiku poetry, both of which have long saturated Japanese culture generally).

Other than the reliance on primary colors used in the opening scenes of Gen, sunsets are probably the most important of the modern aesthetic tropes of the films. The intense, rich and varied palettes of sunsets, beautiful as they are, were rarely shown in pre-Modern Japanese art.

Other compelling effects are drawn from "traditional" Japanese performance aesthetics—widely used across the centuries, if in varied ways depending on the era and the art kind. Reliance on the beauty of nature and a grounding of literature and art in the seasonal have been pervasive throughout Japanese theatre, poetry, and prose for well over a millennium. Throughout Gen and Fireflies, our protagonists turn to nature for solace, reassurance, and the sustenance—the sheer aesthetic pleasure, conveyed aesthetically—required to keep going under daunting circumstances. While some of these activities seem modern—when Seita takes Setsuko swimming, it seems like a twentieth-century jaunt at the beach—there are paintings, hundreds of years old, depicting villagers swimming in rivers at Shinto festivals, that exhibit the same exuberant movement and joy in the purify of water. The latter is both an aesthetic and an ethical value in Japan.

THE ROLE OF AESTHETIC PLEASURE

Traditional themes such as the full moon and cherry-blossom viewing provide sources of aesthetic pleasure and joy to the children, and also suggest a possible reinstatement of culture despite its apparent destruction around them. As film critic Roger Ebert explains:

Japanese poets use "pillow words" that are halfway between pauses and punctuation, and the great director Yasujirō Ozu uses "pillow shots"—a detail from nature, say, to separate two scenes. "Grave of the Fireflies" uses them, too. Its visuals create a kind of poetry.  

Mono no aware, appreciation of the poignant beauty of the moment in spite of its transience, and the more Zen-like emphasis on the sensory experience of the moment, like the sound of water boiling in tea ceremony, as in the scene of Setsuko's doctor washing his hands in the sink, can be enjoyed by anyone, but derive from ancient Japanese aesthetics.

CONCLUSION

Films like these might have been too scary to watch. The continued threat of both renewed nuclear warfare and weapons testing, as well as of accidental catastrophe from power plants—a threat whose urgency was made evident with the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Ōkuma, Fukushima, Japan in March 2011 and, as I write this in March 2022, with Russia's attack on and takeover of nuclear power plants in Ukraine—brings the personal implications of nuclear power home to twenty-first-century audiences. The use of aesthetics in the films Barefoot Gen and Grave of the Fireflies not only allows empathetic identification and audience engagement with these themes, but also permits viewers to take in the new information and its complexities, while recognizing ethical and moral behaviors and attitudes that make life both possible and worth living in the most horrific circumstances.

NOTES

1. Names of twentieth-century Japanese persons are listed in Western order, whereas those of historical persons in Japanese order, family name first. Artists are known by this second (personal or artistic) name.


The Aesthetics and Ethics of Suicide in Japanese Literature and Film

Mara Miller
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR
MARAMILLER3@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT
The popular conception of suicide in Japan is that it is honorable, even the proper and ethical choice: a way of taking responsibility, and even required by certain ethical codes. The honor attributed to ritual suicide in popular conception is buttressed by the idealizing aesthetics of harakiri. The beauty of suicide in literature (aimed at readers, without intending to enable their deaths) arguably has a thousand-year tradition, where it has deep tragic overtones. But contemporary literature, where it is frequently depicted negatively as horrible or reprehensible, suggests a radical turn from past traditions. How does Japanese aesthetics idealize—or refuse to idealize—suicide? How is aesthetics deployed in Japanese literature to contest the ethical value of suicide? This chapter analyzes literary examples from the eleventh through the twenty-first centuries to understand how aesthetics is used to further or undermine the romanticized, idealized view of suicide as beautiful and, therefore, acceptable. Yet it is interested less in what it teaches us about Japan and Japanese aesthetics than about what Japanese aesthetics can teach us about being human.

INTRODUCTION
Generally speaking, we find suicide disgusting, reprehensible, sometimes puzzling. Suicide is contrary to nature, “unnatural” even, in spite of the fact that some animals do it. It carries a sort of natural revaluation, often accompanied by fascination, like the compulsion to view in the negative.

Over the past several decades of reading Japanese literature (in both Japanese and English), I have repeatedly been struck by the poignancy, the beauty, and sometimes the nobility of Japanese literary depictions of suicide. Engrossing and compelling as these portrayals are, beautiful is not, in my experience, how suicide is.

Early in my sophomore year of college, on a lovely autumn day, more balmy than crisp, I was walking to class across a bridge over one of the gorges for which Cornell University is famous. I noticed a cluster of people and police cars across the street at the far end of the bridge. I couldn’t make out what was going on, but I had no time to find out.

Suddenly someone broke away from the crowd and ran diagonally toward me. Stopping ten feet ahead, he catapulted himself over the yard-high stone parapet. I couldn’t take in what I had seen. I stopped and looked over. There he lay, flat and motionless as the rock bottom of the stream bed, arms and legs at odd angles, mimicking the Japanese characters for “five” and “year” that I had not understood—how Japanese aesthetics can teach us about being human.

PERSONAL NOTE
Over the past several decades of reading Japanese literature (in both Japanese and English), I have repeatedly been struck by the poignancy, the beauty, and sometimes the nobility of Japanese literary depictions of suicide. Engrossing and compelling as these portrayals are, beautiful is not, in my experience, how suicide is.

Early in my sophomore year of college, on a lovely autumn day, more balmy than crisp, I was walking to class across a bridge over one of the gorges for which Cornell University is famous. I noticed a cluster of people and police cars across the street at the far end of the bridge. I couldn’t make out what was going on, but I had no time to find out.

Suddenly someone broke away from the crowd and ran diagonally toward me. Stopping ten feet ahead, he catapulted himself over the yard-high stone parapet. I couldn’t take in what I had seen. I stopped and looked over. There he lay, flat and motionless as the rock bottom of the stream bed, arms and legs at odd angles, mimicking the Japanese characters for “five” and “year” that I had not yet studied and would always struggle with because of this tragic and meaningless similarity.

This was not my introduction to suicide. In tenth grade, a friend had shot himself. It was common enough in our suburb that when my out-of-state boyfriend came to visit me, a close male friend who felt the need to impress him gave him and me a “suicide tour” of homes where people we knew had killed or tried to kill themselves. Our next-door neighbor had not yet taken her hotel room and jumped. Because of prescription drugs administered for stress headaches in high school, drugs that today doctors are forbidden to prescribe to teenagers, I’d had my own bouts with almost insurmountable urges to kill myself. Luckily, I’d resisted, reasoning it was irrational to kill oneself before I’d turned twenty-two.

But since seeing this young man jump and what he looked like after, I was never enthralled by the aesthetics of suicide. Yet this Japanese literature fascinated me. What had called it into being?

dead bodies that Aristotle mentions. This revulsion suicide prompts is almost universal.

Yet, for a thousand years, Japanese literature idealized and romanticized suicide. If it did this largely through aesthetics. Why? What are the effects of this? This bears examination—less for what it teaches us about Japan and Japanese aesthetics than for what Japanese aesthetics can teach us about being human.

Now there is a new twist. This pattern has stopped—if not dead in its tracks, at least overwhelmed by a contrary trend spotlighting suicide’s negative side, as, over the past twenty or thirty years, writers began to focus, to the exclusion of its (possible) aesthetic effects, on the meaninglessness or futility of the act, the dreadful and long-lasting effects on survivors, the superficiality or arbitrariness of the decision, and even the resultant loss of beauty in the world.

How and why has Japanese aesthetics idealized—and now come to refuse to idealize—suicide? What are the effects? How is aesthetics deployed in Japanese literature either to support or to contest the specifically ethical value of suicide? This paper briefly analyzes some literary examples from the eleventh through the twenty-first centuries to understand how and to what effects aesthetics has been used either to foster or to undermine the romanticized, idealized view of suicide and to examine the new trend rejecting suicide as desirable, acceptable, or even intelligible.

The fact that many of these recent writers rejecting the idealization or aestheticization of suicide are women (Natsume Kirino, Kyoko Mori, Banana Yoshimoto) raises the question of the role played by gender in this development. Is their refusal an aspect of an ethics of care? Because of Confucianism and Buddhism, care ethics is arguably less gender-specific and more deeply entrenched in Japan than in the West. Mori’s two works are autobiographical (her mother killed herself over Mori’s father’s love affair), so we may also ask whether writing from a survivor’s point of view doesn’t force a recognition of suicide’s negative effects, effects that are more easily evaded when the author identifies with the suicide himself. Yoshimoto’s Moshi Moshi, about the aftermath of the protagonist’s father’s double suicide, is so convincing she felt obligated to add a note to later editions saying her father is still alive.

Yet this is not a new phenomenon: the effects of suicide on survivors are portrayed by even the earliest writers, such as Murasaki Shikibu, who was keenly aware of them. One could read Genji’s obsession with his two greatest loves, who resembled his mother and were biologically related to her, as principally compensation for the deprivation caused by his mother’s premature suicide-like death. (I haven’t studied the character of Kaoru, whose father Kashiwagi wasted away after choosing not to kill himself, well enough to say whether his character is meant to suggest the effects of parental suicide-like death on the offspring.) One also recognizes the ancient themes of female jealous rage and the vitiolic effects on women of male sexual freedom that frequently co-occur with suicide. The male team behind the 2020 television drama Shitto (Jealousy), like Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s The Love Suicides at Amijima and Masahiro Shinoda’s Double Suicide, takes an equally devastating centuries-old perspective on these effects of suicide on a spouse.

Before we move to the argument about the purposes and uses of aestheticizing suicide, we will consider some background issues.

BACKGROUND NOTES ON SUICIDE IN JAPAN
Suicide combines some of the most appalling phenomena life has to offer: the horror of death; the sensual offense of decay; death’s terror of ceasing to be or, perhaps even worse, the terror of judgment; the pain and shock of violent death.

Suicide undoes normal rules of living. We all die—we know we will—but usually without foreknowledge of how and when, and often against our will.

The popular (American) conception of Japanese suicide is that it is honorable, socially acceptable, condoned, even the proper and ethical choice. In some cases, it is a way of taking responsibility, while harakiri is even required by certain ethical codes. All of these things are at least sometimes true; in fact, suicide has historically been required under some circumstances: either by law, by the legal order of a superior, or by an ethical “code” such as bushidō (the way of the warrior), demanding junshi (loyalty suicide) in war.

At the same time, it was often forbidden by law—as in the case of the double love suicides among commoners during the Edo period (1603–1867). While there is no sense in Japan that it is sinful (except perhaps among the few Christians), largely because the religions have no concept of sin (presumably due to the lack of a creator god), it is contrary to Confucian principles, as The Tale of Genji points out in Kashiwagi’s speech. It is presumably due to this awkwardness, perhaps strengthening to a sense of transgression, that Murasaki has Genji’s mother waste away rather than overtly kill herself. She must remain tragic and morally pure.

While both the “custom” of suicide as a way of taking responsibility and the socio-politically obligatory harakiri may be exceptions to worldwide custom (and the latter to the more frequent rule that suicide should provide relief from pain, not cause it), the reasons for killing oneself are otherwise those shared by people around the world: to benefit others, to escape suffering or avoid some terrible fate, to find release from despair and hopelessness, to atone for wrong-doing, to make evident one’s despair or bravery, to separate from others or distinguish oneself from the group, to define oneself.

Suicide, therefore, can enact the essence of agency, of will. Whether commanded or the result of one’s own decision, it can signify taking full responsibility for one’s life, one’s character, one’s acts. (Is this why Genji’s mother and the woman he abducts don’t actually take action to kill themselves but waste away or die of fright?)
Over the past millennium, Japanese literature has explored subjectivity, “interiority,” and agency with great subtlety and insight—perhaps greater than explorations of these themes in the West, where, since ancient Greece and Rome, and especially since Shakespeare, the preoccupation has been with the strengthening of the will, personal identity, and self-determination. Suicide, which facilitates such strengthening and identity confirmation, may appear as particularly useful for such purposes in a society like Japan, where boundaries between/among subjects are less well-defined and are more permeable, overlapping, intermittent, and variable.

There is also reason to believe that in the absence of an ideology promising eternal life and the need to overcome death, the boundary between the living and the dead—who, after all, return to visit the family once a year at Obon—is less clear-cut. This, too, is buttressed by literary aesthetics: Noh theatre often envisions the land of the dead as contiguous with ours, far off and out-of-sight, to be sure, but not unreachable.

BACKGROUND: AESTHETIC THEORY

Aesthetic pleasure—along with its alleged sources, the beautiful or the sublime—has for centuries been the main focus of philosophical aesthetics. It is often defined, following Kant, as an intrinsic (not utilitarian) good, characterized by disinterest/distance, not engagement. Only recently have philosophers begun to analyze alternative types of aesthetics such as kitsch, camp, the ugly, cute, or “interesting”; the Japanese “categorical aesthetics”; and “negative aesthetics” (those causing pain or distress).

But not only are there various kinds of aesthetics, there are actually numerous purposes for aesthetic treatment in addition to pleasure. Some of them use pleasure as instrumental to other purposes.

After analyzing a comment by the Japanese Nobel laureate for literature Yasunari Kawabata that “[l]ooking at old works of art is a matter of life and death,” I identified five “purposes” or capabilities of aesthetic experience, reasons that art might indeed be “a matter of life and death”:

A. Inspiration.

B. Evocation or excitement of pleasure after trauma/alexithymia.

C. Knowledge-that:
   1. Knowledge of suffering people have gone through.
   2. Knowledge of some of the means by which predecessors have survived.
   3. Knowledge that people felt like this before.
   4. Knowledge of our place in the landscape and in the land.
   5. Knowledge of our place in history.

D. Wisdom.

E. Knowledge-how: knowing how to do something.

In the context of Kawabata’s comment and my analysis, I originally thought this would typically be knowledge of how to survive after a devastating catastrophe or crisis. He was speaking about the aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but he meant, I think, something more: how to thrive, how to regain trust and hope.

Later I realized there are others:

F. To hold our attention over time. Halle O’Neal’s article on medieval Buddhist mandala paintings points out another critically important role of beauty in traditional Japanese arts, with respect to the third value (the inculcation and dissemination of knowledge), but goes further, arguing that beauty is vital to the task of drawing in viewers, engaging them so that they continue to look and begin to penetrate the intricate and complex meanings of the work—whose formal intricacy and complexity mimic the qualities of the beliefs and teachings it is their task to make evident.” O’Neal’s mandalas draw the attention of Buddhists for reasons that are partially extrinsic: their messages about ultimate realities and the viewers’ relationships to them.

After watching Ari Melber’s tribute to André Leon Talley (1948–2022) on MSNBC, I identified a seventh effect/purpose:

G. To grab our attention.

Considering the examples for this article, however, I recognized two others that I had somehow overlooked, that are inextricably linked to the portrayals of suicide.

H. To affect our emotions: either by inducing empathy and/or sympathy or, by contrast, by rendering the act regrettable or unacceptable, thereby increasing revulsion, horror, terror, and/or antipathy (toward the person or the act itself), and therefore:

I. To make something acceptable or unacceptable.

These last two function hand in hand: the more they affect us emotionally in positive ways, the more attractive we find them and the more acceptable we find their subjects or causes, whereas the more they repulse, revolt, or disgust us, the more we retreat, and the less acceptable they become to us. Combined, they lead to a final effect:

J. To come to understanding, by which I mean the more complex combination of kinds and levels of knowledge that eventually can lead to wisdom.

Developing knowledge, understanding, and wisdom takes time, time that our natural recoil from suicide ordinarily prevent. Aesthetic engagement lures us into the contemplation that allows empathy, acceptance, and understanding—or a more enlightened avoidance.

We see recognition of this fundamental progression from aesthetics to emotional response to attitude of acceptance.
or rejection in the Japanese shogunal governments’ (and other institutions’) rejection of any aesthetic alliance with actual suicide.

**BACKGROUND: LITERARY EXAMPLES**
The main examples upon which my thinking for this essay is based are:

1. The Heian period classic *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki Shikibu (c. 1000 – c. 1010).

2. The Tales of the Heike, the medieval narratives about the (real) war between the Taira and the Minamoto clans, and various kabuki plays later based on it, such as Yoshitsune senbonzakura.

3. Edo period (early modern, 1603–1867) plays [Chūshingura, AKA the Forty-Seven Rōnin, and the double-suicide puppet plays by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724). "ripped from the headlines" in the early eighteenth century), also based on real events.

4. Countless novels by the great modernists such as Natsume Sōseki, Yasunari Kawabata, and Yukio Mishima.

5. In the last decades, film and television productions of many of these. Often, like the plays and novels, they celebrate real-life suicides, such as the politically imposed suicides of the Lord of Akō, whose enforced suicide led to the rebellion of his followers, portrayed in Chūshingura; Oda Nobunaga; and even Sen no Rikyū (in Teshigahara’s 1989 Rikyū), the creative genius behind the modern tea ceremony (all of whose stories have been made into films); and the individualistic rebellions of the young monk who burned down the Temple of the Golden Pavilion and of novelist Yukio Mishima, who made the monk’s story a famous and very moving novel.

Making the contrary point are:

6. Late- or post-modern fiction and memoir, especially by Natsuo Kirino, Kyoko Mori, and Banana Yoshimoto.

**THE AESTHETIZATION OF SUICIDE: CATEGORIES OF AESTHETICS USED**

Depicting suicide aesthetically in literature has a thousand-year tradition, where it also has deep tragic overtones. Such suicides have been the subject of countless plays and films. Some argue Japan has no concept of tragedy, but the literary suicides and real suicides I’ve considered all feature not only the regrettable and horrific death of a sympathetic hero or heroine but also a demise caused by a tragic character flaw of theirs (not theorized as such).

Each historical period addresses its angst, its dilemmas and quandaries, its tragedies befalling its own types of persons, arising within and as a result of social organizations and institutions, that sometimes had not existed ninety or even twenty years before. (Suicides in the Edo period evince economic motivations not seen before.) And each epoch has invented or evolved its own aesthetics even as subcultures within it maintain previous aesthetic values.

Not all the categories of Japanese aesthetics are used to aestheticize. Miyabi as described by Sei Shōnagon and iki as analyzed by Kuki Shūzō both seem to remain outside the sphere, as do wabi, sabi, and tea aesthetics, except where required by the subject matter.

But suicides in Japan are portrayed using a wide variety of aesthetics. Most are for readers’ benefit. *Mono no aware*, the appreciation of fleeting beauty that stems from Buddhist recognition of the transience of life and the inevitability of suffering, dominates during the Heian period (794–1185), although it remains important to this day. (Art historians have noted the way Japanese aesthetics and art styles maintain close ties to their origins rather than being usurped by newcomers, as in the West.) *Mono no aware* captures the existential possibilities of aesthetics.13

Such Buddhist focus on the appeal of transience, with allusions to cherry blossoms, was crucial to the aestheticization of kamikaze pilots’ suicides.14 (The term kamikaze, however, alludes to war as well, even as it underscores the sacrality of the warrior’s way, since the original kamikaze were literally “divine winds” that blew Mongol would-be invaders’ ships back to the continent, protecting Japan.) Warrior culture recognizes an additional set of aesthetics for harakiri aimed at (actual or would-be) practitioners: the formal, ritual suicide afforded to the privileged warrior class in bushidō, the way of the warrior, as exemplified (in real life and in the films about them) by the harakiri of Nobunaga and the Forty-Seven Rōnin’s Lord of Akō, as well as in the theatrical, idiosyncratic, but ultimately illegitimate attempt by novelist Mishima. Harakiri aesthetics blends sacrality and a double-faced/two-sided aesthetic of single-minded decisiveness and militaristic purity (signified and guaranteed by the white garments), contrasted with extreme pain, toxic masculinity. Like tea aesthetics, harakiri’s are aimed at (actual or would-be) practitioners as much as guests or watchers.

Idealized and popularized by noted director Kenji Mizoguchi and novelist Yukio Mishima, the honor attributed in popular conception to harakiri is buttressed by its aesthetics as portrayed in literature and film: the elaborate ritual, the use of symbols of purity and sacrality. These are also reflections of the four basic values of tea today: wa, kei, sei, and jaku—harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility—insisted upon by the founder of the “modern” tea ceremony, Rikyū (1522–1591), who saved it from the increasingly elaborate, gorgeous, and ostentatious ceremony it had become, restoring it to its earlier Zen roots and devotion to simplicity and natural elements (as opposed to gold or expensive imported Chinese porcelains). The tea aesthetic predominates in the scene in the film where Rikyū heads to the place appointed for his death, through a field of desiccated reeds, reminiscent of the abandoned battlefields of the civil wars, and in colors reminiscent of the wabi and sabi aesthetic, which originated in medieval
poetry and eventually pervaded visual arts from ceramics to architecture.

**Mono no aware** (in its pre-warrior form) was popularized by Murasaki in what is arguably the world’s first psychological novel, *The Tale of Genji*. There are at least four cases in which someone dies by suicide or wastes away because of overwhelming negative emotion, in one case, Kashwagi’s, after a beautiful soliloquy outlining his reasons for and against. *Genji* did a great deal to instill an ideal of suicide as an acceptable, if inevitable, or even tragic, death: regrettable but honorable and beautiful. The beauty is part of what makes it acceptable and underscores both the nobility of the act and the associated regret we are to feel.

What makes these cases appealing is the aesthetics of the literary—and often, subsequently, painted—works portraying them. The restraint intensifies the emotion of the work and keeps us from turning away. By riveting our attention, they allow us to spend the time needed to come to feel with the character, then to understand. Eventually, we can apply our understanding to our own lives and the lives of those around us.

***

Seven hundred years later, during the early modern period known as Edo, or Tokugawa, a commoner named Chikamatsu wrote popular plays for bunraku puppet theatre and kabuki for a growing middle-class audience. Four were love suicides. These, while fictionalized, were based on real-life events and, therefore, present some special ethical issues, even while the society he wrote about and that comprised his audience faced somewhat different ethical dilemmas and presented—and demanded—different aesthetics, as did, of course, the very different art of theatrical script.

Suicide could be a privilege accorded to the elite under specific circumstances. But suicide by commoners was illegal—especially given that it could only be for the commoners’ own reasons and especially when it was due to ordinary human feelings (ninjo) rather than duty (giri). The love suicides were, therefore, triply offensive to the rulers.

The double-suicide plays became, nonetheless, very popular with middle-class audiences. This is largely due to their literary aesthetics: the poetics of the speeches, the structures of the plots, etc. (Kabuki and bunraku visual and performance aesthetics also played a large part.)

The suicides are made beautiful.

Why did Chikamatsu and his theatrical collaborators make these suicides aesthetically compelling? Here I want to distinguish between motivations and effects. Some of their (philosophically uninteresting) motivations are those of many playwrights and producers today: to make the productions popular, to sell tickets, to build their reputations, and to fill their wallets. What is philosophically interesting are the effects. They made such suicides—forgotten and illegal—understandable and acceptable, something the audience could identify with. (This is what really irritated the shogunate.)

Already titillated by what they had read or heard about the incidents, these commoners could now sympathize, even empathize, with the “criminals.” Reading or seeing those plays, it is hard not to sympathize, even when we see the main characters are wrong-headed about their larger courses of action, the ones that got them into trouble in the first place. In spite of their wrong-doing, their selfishness (their tragic flaws, if you will), it is hard not to empathize.

There are other effects, of course. After teaching these plays through Shinoda’s film and the translated scripts, I have come to see not only that they were “entertaining,” the current American accolade, as well as irritating challenges to the Confucianist military rulers, as Japan historians see them, but also that they were among the early forces effecting profound changes in the cultural landscape from medieval values and social structure to the “early modernism” of the Edo period. In spite of its continued emphasis on rule by the elite, military governance, and elaborate social hierarchy, the Edo introduced many features of global modernism: improved education and literacy, a money economy, an improved road system, the beginnings of industrialization and widespread trade (many of the companies we know today originated in the Edo), a “hospitality industry” of restaurants and inns. All of these resulted in increased wealth among producers and the merchant class: a rapidly increasing middle class whose members could attend the theater (just one among many arts they indulged in). They wanted to see themselves reflected in these arts, in the theater. They could understand all too well the frustrations of the legal and economic systems under which Chikamatsu’s protagonists chafed, triggering the indiscretions that lead to their suicides. They felt many of the same feelings, feelings that were now, in the theater, given voice, respected, clarified, made visible.

Waiting, of course, on a more detailed historical argument, is it too much to say that such plays paved the way for more democratic governance at the end of the Edo period?

**REJECTING AESTHETICIZATION IN THE POST-MODERN PERIOD**

The contemporary turn destroys any connections between the depictions of suicide and traditional positive categories of aesthetics in favor of unflinching recognition of the after-effects. Beauty and pathos of all kinds, and even tragedy, are rejected in favor of objective description and no-nonsense self-reflection. In Banana Yoshimoto’s *Moshi Moshi*, the narrator’s father’s double suicide with his lover is a central event in her life and is pivotal to the novel and to the character development. “My depression after losing Dad wasn’t acute—the suffering was more like a gradual accumulation of body blows,” reports Yoshimoto’s narrator.

I would be deeply sunken into it by the time I noticed, and then barely manage to lift my face to break the surface and come up for air. . . .
I grew pedantic and over-logical, and my body seemed to have hardened and shrunk. Out of self-protection, I took to wallowing in my own thoughts even more than before.

Flowers and light, hope and excitement all suddenly seemed like things that were very distant from me, and I was trapped inside a deep, putrid, and bloody darkness. In it, . . . what was beautiful or light had no value at all. \(^{15}\)

Her language here is precise, yet descriptions of the suicide itself, and the love affair purported to have led to it, are as banal and flavorless as a police affidavit, only the occasional choice of a word like “lured” suggesting affect.

In Natsuo’s *Real World*, Terauchi is one of four teenaged girls, close friends, who unexpectedly find themselves assisting the teenaged boy living next door to one of them, nicknamed “Worm,” after he kills his mother. Their reasons for coming to his aid—lending him a bicycle, cell phone, etc.—are not easy to explain to themselves or to others. They despise him and his act but reveal catastrophic degrees of alienation, cynicism, and nihilism, in spite of their different temperaments and abilities to “fit in” with their society and with parents’ and school’s expectations. Although their world seems absurd to them—a world largely defined, through their eyes, by “negative aesthetics” (ugliness, noise, confusion, and absurdity; \(^{16}\) they explicitly reject traditional arts like bonsai)—they choose to see the good in one another even more than they want to see it in themselves.

Eventually, one of them, Kirarin, takes up with Worm, who is becoming increasingly uncertain and desperate. He ends up slititng their taxi driver’s throat, resulting in Kirarin’s and the driver’s deaths.

Ninna reports her phone conversation informing Terauchi of Kirarin’s death:

> I got all this out in a rush of words and finally noticed Terauchi’s silence.
>
> “What’s the matter, Terauchi? Did you hear what I said?”
>
> She answered in this slow, casual way. “That’s awful. That things ended up like that.”
>
> I was shaken, convinced I was to blame for the whole thing. . . . Terauchi tried to cheer me up.
>
> “There’s no need for you to get all upset. . . . You didn’t do anything so bad. I’m the one who did something bad.”

> “What do you mean?”

> “I’m the one who changed fate, I guess.”

> . . . Then I heard this popping noise . . . .

> “What’s that sound?”

> “I’m setting my alarm clock.”

> . . . I couldn’t believe how nervy she was. All I could think about was myself. About me and how the adults were going to blame me. Looking back on it now, I can see that when she set her clock she was setting a time limit for herself, for how much longer she had to live. \(^{17}\)

Both Ninna and Terauchi take responsibility for Kirarin’s death; Terauchi jumps off an apartment building, seeking both to atone and to define herself.

There is no aestheticization of the suicide, though Ninna remarks that she cannot bear to think she will never see Terauchi’s beautiful face again. The absence of aesthetic concern reflects the absence of moral order in their world and their inability to act ethically. Rather than following the effects of the suicide through time as does Genji, for instance, the book ends abruptly shortly thereafter.

Mori wrote twice about her mother’s suicide in reaction to Mori’s father’s love affair. \(^{18}\) In *The Dream of Water: A Memoir*, her mother’s death is central, depicted with stark and unappealing realism. But in *Yarn: Remembering the Way Home*, one of the finest pieces of writing I’ve read, psychologically, emotionally, and aesthetically, aesthetics is central: to the ingenious, perfectly formed structure (ideally suited to the topic and the author’s journey); to knitting, the central metaphor and symbol, describing its aesthetic effects as she becomes more skilled at new techniques through several stages of her life; to her language, sensitive, beautiful, and apt throughout. (She is Japanese and was raised in Japan but wrote this in English.) But for Mori, there is no way to make her mother’s death an aesthetic experience; important as her mother’s death was to her, it barely appears in this memoir.

Interestingly, Masahiro Shinoda’s 1969 film *Double Suicide*, based on Chikamatsu’s 1721 puppet/kabuki play *The Love Suicides at Amijima*, seizes the issue precisely. At the film’s opening, the director, on the phone with his artistic director/photographer, instructs him, “Don’t make the end [the suicide] beautiful; it must not be beautiful.” Yet the film is itself one of the most beautiful I’ve ever seen, so visually compelling that although I’ve shown it to classes a dozen times, I cannot remember it in its black-and-white film: I visualize it in color. Its soundtrack is equally compelling. This is as aesthetically powerful a film as was ever made. The director’s initial instructions notwithstanding, the suicide at the end is also aesthetically mesmerizing.

**CONCLUSION**

Why idealize suicide? Why make it beautiful (or, in some cases, noble or courageous)? Here is a preliminary list of motivations:

- For military or political power: to encourage compliance, to make people think it is their own idea. Once it is made to appear beautiful—i.e., pleasurable, desirable—it can, under the right
circumstances (usually warfare), more easily stave off objections and be turned to someone’s advantage.

- To make it popular, for profit and/or fame. Both profit/fame and power are obvious motivations. Yet there are other, less obvious motivations.

- Beautifying or aestheticizing suicide is one mode of idealizing it.

- But sometimes, as in Genji, it is not idealization, not to make it desirable, but to make it acceptable and to arouse sympathy.

- To seduce readers into empathy.

- To make them think about their own choices, as anyone reading Kashiwagi’s soliloquy will.

- To make them think about how their actions affect others (Kashiwagi again), even to instill morality.

Aestheticized cases allow us to examine the ways in which aesthetics may function, not just in Japanese culture but also anywhere, in any society or culture, to link emotions and attitudes with certain actions that are typically seen as ethical (or, of course, unethical), and to form attitudes and valuations of types of ethical/unethical actions—or to change existing valuations.

***

The aestheticization of suicide was socially and emotionally valuable. By negating or counteracting the horror and disgust that are naturally triggered by death, including self-imposed death, it facilitates understandings of the reasons for the act and the mental states that conditioned them, thereby encouraging sympathy and even empathy, even if it may also lay the groundwork for political control.

According to literary evidence, suicide has been a choice for individuals for a millennium. Literary examples lead readers (and, later, audiences) to deeper understandings of characters’ motivations, to empathy and sympathy, even to a better understanding of the human condition in general—arguably of their own family members and friends. They have afforded shifts in perceptions of and attitudes toward suicide that relate to increasing awareness of individuality in Heian and the rise of individualism (not individuality) in early and full modernism. They have provided ways to define oneself as well as to avoid undesirable situations and to atone for transgressions.

But if, by Edo, suicide was sometimes legally required, or if the military government of WWII required it; if aesthetics was used to justify it and/or make it acceptable, then post-modern writers have chosen to work against the aestheticization, de-aestheticize it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Tom Seidner for his comments on this paper and Scott Robertson for moral and financial support.

NOTES

1. My own experience with common prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals like naprofen (Aleve) and zolpidem (Ambien) requires me to report that the sudden, urgent compulsion to kill oneself described as an “adverse reaction” to drugs should always be considered when trying to understand an unmotivated, incomprehensible suicide or suicide attempt.


4. The National Museum of Death in Aguascalientes, Mexico, presents material evincing worldviews of death diverging widely from those of the more familiar East Asian and Abrahamic religious traditions.


12. For another example of the existential (rather than entertainment or pleasure) capabilities of aesthetics, see Mara Miller, “The Atomic Bombings in Anime: How Aesthetics Makes Actual Historic Terror Tolerable to Children (A Prolegomenon to Existential Aesthetics),” in this issue.


14. For a superb study of Mizoguchi’s film-making, including its attention to the sacred within bushidō, see Darrell William Davis, Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).
What better symbolic gai Mori, the retells, which would have consequently gai's version, the father, Taira Masauji, bequeaths gai's largely schematic characters, gai gives the story his alterations say about Mizoguchi's celebrated gynocentric perspective? And why does Mizoguchi foreground, against his studio's protest, Sanshō (Shindō Eitarō), who in Ōgai's rendering is comparatively peripheral? The consideration of these problems suggests a perspective through which the character of Mizoguchi's singular Buddhist Cinema comes into view.

The story that Ōgai retells, which would have consequently been widely-known by Mizoguchi's Japanese audience, is around a thousand years old. Ōgai gives the story his own neo-Confucian spin and it is the spirit of the latter that Mizoguchi largely resists. Mizuguchi's film both assesses the enormous, even overwhelming, gravity of the almost ubiquitous reign of the Sanshō-archetype—there are no happy endings here and no glib calls for optimism—while simultaneously envisioning the liberating force of Kannon's awakened compassion.

In Ōgai's version, the father, Taira Masauji, bequeaths a small gilded amulet of Jizō to his daughter Anju. The father had been implicated in a misdemeanor committed by his governor and exiled to far-flung Tsukushi Province in western Japan. Mizoguchi, a Buddhist sensibility for the world, rooted in Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It is more a question of the viewer comes to see than it is what the viewer sees. I pursue this thesis by examining the ways that Mizoguchi subtly but consequentially alters the famous 1915 short story by Ōgai Mori upon which the film is based, especially the amplification of the presence of Kannon, the complexification of Ōgai's largely schematic characters, and the special emphasis that Mizoguchi places on Sanshō himself. What emerges is a cinema in which the viewer is called to recall their suppressed compassion.

Among the many virtues of Mizoguchi Kenji's masterpiece, Sanshō Dayū (1954), is its ingenious deployment of cinema as Buddhist practice. This is not to say that this is a film with a Buddhist “message” or theme, although it certainly has conspicuous Buddhist elements. It is not fundamentally illustrating beliefs about Buddhism but rather rethinking cinema as a medium for a Buddhist sensibility, as if the eye of the camera also expressed what Dōgen, following the historic Buddha, called the “true dharma eye.”

I pursue this possibility by comparing the film with its chief source, the famous 1915 short story of the same name by Ōgai Mori, the nom de plume of Rintarō Mori (1862–1922). In so doing, I consider the following: Why did Mizoguchi transfer the story’s Buddhist icon that accompanies Zushiō (Hanayagi Yoshiaki) throughout the narrative from Jizō Bosatsu (Kṣitigarbha) to Kannon (Avolokiteśvara)? Why does he make Anju (Kagawa Kyōko) younger than her sister Anju, are kidnapped. Tamaki is sold into sexual slavery on Sado Island and separated from her children who are in turn sold as slaves to work in the brutal labor camp overseen by Sanshō. After Anju gives her younger brother the amulet and then sacrifices her life so that he can escape to Kyoto, he is eventually able to re-establish his identity by showing it to Morozane, chief advisor to the emperor, who recognizes the noble provenance of the object. “I have heard of this amulet before. It is a figure in gold of Jizō Bodhisattva, Ruler of Light. This statue was originally brought from Kudara and was paid special reverence by Prince Takami. Since you are in possession of the statue, your noble descent is clear.”

This leads to Zushiō’s recognition and subsequent political appointment, during which he abolishes slavery, and then travels to Sado Island for a heart-rending reunion with his broken mother.

That Taira Masauji would give his oldest child, Anju, the amulet, who subsequently gives it to her younger brother Zushiō before she drowns herself, makes ample narratival sense in Ōgai’s rendering. “I want you to have it. You will face greater dangers than I,” Anju tells her brother, who does not suspect his sister’s imminent sacrifice. Jizō Bosatsu protects the spirits of children and for this reason is widely associated in Japan with lost children, especially children who have died from abortion or miscarriages or who were stillborn. Jizō is associated with the mizuko kuyō, the water-child memorial service, performed on the occasion of such deaths. What better symbolic accompaniment for these two vulnerable children as they attempt to make their way through a mercilessly predatory world?

Although Mizoguchi, as well as his screenwriters Yahiro Fuji and Yoda Yoshikata, exercise a discernable measure of fidelity to Ōgai’s retelling of the folktale, several small but
consequential changes are made that deepen Mizoguchi’s Buddhist slant. After all, Mizoguchi had begun a formal Buddhist (Nichiren) practice four years earlier. One such change involves the amulet, which is no longer that of Jizō, but rather Kannon, Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion who hears all of the cries of the world and witnesses all of its pain. Rather than place herself first, even in the quite reasonable and understandable posture of a defense of one’s own innocence, her priority is the suffering of others. She is emblematic of the bodhisattva ideal, namely, that one’s own awakening is suspended so long as others still suffer. The spirit of Kannon’s heart suffuses the film, contesting a world in which power is built on self-elevation and the domination of others.

Anju (who takes on the name “Shinobu,” to persevere or endure), in another small but consequential alteration, is no longer older than Zushiō, but younger, which further accentuates her vulnerability. Yet Mizoguchi, in making her even more vulnerable, does not therefore make her weaker. Claire Cavanaugh argues that Ōga’s story was part of an anti-feminist backlash, hearkening back to “lost virtues and values that depended on a rigid social hierarchy and conservative views of women.” This world where one class of people dominates another is precisely what Mizoguchi refuses. Seeing her brother’s suffering, both in terms of his slavery and his slow descent into complicity with the cruelty of his circumstances, she sacrifices herself so that he may not only live, but also awaken to his forgotten Buddha nature. Zushiō had reconciled himself to accompany Anju’s sick friend Namiji to the forest to die when the earth—another resonance of Kannon—sings their mother’s song of longing for them. Zushiō’s heart hesitates in a kind of metanoia in which he recalls who he was. Anju seizes the opportunity. Although she assures her brother that she will survive when she stays behind to slow down the guards, she has secretly already planned to sacrifice herself. After Zushiō escapes, Anju takes her life into her own hands by walking into a lake. She does not live for herself. After Zushiō escapes, Anju takes her life into her own hands by walking into a lake. She does not live for herself. She embodies the power of Kannon, whose source is the opposite of Sanshō. The latter, as I develop in the next section, sees only himself and is utterly indifferent to the violence and cruelty that sustain his power and empire.

Mizoguchi is celebrated for his embrace of women’s strength and for his resistance to their exploitation. It is telling that he does not only find weakness in the victimized, but also a strength that invites us to rethink what strength can be. One need only think of the remarkable character Oharu (Tanaka Kinuyo) in Saikaku Ichidai Onna (conventionally known as The Life of Oharu) from two years earlier. Real strength is not the violence through which the vulnerable are dominated and exploited. It is the vulnerability and receptivity through which one sees oneself in another. Such paradoxical strength as vulnerability recalls the American poet Gary Snyder’s (himself the product of ten years of rigorous Rinzai Zen training in Japan) embrace of Tārā, who is associated in the Himalayas among various Vajrayana practitioners with Avalokiteśvara and, in some accounts, born of one of her tears. In Mountains and Rivers without End, Snyder cites her power to side with the marginalized and vulnerable. This is in part why Tārā chose to be a woman: Those who wish to attain supreme enlightenment in a man’s body are many . . . therefore may I, until this world is emptied out, serve the needs of beings with my body of a woman.

The man’s body is a site of power and privilege and there is a long history in Buddhism (and beyond) of women’s bodies being denigrated as impure and, as such, incapable of awakening. The best that they can hope for is to be reborn as a man. “Those who wish to attain supreme enlightenment in a man’s body are many,” as if there were a power intrinsic to the male body that made it a privileged gateway to awakening. The desire to embrace the male body as a site of power, even as a putatively spiritual gateway, reinforces the perversion of power that Kannon contests. One does not awaken to enhance oneself—I am greedy for a male body because my ego is greedy for awakening. Rather, the self that would be upgraded by awakening is the chief obstacle that practice seeks to overcome. One practices for others—and for oneself as an other among others. The self that is separable from others and hence somehow mine falls away.

Kannon’s cry, itself suffused with the call of the earth, literally interrupts the depravity and pain of those under the yoke of Sanshō’s world, in the form of Tamaki’s (Tanaka Kinuyo) remote song of longing for her lost children, which emerges directly from the Buddha’s heart. The mother’s cry is a liberatory ne sensū in the logic of enslavement. It is first heard when the newly arrived slave Kohagi (Kosono Yōko), freshly delivered from Sato Island (where Tamaki has been sexually trafficked under the name “Nakagimi”), sings a popular ditty, “How I long for you Zushiō, how I long for you Anju . . . .” Suddenly, Zushiō and Anju recall that they are not slaves, but the precious children of a mother who laments their suffering. Anju subsequently sings this song repeatedly, much to Zushiō’s anguish. Anju has always been open to this call, while Zushiō has retreated into himself to survive at any cost. As Michel Chion eloquently observes: When the acousmatic voice sounds for the first time on the lake shore, Zushiō refuses to acknowledge it; he has made it out as the sound of the water and closed himself off from the voice’s power. Anju the girl, who is completely open to it, recognizes it at once. Zushiō retains an inner space that he closes off and protects; Anju has nothing like this for herself.

Anju is open to the call and remembers to whom it recalls her. As a survivor she is now called Shinobu, to endure or persevere (忍ぶ), but she does not merely patiently endure. Shinobu is also a homonym meaning to remember or recall (想ぶ), as if, in a radical anamnesis, she recollects that she is her mother’s daughter, not a slave, or even that she is the earth’s daughter, or Kannon’s daughter, or the Buddha’s daughter, not an expendable human being to be disposed of as the slaveowners please. Moreover, the love that she feels as a daughter is the love that she freely expresses toward others. She recalls not only that she is loved by Kannon, but that she is Kannon’s love.
Zushiō’s awakening, as I have discussed above, is triggered in a forest that has been demoted to an ignominious place to dispose slaves when they are no longer useful. When Zushiō and Anju are breaking wood, as they did at the beginning of the film when they were still with their mother, the forest itself seems to sing out to them, calling them by recalling their names, prompting Zushiō to remember who he is. This voice is the opposite of Homer’s Sirens, for in recalling their names, it calls them back to life. Zushiō had been carrying with him the compassionate final counsel of his father, but so far, they had been empty words, a hollow formula, a lifeless memento of his lost family. Now he recalls the living source—Kannon’s heart—of such words.

When Zushiō, thanks to Anju’s sacrifice, escapes the forest where he had escorted Namiji to die, he makes his way to Nakayama-dera (中山寺) where the Buddhist monks hide him from Sanshō’s guards. Here Mizoguchi also makes some small but very important changes. Unlike Ōgai’s story, Sanshō’s son, Tarō (Kōnō Akitake), has not only escaped his father’s hellish compound, but he has had a deep change of heart and become a Buddhist monk. He offers Zushiō decisive counsel:

I found that humans have little sympathy for things that don’t directly concern them. They’re ruthless. Unless those hearts can be changed, the world you dream of cannot come true. If you wish to live honestly with your heart-mind (kokoro), keep close to Buddha.

Unlike Ōgai, Mizoguchi also subtly suggests the spiritual and historical significance of Nakayama-dera. Located in Takarazuka in contemporary Hyōgo Prefecture, not far from Sanshō’s slave compound, Nakayama-dera is now the twenty-fourth of the thirty-three stations of the Saigoku Sanjūsangū-šo, popularly known as the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage. Contemporary pilgrims travel to these temples throughout the greater Kansai region, each of which features a prominent Kannon. Nakayama-dera is celebrated for its Jūchimen (or eleven-headed) Kannon. Of course, this pilgrimage was not yet part of the world in which the story is set, and Mizoguchi, a famous stickler for historical accuracy, does not pretend that it was, but once again, as he does throughout the film, he lets Kannon’s power sufﬁce the world dominated by Sanshō.

Zushiō eventually hears the call of Kannon. Earlier in the film (and in contrast to Ōgai’s rendering), he had slowly but decisively acclimated to the cruelty of his world, willing to help in the branding punishment of another slave, for example, ﬁguring that it was kill or be killed, destroy or be destroyed. Not long after arriving in Kyoto, having been saved by Anju and Tarō, he is given the new name “Masamichif” 正道, righteousness, literally the right, correct or positive path or Way. His kokoro awakens not through his own power or through the logic of personality or life circumstances, but through other-power (tariki). Cavanaugh argues that there are explicit Jōdo Shin (True Pure Land) elements in the film. Zushiō consequently liberates the slaves and then renounces his own power (a power that includes gender privilege). He is no longer on the way to himself and his self-aggrandizement. He no longer takes refuge in himself to survive at any cost. He becomes a vehicle of the compassionate Way. Terrence Malick, an ardent admirer of this film, staged a private workshop of his theatrical version of the film in 1993 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, directed by the great Andrzej Wajda. One can detect echoes of Zushiō’s transformation in the character of Franz Jägerstätter in Malick’s most recent film, A Hidden Life (2019). Refusing to take an oath to Hitler and facing execution, Jägerstätter confides, “When you give up the idea of surviving at any price, a new light ﬂoods in.”

Finally, Mizoguchi gives the father, Taira Masauji (Shimizu Masao), about whom we learn almost nothing in Ōgai’s rendering, some small but critical embellishments. He was banished because he safeguarded the poor from what would have been a brutal and gratuitous military conscription. His parting counsel to his children accompanies them through and beyond their enslavement, shaping their hearts: “Without mercy, humans are like a beast. Even if you are hard on yourself, be compassionate to others. Humans are created equal. Everyone is entitled to their happiness.” These words become like a light keeping the darkness from completely triumphing, a small beacon in an otherwise hellish world. Unlike Anju, Zushiō cannot really “hear” these words until he hears the call to remember who he is.

II

I conclude my consideration of the Buddhist sensibility of Mizoguchi’s masterpiece with a deceptively simple question: Who is Sanshō? It is well-known that Mizoguchi fought the studio over his plans to make Sanshō a more prominent character and, although he did not completely succeed, Sanshō receives far more attention than he did in Ōgai’s version.

Prima facie one might conclude that Sanshō is a great villain, a larger-than-life manifestation of cruelty, violence, and indifference to human suffering. Even with such a conclusion, however, it would be inappropriate to characterize Sanshō as an outlier in human history. When we think of Japan’s Heian Period, we think of courtly elegance, poetry, Genji Monogatari, and the wistful sadness of beauty’s ephemerality. Mizoguchi, as is well-known, had a profound admiration for Japanese classical culture. Yet upon what was such courtly luxury and leisure founded? What is the largely invisible yet miserable support of such prosperity? The Sanshō Dāyū legend is the dark side of Heian elegance, the peasants and slaves and otherwise exploited peoples whose coerced bodies form the foundation of an elite, of the class of humans who really mattered.

Zushiō and Anju, moreover, are the children of such elegance. Tamaki, impeccably mannered and dressed at the beginning of the film, is a paragon of this culture. Taira Masauji is a divided man who is eventually destroyed because he sides with the underside of humanity, not with its beneﬁciaries. His crime? That politics would serve humanity, not administer it for its own beneﬁt. The economic and political exploitation of others has been one of the most persistent truths in most all of human history, despite its great cultural diversity. The roots of many of our
great monuments and cultural extravagances take their sustenance from human blood. The legend of Sanshō Dayū received its staying power not from those who identified their plight with Genji Monogatari, but from the latter’s hidden and squalid foundation.

Sanshō is anything but unusual. He is what props up the illusion of the ordinary, the hidden foundations of what we traditionally celebrate as proper human culture. He is, after all, first and foremost an administrator. He is just doing his job and his cruelty produces efficiencies among those he manages. Like Hannah Arendt’s famous account of Eichmann, who may have been despondent about what his duty entailed (genocide), but who executed it with fidelity and care,10 Sanshō is an excellent bailiff, part of the machinery that props up Heian high culture. As Dudley Andrew astutely observes, Sanshō “incarnates not just evil, but its banality, for he routinely passes down a norm of action. Overseer, headman, he is the local official and doing, he is told, a terrific job.”11

The dark underbelly of the Heian is the dark underbelly of high civilization. One can imagine Sanshō busy at work as a colonial administrator or as a functionary in an empire. One can just as easily picture him running a factory, or a coal mine, or an industrial feed lot, or perhaps even an Amazon Fulfillment Center. Sanshō administers regimes that benefit from white supremacy, patriarchy, genocide, labor exploitation, and on and on in a despairingly endless list. Mizoguchi made Sanshō Dayū less than a decade after the nightmare of Japanese militarism, which had become the new normal of the time.

Sanshō is therefore not only the dirty secret of Heian elegance, but an archetypal administrator of the enforced amnesia among the dominated so that they do not remember that they are human beings. Slaves had to be broken. Otherwise, their dignity might lead them to commit suicide rather than acquiesce to their circumstances. In a sense, Sanshō is a great human problem. He is as much Japanese militarism as he is Wall Street profits and global capitalism. He runs the factories that make almost all the clothes that we wear, “supervising” invisible laborers in Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Latin America, etc., whose barely remunerated work creates the illusion that clothes are inexpensive and can be easily replaced with every arbitrary shift in fashion. Tamaki is sold into sexual slavery, a fate to which women seem vulnerable these days more than ever.

At stake is not only the exploitation and humiliation of labor. Karl Marx had a point when he infamously charged in the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right that religion was an opiate of the exploited classes (“the masses” or Volk). The desperation of life in Sanshō’s compound drives people to seek solace in spiritual life, but here the archetype of “Sanshō the priest” has also laid his or her snare. In Mizoguchi’s film, this comes in the form of the old Shinto priestess (Mōri Kikue), whose kindness promises the weary family refuge on a long and dangerous journey. The road is a metaphor for the vulnerability of human affairs. Who knows what robbers and scoundrels await us around the next bend? She exploits this vulnerability, pretending to help them on their way, only to deliver them to their kidnappers.

Not only can religious awakening be a snare in the hands of the unscrupulous, but it also cannot promise an end to Sanshō’s global regime. Sanshō does not receive his comeuppance and his type will likely always be with us. After Zushiō liberates the slaves, they get utterly inebriated, burn down the compound, and revel in self-destructive abandon. So much for freedom! And the people for whom the Sanshōs of the world do their bidding remain largely obscure and above reproach. It is with bitter irony that, less than a decade after a world war that claimed the lives of somewhere between 70 and 85 million people, or about 3 percent of the whole world’s population, the preface to the film refers to its setting as a time in which “mankind had yet to awaken as human beings.”

There have been Sanshōs on both the political right and left, and Mizoguchi seems leery that human liberation—his ardent hope—can be achieved by politics alone. Mizoguchi does not offer a political alternative, not because in the end he resigns himself to the status quo, but because a just politics would be the symptom, not the root. Zushiō carries with him his father’s liberatory and just adage (“Humans are created equal. Everyone is entitled to their happiness.”) throughout his time in Sanshō’s compound. In themselves, they are only words, an empty husk, if they are separated from the root that sustains them. The adage does not prevent Zushiō from assisting in the branding punishment of another slave. It is only when he hearkens to his mother’s voice, the earth’s voice (in the breaking of the branches), Kannon’s voice, does he recall who he is as well as the root of his father’s words.

If Sanshō haunts the full spectrum of the political, the root of liberatory politics manifests when one roots out the Sanshō in one’s own heart.12 This is what Zushiō does. When he finally tracks down his mother on Sado Island, he recognizes her song as it calls out to her children and laments the torture of life without them. He does not see the human refuse of an old and spent prostitute, blind and poor, but his own mother. Tamaki, who had been mercilessly deceived over the years that her children had returned, immediately spurns her son’s initial overture. He does not see that they are only words, an empty husk, if they are separated from the root that sustains them. In one of cinema’s most moving sequences, she blindly fingers the Kannon statue, and realizes who it is. He holds her broken body, just as we are called back to the broken bodies of each other, indeed, also to an earth ravaged by the Sanshō within. Here Kannon is neither ideology nor article of faith. Here Mizoguchi’s camera calls us to remember how to see, to see as it does, and to remember who we are, we who imagine that we live in a time in which we have awakened as human beings.

NOTES
2. Mori, Sanshō the Steward, 50.

5. Gary Snyder, Mountains and Rivers Without End (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), 110–11.


7. In this respect, it worth noting that, as Dudley Andrew explains, the story was traditionally told by Buddhist priests to peasants so that the latter could identify with and take solace in the story of Zushio and Anju. See Andrew and Cavanaugh, Sanshō Dayū, 49.


9. See Andrew and Cavanaugh, Sanshō Dayū, 27.

10. See Andrew and Cavanaugh, Sanshō Dayū, 66.


White Sand, Blank Beauty: Figures and Meanings of Sand in Japanese Arts

Rudi Capra
UNIVERSITY OF WUHAN
RCAPRA8@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT
This article presents an aesthetic analysis of sand in Japanese arts, focusing in particular on sand patterns and backgrounds in Japanese “dry gardens” and in the miniature landscapes of bonsai. This short essay, based on the homonymous novel by Kōbō Abe, after a brief phenomenological description, sand is specifically considered in its metaphorical dimension, which evokes the peculiar shape of dunes: Kazakh barchan (crescent moon-shaped), wider than long), Arab self (sword shape dunes) and others. Any sand field is an intrinsically mobile landscape. Sand itself, to a closer inspection, cannot really be considered an element, if not for its fine consistence. There are countless types of sand, all constituted by the erosion of rocks and minerals. There is calcium sulphate sand, calcium carbonate sand, quartz sand, coral sand, aragonite sand, volcanic sand, garnet sand, olivine sand, magnetite sand, and others. They have different thermal proprieties, origin, micro-shape and composition. The word “sand” itself is nothing but a conventional term used to indicate all this family of fine materials. Hence, the determination of a first characteristic of sand from a phenomenological point of view: its elusiveness.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF SAND
Phenomenology is here intended, as Merleau-Ponty defines it, chiefly as a “philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins,” whose effort consists primarily in “re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status.” In this regard, a phenomenological description operates as a privileged tool that discloses the dialogical nature of the encounter between senses and sensed, which always takes the form of a reciprocal exchange of question-and-answer: “a sensible that is about to be sensed poses to my body a sort of confused problem.” The “problem” of this description is the element of sand, taken in its most general sense.

Recent scholarship in phenomenology has shown a growing interest in environmental and geological studies, resulting in publications and monographs on rocks, stones, landscapes, archaeological sites and monuments. Despite being, after water, the second most used natural resource on earth, and being simply indispensable for the production of glass, asphalt, concrete and the silicon chips that allow me to write this article on a computer, sand has never been seriously considered in philosophical scholarship.

The main reason for this omission coincides with the first point I want to highlight in this phenomenological account—namely, that sand is elusive. At first glance, a sandscapes does not present itself in a much different fashion from other landforms as, for instance, a dry plateau or a hilly terrain covered by grass. The first perceived difference is probably tactile; when a foot steps on a dune it plunge downward, and the more one, instinctively, pushes in search of a foothold, the more realizes the intrinsic precariousness of the sand element. In addition to that, there is the proverbial image of sand slipping through the fingers: sand, like water, adapts itself to the container, continuously passing through, manifesting itself as pure flow.

On a prolonged period of time, this precariousness is even more evident in the modality of sight. A time-lapse shooting in a sandy desert reveals the extraordinary effect of winds and weather on the dunescape, which is affected by veritable tides, creating all sorts of shapes and patterns. Along with the geological classification in five types (crescentic, parabolic, dome, star and linear), other languages and dialect offer more specific terms to indicate the peculiar shape of dunes: Kazakh barchan (crescent moon-shaped, wider than long), Arab self (sword shape dunes) and others. Any sand field is an intrinsically mobile landscape.

Recent scholarship in phenomenology has shown a growing interest in environmental and geological studies, resulting in publications and monographs on rocks, stones, landscapes, archaeological sites and monuments. Despite being, after water, the second most used natural resource on earth, and being simply indispensable for the production of glass, asphalt, concrete and the silicon chips that allow me to write this article on a computer, sand has never been seriously considered in philosophical scholarship.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF SAND
Phenomenology is here intended, as Merleau-Ponty defines it, chiefly as a “philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins,” whose effort consists primarily in “re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status.” In this regard, a phenomenological description operates as a privileged tool that discloses the dialogical nature of the encounter between senses and sensed, which always takes the form of a reciprocal exchange of question-and-answer: “a sensible that is about to be sensed poses to my body a sort of confused problem.” The “problem” of this description is the element of sand, taken in its most general sense.

Recent scholarship in phenomenology has shown a growing interest in environmental and geological studies, resulting in publications and monographs on rocks, stones, landscapes, archaeological sites and monuments. Despite being, after water, the second most used natural resource on earth, and being simply indispensable for the production of glass, asphalt, concrete and the silicon chips that allow me to write this article on a computer, sand has never been seriously considered in philosophical scholarship.

The main reason for this omission coincides with the first point I want to highlight in this phenomenological account—namely, that sand is elusive. At first glance, a sandscape does not present itself in a much different fashion from other landforms as, for instance, a dry plateau or a hilly terrain covered by grass. The first perceived difference is probably tactile; when a foot steps on a dune it plunges downward, and the more one, instinctively, pushes in search of a foothold, the more realizes the intrinsic precariousness of the sand element. In addition to that, there is the proverbial image of sand slipping through the fingers: sand, like water, adapts itself to the container, continuously passing through, manifesting itself as pure flow.

On a prolonged period of time, this precariousness is even more evident in the modality of sight. A time-lapse shooting in a sandy desert reveals the extraordinary effect of winds and weather on the dunescape, which is affected by veritable tides, creating all sorts of shapes and patterns. Along with the geological classification in five types (crescentic, parabolic, dome, star and linear), other languages and dialect offer more specific terms to indicate the peculiar shape of dunes: Kazakh barchan (crescent moon-shaped, wider than long), Arab self (sword shape dunes) and others. Any sand field is an intrinsically mobile landscape.

Sand itself, to a closer inspection, cannot really be considered an element, if not for its fine consistence. There are countless types of sand, all constituted by the erosion of rocks and minerals. There is calcium sulphate sand, calcium carbonate sand, quartz sand, coral sand, aragonite sand, volcanic sand, garnet sand, olivine sand, magnetite sand, and others. They have different thermal proprieties, origin, micro-shape and composition. The word “sand” itself is nothing but a conventional term used to indicate all this family of fine materials. Hence, the determination of a first characteristic of sand from a phenomenological point of view: its elusiveness.

A second feature can be immediately detected in a subjective encounter with the sand: its neutrality. While wandering in a sandy area, the most noticeable sounds are the howling of the wind and, in case of a beach, the patient roaring of the sea. In a way, a sandy place brings out in plain evidence the natural forces that contributed to shape it, highlighted by contrast with the mild, soundless background. Even one’s sense of smell may undergo a similar experience. During days, weeks or months of dry and weather, plants exude a peculiar oil of which fine-grained soils and rocks get impregnated. The first rain triggers the cyanobacteria present in the impregnated soil...
to produce geosmin, a chemical compound that diffuses the characteristic musty, muddy, argillaceous odour that is nowadays known as petrichor. Even in this case, it is the neutral olfactory field of sandscapes that let petrichor emerge in its full penetrant, pleasantly intoxicating scent.

The tactile perception of sand is also neutral, in the sense that it depends on the surrounding weather conditions. Sand is a poor thermal conductor, because it absorbs and disperses huge quantities of heat and cold in a very short time. Most sandscapes reflect thoroughly in any given moment the climatic conditions that affect them in that very moment; this is not a trivial observation, as it does not extend to most natural and urban environments. In particular, in conditions of extreme heat and peculiar light conditions, deserts give rise to mirages, optical phenomena that refract objects or events that are distant in the atmosphere. It can be said that the neutral voidness of a sandscape allows the forms of distant landscape to manifest more or less vividly before the observer.

SAND GARDENS

Therefore, a subjective encounter with sand reveals two distinct features. The first is its elusiveness: tactile, visual, and conceptual. The second is its neutrality, intended as a lack of distinctive aesthetic qualities that, in virtue of its blandness, allows the full blooming of indirect tactile, olfactory, visual, and aural conditions, as temperature, petrichor, mirages, and winds.

Merleau-Ponty claims that, in addition to its “positional spatiality,” the body has a “situational spatiality” that amounts to its orientation toward a set of affordances, actual or possible tasks. From this additional point of view, a sandscape does not offer significant affordances to most living creatures. It is perpetually unstable. Few or no resources at all: extreme temperatures, scarce vegetation, no food, no water. No landmarks, no shelter. Its neutrality is genuine in the etymological sense, from Latin ne-uter, “none of the two,” “not-this, not-that.” Its elusiveness amounts to a fundamental alterity that does not belong, and cannot belong, to human beings. Metaphorically, the neutral, elusive alterity of sand can easily be employed to visually represent the fourth, invisible dimension of reality: time. It is not merely the trivial image of the hourglass to suggest so; in Japanese arts, sand has been frequently associated with the idea of impermanence.

A first, remarkable case is exemplified by the tradition of karesansui 枯山水 (dry-landscape) gardens. The veritable term that indicates a “landscape” (sansui 山水) reflects the juxtaposition of mountains (san 山), a solid, steady, non-flowing, apparently unchanging element, and water (sui 水), whose incessant flux is a natural reminder of the impermanence that affects all phenomena in the universe. In karesansui gardens, pools and streams are replaced by massive rocks and oceans of sand or gravel, establishing an aesthetic and conceptual analogy between the microcosm of the artificial, human-made garden and the natural aspect of the macrocosm.

Specifically, Japanese karesansui gardens have frequently been analysed in relation to Zen Buddhism. The transfiguration of natural forms into abstract patterns of rocks and sand (or gravel) defers to the understanding of all phenomenal objects and events as manifestations of their inner vacuity (ku 空), emphasizing the universal law of impermanence (mujo 無常). Often, karesansui garden feature the principle of shakkei 借景 (“borrowing the scenery”), in which a part of the surrounding luxuriant natural landscape is enclosed within the frame, establishing a conflicting dialectic with the austerity of the dry garden. The conflict is precisely meant to remind one of the Buddhist truth that the two sides, the ever-changing rhythm of nature and the unchanging stillness of the karesansui, are one and the same.

Already before the advent of Buddhism, precincts of white sand marked ritual sacred areas in Shinto shrines, known as niwa 草, a term that nowadays commonly translates “garden.” These spaces offered an ideal ground for religious and political ceremonies. Sand mounds known as kiyome no mori 清めの盛り were also employed in ritual purifications. After the diffusion and institutionalization of Zen, lakes and oceans of sand, featured in several temples such as the Ginkaku-ji 銀閣寺, the Shisen-dō 詩仙堂, the Dasein-in 大仙院, the Hōen-in 法然院 (all located in Kyoto), evoke the fundamental instability of existence, permeated by a vibrant sense of ephemeralism. In fact, not only sand does not offer any solid foothold for human dwelling, but due to the combined effect of winds and weather, it cyclically cancels out all traces of human passage.

WOMAN IN THE DUNES

These evocative qualities attributed to the sand element echo in the renowned Japanese movie Woman in the Dunes (Suna no onna 砂の女, 1964, directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara), adapted by Kōbō Abe 公房安部 from his 1962 homonymous existentialist novel. Teshigahara, well-versed in traditional Japanese arts as ikebana, calligraphy, pottery, and painting, transposed the centuries-old fascination of sand from a classical religious and codified background into a lay, fluid, contemporary setting. Niki Junpei, amateur entomologist, visits a remote sandscape in order to collect new specimens. Trapped in a sand cave with a widow by the villagers, he is forced to dig every night for years, until he is completely stripped away of his previous social persona, and surrenders to his condition of captivity. In the end, even the opportunity for freedom appears as an absurd mirage, as a return to “freedom” would actually represent a second form of captivity, regulated and institutionalized by societal rules.

In Woman in the Dunes, the fine and fluid grain of the sand becomes a crucial component of the cinematography. A foggy sandscape is the ideal environment for the setting of an existentialist drama that plays with the concepts of human freedom and social persona. Although the movie, as the novel by Abe, is pervaded by an aura of dystopian pessimism that is generally alien to Japanese culture, evidently reminiscent of the writings of Kafka, Camus and Sartre, existential concerns about time and identity are traditional problems of Japanese philosophy. From this perspective, the oppressive, pervasive presence of sand generates a vivid contrast with the feverish image of Tokyo, frequently evoked throughout the movie. The mobile,
electric dynamism of a metropolitan landscape ideally opposes the still, unchanging neutrality of sand.

Yet, a city is an image of instability that arises from a firm ground, whereas a landscape appears as an unchanging, timeless environment that nonetheless springs from an unescapable, totalizing instability. The reiterated shots among the dunes abstract the individuals from the meticulous construction of their social persona, opposing the contextual network of social bounds and moral conventions to the abrupt vacuity of a non-social, uncontextual isolation. As in ancient Shinto shrines, sandy terrains mark a liminal space in which all the rules of society and religion are suspended. Time is not anymore parcelled out, allocated and programmed by institutionalized relationships of power; the mathematical tyranny of the clock is banned, and the passing of time is only modulated through the blowing of costal breezes over the dunes. In this sense, sand constitutes “a direct time-image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced.”

THE WHITE SAND OF BONSEKI 盆石 AND CORRELATIVE THINKING

Sand is often employed in the composition of bonseki 盆石, miniature landscapes that feature beautiful-shaped rocks (石) over flat trays (盆). With the aid of mineral stones, coloured sands, torii gates, spoons, feathers and other tools, the gardener of bonseki can create mountain sceneries, hills, even seashores and luxuriant landscape gardens with water patterns. It is unclear when exactly the tradition of bonseki originated, but specific techniques and styles were already established well before the Muromachi Period (1336–1573), when the habit of working on miniature gardens was already spread among common people.

In the fourteenth century, the Rinzai monk and poet Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1347) wrote an important treatise on miniature landscape gardening, collected in his anthology of prose and poetry Saihokushū 济北集. In introducing the concept of miniature landscape, he presents it as a serious play that he conceived at a late stage of his life:

What I liked to do for fun when I was a child was to gather up sacks of stones and pile them on a table near the window high and free. When I reached middle age, I felt ashamed of doing this and so I stopped, becoming like any other ordinary person, obtuse like a brick. Finally, I have reached decrepit old age, and I particularly dislike the sound of children’s games in the summer. So I had the children gather up stones in the corner of the wall. I brushed them off and washed them, preparing a green celadon tray with white sand on the bottom. The result was poetry that would lighten your heart. The landscape lent a coolness to the air and dispelled the heart.

It is interesting to note that the structure of this passage is similar to the famous saying of Qingyuan Weixin 青原惟信, a Buddhist monk who lived in the ninth century:

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and rivers as rivers. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and rivers are not rivers. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it is just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and rivers once again as rivers.

The conception of bonseki is ingrained within a threefold dialectic, expressing the culmination of a process that differs from both the aimlessness of a child’s play and the gravity of adulthood. In playing with imitating the landscape, the bonseki gardener makes manifest an implicit analogy between microcosm and macrocosm, exposing the relevance of “correlative thinking.” For “correlative thinking,” I intend, following Angus Charles Graham, David L. Hall, and Roger T. Ames, a philosophical and aesthetic strategy that proceeds by metaphorical associations rather than analytical definitions, relying on the ambiguity of language for the production of meaning, rather than its vocation for clarity.

Within this framework, sand stands for the inert, amorphous background on the basis of which all forms manifest and arise, the unchanging law of change. The “white sand” described by Kokan Shiren may also be regarded as an additional exemplification of the “beauty of the blank” (yohaku no bi 余白の美), an aesthetic ideal widely adopted in sumi-e paintings, where empty or negative spaces are employed to convey a sense of movement and ephemerality. This way, the vast blank gives form to the formless flowing of the universe, in perpetual and imperceptible motion, even when the appearance of things is divergent; in the paradoxical words of Dōgen 道元, “the mountains are always walking.” Once more, the dull neutrality of the sand element unveils the fourth invisible dimension of reality: time.

NOTES

3. For instance, Hamilton and Whitehouse, “Phenomenology in Practice”; Howard, Thompson, and Waterton, eds., The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies; Klaver, “Phenomenology on (the) Rocks”; Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape; and Tilley, The Materiality of Stone.
4. For instance, Ogawa, “Qi and Phenomenology of Wind”; and Dicks, “A Phenomenological Approach to Water in the City.”
5. It should, at least by the field of environmental philosophy: Sand is a finite resource and its progressive depletion constitutes a serious environmental concern. For more on this, see Wesley and Puffer, “The End of Sand.”
6. Of course, with the exception of the renowned phenomenon of Sahara’s “singing” dunes.
7. The term derives from Greek ichor, the supposedly ethereal blood of the gods, and petros, “stone.”
9. Parkes, “The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden,” 92. Since early times, the Buddhist tradition theorized the co-existence (and paradoxical coincidence) of conventional and ultimate reality. The conventional reality is where phenomenal things abide; the ultimate reality means to regard all things as emptiness. The two are opposed, but complementary; in
Nāgārjuna’s words, “Without a foundation in the conventional truth the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught. Without understanding the significance of the ultimate, liberation is not achieved” (Garfield, The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, 296). East Asian Buddhism reiterates the necessity to detach from the illusory nature of conventional reality, while simultaneously avoiding to take a fixed abode in the blissful emptiness of ultimate reality. In fact, psychological detachment must be accompanied by ethical commitment, fulfilling the vow to help all sentient beings in their path to liberation.


11. Mansfield, Japanese Stone Gardens, 17. At that stage, it is possible that sand was also an implicit reference to the cosmogonic myth of Japan, the union of two deities who created small islands with a spear (Nitschke, Japanese Gardens, 14). After the creation of the islands, the couple gave birth to several kami, among whom Iwashihime-no-kami, a divine princess who was intimately related to the element of sand (Coulter and Turner, eds., Encyclopedia of Ancient Deities, 246).


EXTENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Karesansui Gardens as Exemplars of Virtue

Julianne N. Chung

YORK UNIVERSITY

JNCUONG@YORKU.CA

ABSTRACT

While many traditions recognize certain human beings as exemplars of virtue—that is, as models for a good or flourishing human life—less commonly discussed are traditions that recognize non-human entities as exemplars of this kind. In this paper, I engage in a case study of forms of exemplarism suggested by conversations regarding karesansui, or Japanese dry landscape, gardens. To do this, in Part I, I explain in detail relevant aspects of Ian James Kidd’s account of a cosmic, non-human, mode of emulation facilitated by the Zhuangzi. Then, in Part II, I explore how karesansui gardens can be interpreted as facilitating a cosmic mode of emulation. Finally, in Part III, I conclude by very briefly explicating four questions of note to make way for intriguing further discussion.

***

In his paper, “Following the Way of Heaven”: Exemplarism, Emulation, and Daoism,” Ian James Kidd notes that while many traditions recognize certain human beings as exemplars of virtue—that is, as models for a good or flourishing human life—less commonly discussed are traditions that recognize non-human entities as exemplars...
I. KIDD ON COSMIC EMULATION

As Kidd reports, the idea that there are exemplars, which function as living symbols to inspire and guide others in the pursuit of a good or flourishing life—or exemplarism, as it might be called—has been most extensively explored and developed in contemporary Anglo-analytic philosophical discourse by Linda Zagzebski. A central concept in Zagzebski’s account of the exemplarist process is emulation: “a form of imitation in which the emulated person is perceived as a model in some respects.”1 Briefly, to emulate x is to take x as a model for oneself through active imitation of some or all of x’s qualities as a way of acquiring them for oneself.2

According to Kidd, consulting other traditions that include exemplars indicates a feature of Zagzebski’s exemplarism that invites attention: the exemplars she mentions are human beings (whether historical or contemporary, or legendary or fictional characters). Some might wonder what models of virtue there could be other than human beings (real or fictional) whose life or conduct invites admiration and sustains emulation. However, we find, in some traditions, a range of objects of emulation—human and non-human.

Specifically, Kidd is interested in non-human objects insofar as they can be identified with what he terms the ground or source of reality, or of the world as experienced.4 He proposes to call this form of emulation (borrowing a term from the Stoics) a cosmic mode of emulation (again, cosmic emulation for short). An aspirant is engaged in cosmic emulation when they emulate the ultimate ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced, whose qualities—when embodied by human beings—manifest as some form of excellence. Certain virtues of human exemplars are, as a result, at bottom emulations of qualities of the cosmos, or of whatever is understood (within the terms of the relevant traditions) as the ultimate ground, source, or nature of the world.5

To demonstrate the existence of this form of emulation, Kidd explores how the Zhuangzi can be read as facilitating it. As Kidd describes the practice, emulation requires a substantive process of modeling, where the qualities of the emulated indicate the characteristics that the emulator aims to exemplify. Objects of emulation are models, although not necessarily total models, complete in every detail. What matters, on Kidd’s view, is that an aspirant aims to exemplify some partial or general set of qualities, or a “character.”6 This prompts three questions:

i. What is the ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced, according to the Zhuangzi?

ii. What are its relevant qualities, or what is its “character”—and how might we attune ourselves to it?

iii. How does the Zhuangzi facilitate emulation of these relevant qualities, or this “character”?

Concerning question i, one suggestion is Dao (“[the] Way”), partially explicable as, for example, “the totality . . . [e.g., of objects, events, and processes] that constitute[s] the cosmos” or “the ultimate metaphysical entity . . . responsible for the way the world is and the way that it ought to be.”7 This raises a difficulty relevant to addressing question ii, as Dao is—at least in the case of texts now classified as “Daoist”—commonly taken to be ineffable. Yet, while Dao may not be literally describable, it is often thought that non-literal speech can play various roles in helping aspirants to attune themselves to it. For instance, Dao is frequently spoken of in terms of spontaneity—a word that points or gestures toward a quality that can be emulated by suitably attuned human beings. On Kidd’s approach, spontaneity (ziran, which can be more literally translated as “self-so-ness”) is among the primary Daoist virtues and the most important characteristic of zhenren (“true” or “genuine persons”) and Dao alike. Kidd notes that this proposal fits not only a variety of textual evidence well, but also remarks from contemporary commentators such as Edward G. Slingerland, who claims that being “fully in harmony” with Dao requires living in a way that is “completely spontaneous.”8

It is important to stress that the type of spontaneity admired and aspired toward is not that of a passionate impulsivity or thoughtless reactiveness. Rather, spontaneity in the relevant sense is a supple responsiveness, apt to be spoiled by processes of analyzing possibilities, weighing options, and applying rules.10 Thus, although spontaneity in European-influenced traditions is commonly understood as being associated with features like subjectivity, willfulness, caprice, and emotional excess, as a variety of commentators have explained, the opposite can be said of the sort of spontaneity under discussion here. Indeed, there is a sense in which this sort of spontaneity can be thought of as representing the highest degree of features like objectivity, sensitivity, stability, and equanimity. For, while exemplifying it, one is thought to act in accordance with something larger than oneself: in this case, Dao.11
Finally, regarding question iii, Kidd’s study is rich with a number of suggestions regarding ways in which the Zhuangzi facilitates emulation of Dao’s spontaneity. One concerns its illustrative accounts of individuals who are acutely concentrated on what they are doing. As he writes, “Cook Ding, for instance, ‘comes to a halt’ at ‘gnarled joints of bone,’ relying not on ‘mere skill,’ but the ‘promptings of the spirit,’” until—suddenly—the ox lies ‘dismembered’ at his feet. Asked to explain his preternatural skill, the old man swimming in a pool under a waterfall, too turbulent even for the fish, replies that he ‘had no way,’ but would simply ‘enter with the inflow and emerge with the outflow,’ to ‘follow the Way of the water,’ rather than try to ‘impose’ his own way upon it.” Kidd also argues that we find more specific parallels between figuratively rendered attributes of Dao and a set of virtues of spontaneity (in the relevant sense), including virtues of impartiality, constancy, and being nourishing; virtues that the Zhuangzi can also be read as promoting, along with a set of emulative practices, including the embracing of you (“wandering”) and xinzhai (“fasting of the heart-mind”). Briefly, on Kidd’s account, embracing “wandering”—the capacity to go beyond one’s own ways of experiencing and engaging with the world and to take on alternative perspectives—enables the sage to “see through to the way things fit together” and thereby to emulate the impartiality of Dao, which has “... no scheme of ‘likes or dislikes’—and the sage can therefore appreciate that ‘true Virtuous resides in the Heavenly,’ not in the projects and activities of the human world.” Further, “fasting of the heart-mind” prepares one to embrace such “wandering” by emptying or ridding the mind of tightly held plans, purposes, and preconceptions.

II. KARESANUI GARDENS AND COSMIC EMULATION

i. A Very Brief History of Karesansui

With the above outline of an example of a cosmic mode of emulation in hand, we can now turn to the question of whether other traditions incorporate cosmic modes of emulation, too. Specifically, as noted above, I will engage in a case study of forms of exemplarity suggested by conversations regarding karesansui, or Japanese dry landscape, gardens. To do this, I will begin by providing a very brief history. While gardening—considered as a fully developed artistic practice—is widely considered to have been imported to Japan from China or Korea in the sixth or seventh century CE, several aspects of Japanese garden design have prehistoric as well as Shintō origins. One that is germane to our explorations here concerns teien, among the most commonly used Japanese terms for “garden.” As Marc P. Keane, renowned landscape architect and expert on Japanese garden design, explains, “teien” originally represented two opposing characteristics: wildness and control. This is because it is a compound term that, when composed using the writing system imported from China in the sixth century CE, employs two characters: one that can be pronounced as “tei,” meaning “territory” (that is, an uncontrolled area of wild nature), and the other that can be pronounced as “en,” meaning “bordered field” (that is, a controlled area of nature cultivated for human purposes). Thus, “teien” not only refers to gardens, but also expresses a guiding principle of Japanese garden design: Japanese gardens aim to achieve a balance between both wild and controlled nature. Indeed, according to Keane, “it is in the exquisite balance of these two fundamental qualities that the Japanese garden finds a universal voice. Siting quietly on the veranda of a temple and looking out into the light of the garden, one can still feel the sensory world of the Jōmon period [a prehistoric era of Japanese history] although it has been transformed through the controlled art of the gardener into a spiritual, aesthetic, or even intellectual expression.”

Just how gardeners effect such distinct expressions—as well as how they are related to each other—depends on the style of Japanese garden under consideration, of which there are many. Here, I will focus on just one: karesansui, or Japanese dry landscape. Literally, kare-san-sui can be translated as “dry-mountain-water” and alludes to these gardens’ composition, which includes abstracted, “dry” scenes of mountains and water depicted using other natural elements, such as stones, sand, and moss, and without the aid of real water. Because of their associations with rocks, and Zen Buddhism, these gardens are commonly referred to as “Japanese rock gardens” or “Zen gardens,” especially in European contexts.

On Keane’s account, karesansui gardens had existed during the Heian period (794–1185 CE) as elements of larger gardens (the term “karesansui” even appears in the Sakuteiki, widely considered to be the oldest extant Japanese gardening manual, dated circa 1000–1100 CE). However, it was not until the late Muromachi period (1333–1568 CE) that the classic dry landscape garden—in which a relatively small courtyard is given over entirely to such a composition—developed into an independent form. These gardens, in contrast to those that preceded them, are also appropriately called kanshō-niwa (“contemplation gardens”), as they are typically designed to be viewed from a nearby hall—often part of a Zen temple—rather than entered into. To this extent, they are primarily explored mentally rather than physically. Although karesansui gardens are often thought of as being used for meditation, using them as a focal point for long episodes of zazen (“seated meditation”) is difficult. On the one hand, their expanses of white sand or gravel are often too bright to be comfortably viewed for extended periods during the day. But, on the other hand, at night it is too dark to see the gardens at all.

Despite their being rarely used for extended periods of zazen, karesansui gardens relate to practical and theoretical ethics—Buddhist and otherwise—in other ways. The way that I will explore below concerns the possibility that karesansui gardens can be interpreted as facilitating a cosmic mode of emulation in virtue of exemplifying nothingness or emptiness. The choice of which of these two notions to employ will depend on the specific philosophers whose ideas one is considering; philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō often focus on conceptions of “nothingness,” but others prefer to use conceptions of “emptiness” instead. And while conceptions of “nothingness” are often similar...
ii. Emptiness and Emulation

To explore how karesansui gardens exemplify nothingness or emptiness—as well as how to interpret “nothingness” and “emptiness” in this context, and how engagement with them can be related to a cosmic mode of emulation—I will draw on the work of Robert E. Carter, who in his book, *The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation*, provides an exceptionally detailed and insightful exploration of a variety of Japanese art forms and their ethical import. Citing Nishida, he opens his chapter on “Landscape Gardening as Interconnectedness” thus:

Nishida emphasizes that Western art has form as its focus, whereas Eastern art expresses both form and the formless. He refers to the formless aspect as the “background” of things, and this background “is an integral part” of art worthy of the name. Using a sculptor’s image, he imagines “all great art” as a relief “cut out of the marble of eternity,” as Michelangelo released David from the stone in which he was held fast. In more formal philosophical language, the background is “absolute nothingness,” that formless, quality-less “no-thing” out of which all forms arise and to which they will all return. Nothingness is the creative matrix which exists prior to form, and like the eye which can see all things seeable but which cannot see itself, so nothingness is the origin of all form (things), but itself is formless. The formless cannot be seen (directly), and yet, for the discerning mind and heart, it can be seen (indirectly) in every thing. Nothingness is eternity at “the back of things.”

Regarding gardens specifically, later in the chapter Carter continues:

The more austere and remarkably abstract Zen rock gardens have come to symbolize the uniqueness of the Japanese perspective on gardens. Whether one takes the most abstract rock garden of them all, at Ryōan-ji, in Kyoto, which consists of fifteen large rocks emerging out of a “sea” or “background” of (formless) sand, or more complex “dry rock paintings” which mimic Chinese landscape paintings (Daisen-in, interior garden), or a meditation garden which consists only of a field of sand raked into two small Fuji-shaped cones (Daisen-in, exterior garden), there is nothing quite like these expressions of the formless and the formed in other cultural traditions. If you will imagine the two cone-shaped forms emerging out of the sand background, each composed of the very sand which represents formlessness, then you may also understand how “empty” (in the sense of temporary and fragile) forms really are. A quick swipe of a rake or an arm, and the cones are gone, returned to the background from which they came. Moreover, the monk-gardener can quickly re-create the two cones, or many more if he chooses, by giving shape to the background sand once more. What becomes evident in this example is that the foreground cones are of the same stuff as the background whole—form is emptiness, emptiness form; or, in more traditional Buddhist terms, nirvāna is samsāra, samsāra is nirvāna.

As submitted above, we have in these passages the beginnings of answers to both of the following questions:

- How might we interpret “nothingness” and “emptiness” in this context?
- How do karesansui gardens exemplify nothingness or emptiness?

I will answer each of these questions in turn. Before I do this, however, I should point out that answers to these questions can be further built upon to respond to questions similar to those discussed regarding the Zhuangzi in section 1. They are:

i. What is the ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced, in the cultural context germane to karesansui gardens?

ii. What are its relevant qualities, or what is its “character”—and how might we attune ourselves to it?

iii. How do karesansui gardens facilitate emulation of these relevant qualities, or this “character”?

Regarding questions a, i, and ii, we can begin by noticing that both “nothingness” and “emptiness” in this context need not be interpreted as referring to anything like a total void. What they might be interpreted as referring to instead is controversial; as a starting point, we might interpret “nothingness” as gesturing toward something (or, perhaps better, “something”) formless but capable of giving rise to a variety of different and changing forms. It is this sense employed by Carter’s talk of nothingness as a “creative matrix”—an open space of potentialities that can give rise to forms, partly through the meaningful actions of human beings. Likewise, “emptiness” can be interpreted similarly, as suggested by Carter’s allusion to a famous line from the *Heart Sūtra*, a Buddhist classic: “form is emptiness, emptiness form.” A common way of interpreting this passage proceeds approximately as follows. All forms in the world are empty of any independent, substantial self-nature or “own being.” This is because all forms are held to come into being in “interdependent origination”: everything, including the ego, is thought to be interconnected and in flux.

However, as Bret W. Davis explains, if the movement of negation were to stop at a one-sided negation of being (i.e., at negation of the illusory independent, substantial reality of things including the ego), the idea of “emptiness” would not itself be emptied. That would leave us with either a pessimistic nihilism or, ironically, a reified view of emptiness itself. These are what
Buddhist traditions often refer to as “śūnyatā-sickness” (or, in Japanese: くびょう). Rather, “emptiness” must be understood to dynamically negate the opposition of being and (relative, though not absolute) nothingness. Davis sees this as “an explicit return—through a ‘great negation’ of a reified misunderstanding of being—to a ‘great affirmation’ of a non-reified understanding of being. ‘Emptiness’ thoroughly understood is nothing separate from or opposed to ‘being’ properly understood.” Forms are held to only exist as they do in virtue of being empty in this way: empty of own-being, they can be formed and reformed into a wondrous variety of things—a fluid, quicksilver world of possibilities. We can therefore see that on this interpretation, “nothingness” or “emptiness” can be understood as both the ground or source of the world as experienced, as well as its nature or “character.”

Regarding questions b and iii, we can also see the beginnings of answers in the quoted passages from Carter, to repeat:

If you will imagine the two cone-shaped forms emerging out of the sand background, each composed of the very sand which represents formlessness, then you may also understand how ‘empty’ (in the sense of temporary and fragile) forms really are. A quick swipe of a rake or an arm, and the cones are gone, returned to the background from which they came. Moreover, the monk-gardener can quickly re-create the two cones, or many more if he chooses, by giving shape to the background sand once more.

As Carter continues, what becomes evident in this example is that the foreground cones—and, by extension, all things in the world—are of the same stuff as the background whole, and are not distinct from it. Rather, the two are interdependent and, in a sense, one. Hence, we have a way in which karesansui gardens can be considered to facilitate cosmic emulation of nothingness or emptiness: they can be interpreted as artistic representations of the qualities or “character” of the ground or source of being such that they inform or remind us—in a visceral manner—that all things, including ourselves, are interdependent and, in a sense, one, too.

It should therefore be emphasized that karesansui gardens convey these insights not only in a way that might inspire belief, but also in a way that might inspire appreciation. If all that karesansui gardens did to facilitate cosmic emulation of nothingness or emptiness is inform or remind us of certain philosophical claims, one might justifiably wonder why we ought to bother looking to them for help in this regard. Why not just do philosophy instead? Thankfully, such gardens do much more, however: they provide affectively rich perspectives that engender aesthetic experiences and appreciations of the cosmic or even the divine. This is significant for at least two reasons.

First, as Brian J. Bruya has argued, a comprehensive and up-to-date theory of action should accept aesthetics as prior to ethics. Roughly, this is because, developmentally, an action must be practiced and habituated before it can be executed in a well-timed and accurate manner. Whether an action is executed appropriate to one’s intentions necessarily involves an aesthetic judgment regarding timing, proportion, speed, force, accuracy, and so on. Applying his argument to this case, we might speculate that one cannot effectively act in a way that recognizes nothingness or emptiness unless one aesthetically experiences and appreciates them to some extent prior to so acting.

Second, since nothingness and emptiness are both held to be without (independent, substantial) form, they arguably cannot be literally described. If this is so, it might not be possible to have any true beliefs about them. But, even if so, it might nonetheless be possible to recognize and aesthetically experience and appreciate them, and hence to emulate them, even if one cannot express in literal language what precisely one is emulating.

This suggests another way in which karesansui gardens facilitate cosmic emulation of nothingness or emptiness. To the extent that they inspire aesthetic appreciations of the cosmic or divine, they can provide us not only with insight regarding the ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced, but also with motivation to emulate it. This jibes with yet another remark from Nishida quoted in Carter, who writes:

Nishida . . . describes Japanese culture’s most characteristic feature as moving from the subject to the object—object here refers to the environment, or any feature of the environment. And this movement from subject to object requires: “negating the self and becoming the thing itself; becoming the thing itself to see; becoming the thing itself to act. To empty the self and see things, for the self to be immersed in things, ‘no-mindedness’ (mushin) [in Zen Buddhism] or effortless acceptance of the grace of Amida (jin-en-hōn) [in Pure Land Buddhism]—these, I believe, are the states we Japanese strongly yearn for. . . . The essence of the Japanese spirit must be to become one in things and in events. It is to become one at that primal point in which there is neither self nor others.”

Applied to the case at hand, we might think that karesansui gardens facilitate cosmic emulation of nothingness or emptiness not only because they can inform, remind, or inspire, but also because they can unify. As Nishida claims elsewhere: “To say that we know a thing simply means that the self unites with it. When one sees a flower, the self has become the flower.” Thus, we might also say that in experiencing and appreciating karesansui gardens, we are the gardens, and the gardens are us. Once we realize this fully, we are in a position to best emulate the ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced, and to arrange all of life’s contrasting aspects into a rich and variegated whole-in-flux.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It may not come as a surprise to find a plausible example of a mode of cosmic emulation in a tradition so influenced
by Zen—and hence, by Daoism—given Kidd’s account. Nonetheless, it is my hope that this case study provides additional supporting evidence for the existence of philosophically interesting cosmic modes of emulation and helps to raise intriguing questions for further discussion. I will conclude by briefly explicating four.

First, if Dao, nothingness, and emptiness can only be figuratively, metaphorically, or otherwise non-literally characterized, might it nonetheless be possible to literally emulate them? If not, is it possible to non-literally emulate them instead? Indeed, one might think that there is a sense in which much emulation is “non-literal,” to the extent that it involves less literal copying than it does, perhaps just for starters, analogical or associative extension and application. Because of this, considering cosmic modes of emulation might make it easier for us to conceive of and to explore non-human exemplars of virtue more broadly construed, as it illuminates the possibility that we can conceive of figurative, metaphorical, or otherwise non-literal emulation, possibly alongside literal emulation.

Second, do these case studies suggest that not only aesthetic experience but also aesthetic appreciation is required in order to effectively engage in cosmic emulation—not only in light of Bruya’s remarks concerning the possibility that aesthetics is prior to ethics, but also in light of the possibility that Dao, nothingness, and emptiness cannot be literally described? If so, what are the precise contours of such experiences, or instances of appreciation?

Third, what are some other examples of art or aesthetic experiences that can facilitate emulation, cosmic or otherwise? Further, what, if anything, can these examples teach us about the value of art and the aesthetic? Specifically, in what ways can these examples be brought into current conversations about whether and how art and other aesthetic phenomena can have cognitive value of a meaningful sort—questions that are, as yet, important but far from settled?

Fourth, do these case studies suggest that cosmic emulation is of the deepest priority, at least in some traditions, as ultimately all other exemplars of virtue that we might seek to emulate are themselves emulating the ground, source, or nature of the world as experienced? If so, might we expect an account of how all supposed human virtues fundamentally stem from cosmic emulation? Concerning human virtues purportedly facilitated by karesansui gardens in particular, suggestions by leading contemporary Japanese landscape architect Shunmyō Masuno, in an interview with Carter, include gentleness, respectfulness, unselfishness, compassionateness, and lack of concern with reputation or position. Indeed, in his commentary, Carter himself explicates aspects of Masuno’s reflections as: “Ethics must take a ‘cosmic perspective,’ rather than a more limited perspective;” a cosmic perspective that, I propose, engaging karesansui gardens can help us to cultivate via cosmic emulation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I would like to thank Ian James Kidd for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper. As is too often the case, I could not do justice to all of his excellent comments here, but I nonetheless could not be more grateful for them. Special thanks are also due to A. Minh Nguyen for inviting me to contribute this paper to the issue and for his patience and support as I have worked to compose it. Finally, I dedicate this paper to the memory of my friend, Daniel Eduard Harmesen. He was as close to a zenren as anyone I have ever known. Also, if anyone could emulate the ground or source of being or exemplify Daoist spontaneity with any regularity, it was him. What an exemplar he was, and always will be, for me.

NOTES
1. 32. Carter, "Following the Way of Heaven": Exemplarism, Emulation, and Daoism," 1, 3.
7. Chris Fraser, "Wandering the Way: A Eudaimonistic Approach to the Zhuāngzi," 546, fn. 16.
15. Kidd, "Following the Way," 9. As Kidd notes, since the ancient Chinese did not distinguish the cognitive and affective, xīn—"heart-mind"—includes our tendencies to classify and evaluate, to "affirm things as right and some others as wrong," our evaluations and interpretations.
20. For more detail, see Bret W. Davis, "The Kyoto School."
23. Davis, "The Kyoto School."
24. Davis, "The Kyoto School."
25. I would like to thank Ian James Kidd for this way of putting the point.
29. Carter, The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation, 64.
31. I would like to thank Melanie Coughlin for this way of putting the point.
Nishida and Marion on the Beautiful: Resonance and Dissonance

Gerald Cipriani
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND GALWAY
GERALD.CIPRIANI@NUIGALWAY.IE

ABSTRACT

Both Nishida Kitarō and Jean-Luc Marion, two philosophers from different cultural traditions, reflected on the nature of the experience of the beautiful. While Nishida, at the origin of the Kyoto School, develops a critical syncretism from aspects of Eastern thought and Western philosophy, Marion works within the fields of Western history of ideas, theology, and phenomenology. While the former initially brings to light the primacy of the Zen Buddhist conception of “no-self” (muga 無我) in aesthetic experience, the latter stresses the phenomenal nature of the beautiful—that which makes itself “manifest” (elle se manifeste). Nishida formulated his conception of the beautiful in an early short text, “An Explanation of Beauty” (Bi no setsumei 美の説明, 1900), that predated more elaborate epistemologies on the aesthetic and creativity such as Art and Morality (Geijutsu to dotoku 芸術と道徳, 1923). Key aspects of Marion's conception of the beautiful are encapsulated in “The Phenomenon of Beauty” (Le phénomène de beauté, 2016), whereas other texts such as “The Idol or the Radiance of the Painting” (L’idole ou l’éclat du tableau, 2001) address aesthetic matters also from other angles and in greater details. Far from suggesting any polarizing comparative analysis East-West or an all-encompassing study of their respective aesthetics for that matter, this short essay reflects on the resonances and dissonances between the two aesthetic truths pertaining to muga and phénomène. This may subsequently contribute to a more holistic conception of the relational paradigm of the beautiful.

***

Bringing two philosophers from different traditions into dialogue is always a perilous exercise, not so much because of potential incommensurability (after all, this is how differences are revealed), but more because the interlocutors may be made to speak in a way and say things they would not have chosen or endorsed. But then, does not this risk concern all interpretive endeavors regardless of the number of speakers, including when dialogue takes place “only” between reader and text? The following notes should be read as suggestions for more thorough research on the junctions and worlds apart between Nishida's and Marion’s understanding of the nature and fundamental of the experience of the beautiful.

Nishida’s conception of the experience of the beautiful offers an interesting instance of critical syncretic philosophy so characteristic of what Kyoto School philosophers subsequently elaborated. In his 1900 short—albeit important—text “An Explanation of Beauty” (Bi no setsumei 美の説明), the young Nishida highlights the correlation between Kant’s conception of “disinterested pleasure” from his Critique of Judgement (Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1790) that specifies the percipient’s attitude in the experience of beauty and the Zen Buddhist sense of “selfless-ness” or “no-self” (muga 無我), sometimes also translated as “ecstasy.” These initial reflections precede his first major philosophical work, An Enquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyū善の研究, 1911), where “pure experience” (junsui keiken 純粹経験) transpires as some self-constituting fundamental. Nishida subsequently developed more voluntarist approaches in his Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awakening (Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei 自覚に於ける道徳と自覚, 1917) and Art and Morality (Geijutsu to dotoku 芸術と道徳, 1923) under the influences, among others, of Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s idea of Tathandlung (“fact-act,” a liberation from objecthood that Nishida sees as a source of creativity) and Konrad Fiedler’s “bodily” artistic creation understood as an expressive and therefore active form of “vision” from his On the Origin of Artistic Activity (Der Ursprung der Künstlerischen Tätigkeit, 1887). Both “no-self” and “the body” remained in one way or another guiding principles of Nishida’s aesthetics, whether in his idea of artistic creativity as a form of active “self-awakening” (jikaku 自覚) that expresses some conception of absolute will, or in “Artistic Creation as Act of Historical Formation” (Rekishiteki keisei sayo to shite no geijutsuteki sosaku 歴史的形成作用としての芸術的創作, 1941) whereby art actively takes part in the self-transformation of the world and its history, or in
shorter texts such as “The World of Art Objects” (Geijutsu no taishōkai, 芸術の対象界, 1919) and “The Beauty of Writing” (Sho no bi,書の美, 1930). It should be noticed at this stage that very often in Nishida’s writing on aesthetics the idea of “beauty” is implied when discussing “art” under the assumption that one of the functions of art is to express beauty.

In Marion, questions pertaining to broader issues of appearing and visibility in painting or through images, icons, idols, or the face run through a number of his works such as The Erotic Phenomenon: Six Meditations (Le phénomène érotique: Six méditations, 2003), The Crossing of the Visible (La croisée du visible, 1996), Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness (Étant donné: Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation, 1997), or Courbet ou la peinture à l’œil (2014). It is, however, in his essay “The Phenomenon of Beauty” (Le phénomène de beauté, 2018) that he encapsulates more specifically his conception of the experience of the beautiful in terms that echo, dissonate, as well as potentially complement, Nishida’s own formulation of beauty with muga as center of gravity.

First, let me turn to what Nishida initially says about beauty. The element of “disinterestedness” that Nishida identifies in the experience of the beautiful is by no means a disembodied psychological state. Nor is it understood from the sole perspective of the spectator as in Kant’s Critique of Judgement (with the exception of the sections on the “genius”). Moreover, muga certainly amounts to the self losing its substance as self, but not to the self giving way to the objective world. The no-self is initially a unity between self and world, or subject and object that makes the perceptual experience unmediated, embodied, or “pure” (junsui 純粹) as formulated in An Enquiry into the Good:

What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated by some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. . . . When one directly experiences one’s own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.

If the absence of discrimination and therefore “interest,” its particular kind of “pleasure,” and its ensuing ethical outlook constitute a point of convergence between Nishida’s and Kant’s characterizations of the experience of the beautiful, the sense of unity understood from the Zen perspective of “nothingness” (mu 無) obviously does not.

At the early stage of “An Explanation of Beauty,” which focuses specifically on beauty, Nishida argues against any conception of aesthetic experience understood as solely giving rise to selfish pleasure. Contra Henry Rutgers Marshall in his Pain, Pleasure, and Aesthetics (1894), the experience of beauty is more than a source of stable pleasure contrasted with the pleasure of the moment felt, for example, in the experience of the agreeable. In Art and Morality, the picture of the experience of the beautiful presented as pleasurable only is again presented as partial and ill-guided. Art (and therefore beauty in art), spirituality, and morality are rooted in no-self, albeit in different fashions. From one angle, however, the Kantian perspective remains: should beauty be only understood as a source of pleasure, the question of the relevance of its universality would be flawed.

This is not to say that, for Nishida, the experience of the beautiful is completely foreign to any notion of “pleasure” (kairaku 快楽); it is simply a special kind of pleasure that is out of reach of psychology-oriented enquiries. The sense of beauty (bikan 美感) is a feeling of being detached from the ego,1 indeed disinterested and without prejudice, as it amounts to looking at things as they are, as such. This is, of course, a well-known theme in Zen Buddhism and aesthetics whereby the experience of the beautiful does not amount to any judgement that would determine beauty or even correlate with what beauty is supposed to be. (Marion will mention the irrelevance of any attempt to recognize or establish some alleged congruence between “judgement” and “disclosure” of beauty. Beauty calls for unprejudiced intuition not only from the peripient but also from the artist through a fusion between subject and object.

The concept-less nature of the experience of the beautiful is also for Marion what characterizes it as “phenomenal.” He makes it clear from the outset: “beauty pertains to phenomenalité [for] beauty is to be seen, heard, touched; in short it makes itself manifest.” This bodily dimension of the phenomenon of beauty has had in the course of the history of Western philosophy its well-known detractors, above all Hegel, for whom beauty “becomes accessible to consciousness only through the concept.” In fact, not only is the sensible relegated to irrelevant instrumentality, but the “concept” also makes any understanding of the phenomenal nature of beauty impossible, as exemplified in Arthur Danto’s interpretation of Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes that find their alleged artistic worth elsewhere than in their “pure and simple appearing.” The Brillo Boxes find their alleged artistic worth in the concept, and the same applies to Duchamp’s ready-mades, Pop Art, and much of modern/postmodern art.

For Marion and contra Sartre, who in his own expression could not care less about “beauty as inner quality of the artwork,” beauty as phenomenon does matter. This is, however, no implicit way of embracing Heidegger’s ontological phenomenology that brought not only metaphysics to an end but also any conception of art as bearing any relevance to beauty. Marion evokes in this sense “the disqualification of beauty as value on the same footing as the right, the good, unity, and even Being (hence par excellence, God).” To requalify beauty, we must acknowledge that there is also more to its mere phenomenal nature. And just as, for Nishida, the kenotic concept of muga (among others) is central to understanding the experience of the beautiful and implicitly its relevance to art, Marion defines beauty in terms of “maximum of the idol which cannot but be loved.”

Marion’s treatment of Kant’s aesthetics is also in some way akin to that of Nishida, in that both take and depart
from it when qualifying the experience of the beautiful. For Nishida, although disinterestedness is central to understanding the nature of aesthetic experience, one cannot ignore the side of the artist and, more precisely, creativity as enacting a paradigm, that of beauty, truth, and the good, hence his recourse to Fiedler’s aesthetics. Marion too sees in Kant a legitimate attempt at working out aesthetic judgement in the sense of being “conceptless” as, after all, we should not lose from sight the fact that the work of art (and therefore the beautiful when revealed through it) “can only make itself manifest in the absence of the concept.” Just as Nishida takes from Kant the fundamental of disinterestedness from the side of the percipient, Marion recalls that the one who experiences the beautiful cannot give a reason for it, whether based on “personal interest” or some “end.” Indeed, such an individual cannot figure out what beauty is by referring to a concept. But there is more to it. As Marion puts it, “beauty pertains to phenomenality.” As such, the experience of the beautiful is that of a phenomenon that cannot by nature or definition be comprehended by means of representation; neither “fore-seen” nor “pre-dicted” (pré-vu et pré-dit). There is no “a priori concept” that would impose its condition. On the contrary, the phenomenon of beauty imposes itself to the one who lets it “come into view as intuited” so that it “appears in its own right.” Beauty is experienced as such for it “expresses the full and authoritative way of appearing of particular phenomena.” To induce such “freedom of intuition without the mediation of the narrative or concept” is obviously not the only privilege of music; it was and has been, albeit less and less as Marion suggests, what defines the work of art in general in terms of the phenomenon of beauty. But, in all cases, what is at stake is a “deployment” whose appearing cannot be limited by the boundary of a concept, and which can become an “excessive power” when such “presentation without representation” overwhelms the percipient (as Marion recalls from Kant). And whether this “excess” of the appearing—a “saturated phenomenon” (phénomène saturé) as formulated in Being Given—over the recognizable can be handled depends indeed on the percipient’s disposition whose limit is a “maximum” that is reflected in what Marion calls the “idol” of the phenomenon of beauty:

We name this maximum, which is each time different and proper to each, its idol. The idol not only saturates the eye . . . but by bringing it to the precise limit of its last toleration with this visible extreme, the idol also shows its mirror. Inasmuch as the “idol” reflects this “maximum” when “saturating” the capability of the percipient’s “pure intuition,” it comes as no surprise that the “exemplary” phenomenon of beauty leaves a mark on the self. Moreover, the idol can “hurt the ego, even inflict a trauma,” albeit a pleasurable one. The mirroring dimension of the idol and its “excessive power” finds echo in Nishida’s Art and Morality, although Marion does not provide the same explicitly voluntarist interpretation so typical of Nishida’s second period of his philosophical life. Nishida defines the experience of the beautiful (again whether on the percipient’s or artist’s side) as creative will at work that mirrors itself—a recurring image of Buddhist inspiration throughout his work—in a moment of “self-awakening” of “absolute will.” The self who experiences beauty actively reflects itself—its “maximum” by negation, through self-emptying “pure intuition” (junsui chokkan 純粹直観)—and sees itself in the mirror of beauty. Moreover, as Marion highlights the “trauma” that the “idol” can inflict on the percipient, such is the “ecstatic” effect of the experience of beauty in Nishida. As Steve Odin recalls in his “Beauty as Ecstasy in the Aesthetics of Nishida and Schopenhauer,” muga should not be understood in nihilistic terms. No-self in Nishida, as well as other thinkers partly inspired by or representative of Zen, certainly does not correlate with ideas of acquainted aesthetic values such as symmetry and harmony; “beauty as ecstasy” is, however, creativity at work. The ecstatic beauty at stake is asymmetry and disharmony that overwhelm the self-emptying self, again implying a particular form of “pleasure.” The experience of the beautiful that amounts to no-self allows that which was aesthetically “unpleasant” to rise to “aesthetic pleasure.” The effect is that the fundamental of no-self in aesthetic experience is such that, for Nishida, “everything in life gives a sense of beauty.” At first glance, this contrasts with Marion’s assertion against contemporary “claims that beauty must incorporate ugliness, the despicable and evil, or, seemingly the opposite, that the canons of beauty in art need to be rejected.” There is, in fact, a profound resonance, precisely based on the kenotic dimension of Marion’s formulation of aesthetic experience: “since in the phenomenon of the beautiful, beauty is defined and distinguished as that maximum of the idol which cannot but be loved.”

Another resonance between Nishida and Marion can be found on what may be called their relational transformative conception of beauty. On many occasions and through his method, Nishida describes the experience of the beautiful and creativity in relation to each other whereby percipient, artist, work, and world are expressively enacting and transforming one another. Again, Nishida departs from Kant’s aesthetics that analyzes judgement vis-à-vis an artistic configuration assumed to be a separate “object.” If he found pertinent elements and concepts regarding the appreciative standpoint of the percipient in Kant’s Third Critique, these have to be related to the transformative nature of art expressed through the embodied action of the artist. With Nishida, the experience of the beautiful had to be understood from within a mutually inclusive conception of percipient and the creative act of the artist. As he explained in Art and Morality, beauty is no quality intrinsic to things like blue or red; beauty pertains to the percipient. But, at first glance, the creative act of the artist that must equally characterize beauty is not an aesthetic appreciation per se. In truth, the appreciation may well be itself a form of creative act just as the percipient may need to become an artist to experience the beautiful. Beauty is therefore conceived in relational terms or, more precisely, in some form of dialectical chiasm whereby judgement and the creative act intermingle with each other through a dynamic, mutually self-determining movement.
that implicates perceptive, artist, work, and, in later texts, “world.” Nishida explains that not only expression excludes any conception of static object, but aesthetic judgment itself also cannot be conceived separately from an acting creative subject. To illustrate his point further, he gives the example of beauty in nature that can only be actively perceived as such from within.

Echoing Marion’s “idols,” there is indeed a relational transformative power at work further developed in Nishida’s conception of the experience of the beautiful in his later texts. In “Artistic Creation as Act of Historical Formation,” Nishida explores the “acting intuition” (koiteki chokkan 行為的直観) of the artist who intuitively enacts the transformation of a world that is no longer seen as object outside of the self—a concept developed in “Acting Intuition” (Koiteki chokkan 行為的直観, 1937) and “The Standpoint of Active Intuition” (Koiteki chokkan no tachiba 行為的直観の立場, 1935). And, again, the formative act is chiasmic: the historical formation of the world unfolds through the artistic creation of the self, which is in turn transformed by the world.

A last note, then, on the saturated phenomenon of beauty that can only be loved: perhaps Marion expresses a fundamental dissonance with what Nishida saw as a fundamental dissonance with “Occidental culture.”

Obviously, there is a great deal to esteem in the dazzling development of Occidental culture which made form into being and formation into the good, and a great deal to be learned from it. But is there not something that lies concealed in the ground of the Oriental culture that has nourished our forebears for thousands of years, something like seeing the form of the formless or hearing the voice of the voiceless? Our hearts never cease in its pursuit; what I want to do is give it a philosophical basis.

The form of the formless, the voice of the voiceless, may well be expressed in Marion through the language of Being, albeit phenomenologically.

**NOTES**

21. Nishida, Geijutsu to dotoku, 10.3.
27. Nishida, Geijutsu to dotoku, 1.4.
28. Nishida, Geijutsu to dotoku, 1.1.

---

**A Distinction between Art and Religion in the Aesthetics of Nishida, Schopenhauer, and Early Indian Buddhism**

Steve Odin

**UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA**

**STEVEO@HAWAII.EDU**

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I clarify how a distinction between art and religion in the modern Japanese aesthetics of Nishida Kitarō was influenced by the post-Kantian philosophy of Schopenhauer. Following Schopenhauer, Nishida asserts that an aesthetic experience of beauty in art is an ecstasy of the moment, while religious experience culminates in eternal ecstasy. Moreover, I argue that discoveries at the ancient artistic wonder in India known as the Ajanta Caves dating from the second century BCE, together with
scholarship about the Mulasaravastivada sect of Buddhism associated with Ajanta, suggest that the kernel of this distinction between art and religion established by the modern aesthetics of Schopenhauer and Nishida, was already present in the worldview of early Indian Buddhism.

INTRODUCTION
In a previous essay titled “Beauty as Ecstasy in the Aesthetics of Nishida and Schopenhauer,” I analyzed the Zen-colored aesthetic ideal of beauty as muga (無我) in its meaning as ecstasy articulated by Nishida Kitārō (西田幾多郎, 1870–1945), founder of the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy. It demonstrated how Nishida’s initial concept of beauty as ecstasy or selflessness has been profoundly influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) in post-Kantian German aesthetics. My thesis was that both Nishida and Schopenhauer develop an aesthetic of beauty as a function of “ecstasy” (Greek: ek-stasis), meaning to be transported beyond oneself in a state of rapture. I argued moreover that, following Schopenhauer, the Zen philosophy of Nishida asserts that an aesthetic experience of beauty is an ecstasy of the moment, while religious experience culminates in eternal ecstasy. Thus, for Nishida, as for Schopenhauer, the experience of beauty as ecstasy in art offers a fleeting glimpse of religious salvation. Following the tradition of early Indian Buddhism, Schopenhauer sought deliverance from suffering in the world of flux through mystical resignation, the paradigm for which is total renunciation of self in nothingness through attainment of nirvana.

Although Schopenhauer adopts much of what he understood to be early Indian Buddhism, he differs in the major role he assigns to art as the highest stage prior to realizing moksha or final liberation from suffering. It might therefore be argued that systematic philosophical discourse on the beauty of art in Nishida and Schopenhauer is a product of post-Kantian modern aesthetics, and not something to be found in the austere monastic worldview of early Indian Buddhism. From the standpoint of early Buddhism, aesthetic pleasure in the beauty of art can lead to egoistic desire, clinging, and attachment, which on the Buddhist wheel of life are the underlying causes of suffering. However, discoveries at the ancient artistic wonder in India known as the Ajanta Caves dating from the second century BCE, together with scholarship about the Mulasaravastivada sect of early Buddhism associated with Ajanta, suggest that the notion of art as an important stage on the path to nirvana was discoverable in early Buddhist teachings. The present writing is thus an addendum or postscript to my previous essay, explaining how the distinction between art and religion established by the post-Kantian modern aesthetics of Schopenhauer and Nishida, was already present, at least in seed form, in the worldview of early Indian Buddhism.

THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY IN NISHIDA’S BI NO SETSUMEI
Nishida Kitārō wrote Bi no setsumei (美の説明), “An Explanation of Beauty,” in 1900, eleven years before publishing his first major work Zen no kenkyū (善の研究), “An Inquiry into the Good.” Moreover, as one of his earliest philosophical essays, Nishida’s Bi no setsumei outlines an initial formulation of themes characteristic of what has come to be known as Nishida tetsugaku 西田哲学, or “Nishida philosophy.” Elsewhere I have published a fully annotated translation of Nishida’s Bi no setsumei. All references to Nishida’s essay will therefore be to my own translation.

After reviewing various Western definitions of beauty as pleasure and finding them inadequate, Nishida asks: What is the special kind of pleasure characterizing the aesthetic pleasure of beauty? At this point, he turns to the explanation developed by the tradition of German aesthetics inspired by Kant’s Critique of Judgment, wherein the sense of beauty was defined as consisting in a “disinterested pleasure”:

Then what are the characteristics of the type of pleasure that makes up the sense of beauty? . . . According to the explanation of German idealism since Kant, the sense of beauty is pleasure detached from the ego. It is a pleasure of the moment, when one forgets one’s own interest such as advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss. Only this muga is the essential element of beauty. . . . Therefore, if you want to obtain an authentic sense of beauty, you must confront things in the state of pure muga.5

Nishida here reformulates the Kantian sense of beauty as a disinterested pleasure, or artistic detachment from egoistic desires, in terms of a key philosophical notion of Zen Buddhism in Japan: namely, muga 無我 (Sanskrit: anātman), which can be translated in negative terms as “no-self,” “non-ego,” “self-effacement,” and in positive terms as “ecstasy.” As we know from Nishida’s journals and correspondence, Bi no setsumei was written during that period of his early years, extending from around 1896 to 1902, when he was most actively engaged in the intensive practice of Zen meditation.7 Although he makes no direct reference to Zen in this brief essay, nonetheless, his use of the signature Zen term muga to define the aesthetic experience of beauty is laden with traditional Zen associations.

THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOPENHAUER ON NISHIDA
It can be said that Schopenhauer was the first Western philosopher to appropriate the teachings of early Indian Buddhism. Schirmacher points out that due to the many profound insights Schopenhauer had discovered in common with the early Indian philosophy of Buddhism, he became known as “the Buddha of Frankfurt.” He adds: “Increasingly . . . we understand that behind the mask of a pessimist Schopenhauer was a Zen master and arguably the greatest mystic of the nineteenth century.”6 It should be emphasized that Nishida’s concept of beauty (bi, 美), as well the relationship to art (geijutsu, 芸術) and religion (shūkyō, 宗教), is clearly influenced by Schopenhauer, even if he does not make reference to the latter’s work. In her intellectual biography of Nishida titled Zen and Philosophy, Yusa Michiko reports that Nishida enthusiastically studied Schopenhauer during his early student years at Tokyo University.15 Likewise, James Heisig documents Nishida’s interest in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the absolute Will. He adds that Nishida’s writings on aesthetics was...
especially influenced by Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art: “Much of his interest in artistic expression also bears the mark of Schopenhauer’s thinking though again it is not cited.”

At this point I would like to elucidate the key distinction Nishida posits between art and religion in Bi no setsumei:

“The muga of beauty is the muga of the moment, whereas the muga of religion is eternal muga.”

Both art and religion are based on the impersonal feeling of muga as ecstasy, nonego, or selflessness. However, while the impersonal feeling of ecstasy arising from the beauty of art is a “muga of the moment” (ichiji no muga, 一時の無我), the divine ecstasy of religion is “eternal muga” (eikyū no muga, 永久の無我). Nishida thus conveys Schopenhauer’s aesthetic vision whereby there is a transition from the momentary release from suffering through delight in the beauty of art, to eternal salvation at the level of religious experience achieved by mystical resignation of the saints.

Nishida’s distinction between art and religion no doubt traces back Schopenhauer’s post-Kantian philosophy. In his magnum opus The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer holds that the best candidate for the summum bonum or highest good in life, is “the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true willlessness, which alone stills and silences forever the craving of the will.” It is through self-effacement by denial of will that one penetrates the Hindu “veil of Maya” as the principium individuationis or “principle of individuation.” Moreover, Schopenhauer explicitly states that what philosophy can express only negatively as “denial of the will,” can also be expressed positively as “rapture” or “ecstasy.” Elsewhere in the text he proclaims: “the mystics of all religions ultimately arrive at a kind of ecstasy.” Moreover, there are two ways to achieve blissful repose in ecstasy as denial of the will: (1) temporary ecstasy through an occasional moment of will-less and selfless disinterested aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful in art and nature; (2) eternal ecstasy through complete negation of the individual will by asceticism: first through a moral transition from egoism to altruism as egoless compassion; and ultimately through resignation in a beatific state of holiness as achieved by saints in the great world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

Schopenhauer’s philosophy can be envisioned as an ascending journey toward liberation from the suffering of transitory existence, marked by a series of transitions from stage to stage. There is an initial transition from ordinary experience of particular objects to the aesthetic experience of beauty in art and nature, whereupon an artist briefly silences the will, thus to cognize the universal in the particular as a Platonic Idea. Schopenhauer, like Nishida, here conceives of this transition to an aesthetic experience of beauty as a losing of oneself or a forgetting of one’s individuality so as to become completely absorbed in the aesthetic object: “We lose ourselves entirely in this object. . . . in other words, we forget our individuality.” Likewise, Nishida writes that beauty perceived by the intuition of poets is that wherein one has “separated from the self and become one with things.”

For both Schopenhauer and Nishida, this act of forgetting the self to become one with an object of aesthetic experience is in negative terms a loss of ego, and in positive terms a state of ecstasy. In Schopenhauer’s pessimism the suffering of transitory existence arises through the blind striving of individual will, and release from suffering comes when we lose ourselves in aesthetic contemplation, moral compassion and ascetic renunciation. Yet in Schopenhauer’s account of salvation, there is a transition whereby both the beauty of art and the virtue of morality lead to the holiness of saints at the standpoint of religion. In the realm of art this transition from disinterested aesthetic contemplation to spiritual resignation is especially facilitated by tragedy, wherein the misery and suffering of temporal existence is revealed. Schopenhauer goes on to argue that morality, like art, is a transitional activity that moves towards its consummation in the selfless ecstasy of mystical resignation. Likewise, the key insight of Nishida’s Bi no setsumei is that while the standpoints of art, morality, and religion differ in degree, they all ultimately originate from the same fundamental experience of muga as ecstasy or self-negation. Yet for Nishida, both art and morality culminate in the supreme ecstasy of religion.
truths of Buddhism: (1) suffering, (2) origin of suffering in desire, (3) cessation of suffering in nirvana; and (4) the middle path. 26 As Schopenhauer explains, his concept of salvation as an egoless state of resignation achieved by denial of will is in agreement with the Buddhist concept of liberation from suffering in nirvana realized by total renunciation of selfhood and its insatiable desires. He explicitly identifies “denial of will” with Buddhist nirvana. 27 For Schopenhauer affirmation of will results in the suffering of samsara, whereas negation of will is salvation and equivalent to Buddhist nirvana. 28 Schopenhauer elsewhere describes this final transition to the holiness of spiritual resignation achieved by denial of will as “a transition into empty nothingness.” 29 Moreover, he identifies nothingness with Buddhist nirvana. 30 Aesthetic contemplation of beauty, however, offers a brief intimation of nirvana.

Schopenhauer holds that even for the artistic genius an ecstatic state of disinterested will-less aesthetic contemplation of beauty is limited to only a “moment of rapture or exaltation.” 31 A permanent deliverance from suffering in everlasting peace requires a shift from artistic enjoyment to religious salvation: “Therefore if [art] does not become for him a quieter of the will, as . . . in the case of the saint who has attained resignation; it does not deliver him from life for ever, but only for a few moments . . . . The St. Cecilia of Raphael can be regarded as the symbol of this transition.” 32 And elsewhere:

[A]esthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual that knows in the interest of its constant willing. . . . From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but forever . . . 33

Schopenhauer thus explicated the process of transition from momentary ecstasy through disinterested aesthetic delight in beauty achieved by artists, to the eternal ecstasy achieved through mystical resignation of saints.

ECSTASY IN SCHOPENHAUER’S AESTHETICS AND BUDDHIST YOGA

In her work Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas, Dorothea Dauer holds that Schopenhauer’s disinterested aesthetic contemplation of beauty establishes a parallel to early Indian Buddhist yoga meditation as a technique for release from suffering in a state of ecstasy. Dauer asserts that while early Buddhist yoga practice touches nirvana through the “psychological ecstasy of meditation,” for Schopenhauer one approximates this egoless state of resignation through the “aesthetic ecstasy” of art. 34 She continues:

The aesthetic ecstasy [of Schopenhauer] which makes the admirer forget the torments of life, consists of the fact that the intellect . . . . liberates itself temporarily from the will. . . . And in this sense, it presents a parallel to the yoga which was a psychological technique of creating an ecstatic feeling of union with the absolute. Buddhism incorporated this yoga in the form of meditation, in which the monks believed to have intuitively enjoyed the foretaste of nirvana. 35

According to Dauer, then, the aesthetic ecstasy of art in Schopenhauer, and the psychological ecstasy of Buddhist yoga, are both alike temporary reprieves from suffering, thus to provide a “foretaste of nirvana.”

THE AJANTA CAVES AND EARLY BUDDHIST ART

The ancient Ajanta Caves in the Indian state of Maharashtra were accidently rediscovered by a British hunting party in 1819, who in doing so unearthed one of the greatest archeological finds of the nineteenth century. These magnificent rock-cut caves were created in two phases. The earlier caves, known as the Hinayana Caves, were excavated from the second century BCE to the first century CE. The Hinayana Caves display the artwork of early Buddhism where the Buddha still wasn’t represented in human form, but through symbols, such as the wheel, footprints, and stupas. In the fifth and sixth centuries CE there was a second period of excavations, known as the Mahayana Caves, where the Buddha is shown in human form, abiding in the peace and bliss of nirvana while making various mudras and ritual gestures. The Ajanta Caves served as a complex of temples and monasteries for resident monks, lavishly adorned with spectacular artworks, including architecture, pillars, sculptures, paintings, and images.

Richard S. Cohen’s work Beyond Enlightenment: Buddhism, Religion, Modernity discusses the Mulasaravastivada, an early Buddhist sect associated with the Ajanta Caves of India, and their emphasis on the importance of beauty as a Buddhist value. 36 In her essay “Only Nirvana Is More Beautiful,” Andrea Miller discusses her own pilgrimage to the awe-inspiring Ajanta Caves, and in this context sums up Cohen’s scholarship on early Indian Buddhist art, religion, and philosophy:

According to Richard Cohen, associate professor emeritus of South Asian religious literatures at the University of California, San Diego, the opulent artistic beauty of the caves was in keeping with the views of early Indian Buddhists. A scripture of the Mulasaravastivada, a Buddhist sect associated with Ajanta, “talks about the importance of creating beauty in this world and of having a beautiful monastery,” says Cohen. Inscribed into the rock at Ajanta, there is a verse by a monk claiming that it’s better to be in nirvana and free of this world, but if you are going to be in this world, you might as well be in a place of beauty. Ajanta, Cohen says, reminds us that “beauty is a Buddhist value.” 37

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have examined how Nishida’s early concept of beauty as muga or ecstasy has been influenced by Schopenhauer’s post-Kantian aesthetics. For Nishida, as for Schopenhauer, the aesthetic experience of beauty in art is an ecstasy of the moment, while religious experience is an eternal ecstasy. Nishida thus elucidates Schopenhauer’s
key doctrine, according to which the ecstasy realized by disinterested aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful in art offers a temporary release from suffering, while the supreme ecstasy of religion culminates at its apex with the exalted resignation of mystics, ascetics, and saints as a permanent renunciation of selfhood in the eternal peace and bliss of nirvana.

Furthermore, I have argued that recent scholarship on the ancient Ajanta Caves with its inscriptions and treasury of artworks dating from the second century BCE, as well as on the Mulasaravastivada, a Buddhist sect associated with Ajanta, reveal that the kernel of this distinction between art and religion established by the post-Kantian aesthetics of Schopenhauer in the West, as well as its reformulation by the Zen aestheticism of Nishida in the Japan, was already implicit in early Indian Buddhist teachings. In early Buddhism, like the modern aesthetics of Schopenhauer and Nishida, it was thus recognized that art is an important stage on the path to moksha or liberation, that the ecstasy of aesthetic contemplation provides a momentary glimpse or foretaste of nirvana, and that beauty is itself a profound Buddhist value. For according to the early Buddhist monks associated with the Ajanta Caves, until one enters nirvana, it is best to live in an exalted world filled with the beauty, splendor, and glory of art.

NOTES
1. Steve Odin, “Beauty as Ecstasy in the Aesthetics of Nishida and Schopenhauer.”
4. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason.
7. For an account of Nishida’s practice of Zen meditation from about 1896 to 1902 as recorded in his diary and correspondence, see Viglielmo, “Nishida Kitarō: The Early Years,” 535–60. Viglielmo further clarifies how Nishida’s early notion of beauty as muga or “ecstasy” in Bi no setsumei was a blueprint for his later work on aesthetics titled Art and Morality (藝術と道徳, 1923), where the beauty of art and the goodness of morality tend toward the rapture and ecstasy of the saint in mystical experience at the standpoint of religion.
8. Wolfgang Schirmacher, The Essential Schopenhauer, x.
17. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, II, 611.
27. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, II, 508, 560.
29. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, 408–09.
30. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, 508, 608.
32. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, I, 267.
33. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, I, 390.
34. Dorothea Dauer, Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas, 23.
35. Dauer, Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas, 23, Italics added.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Japanese Aesthetics as Intercultural Double Bind: Philosophical and Artistic Practice between Nishida and Sesshū

Adam Loughnane
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
ADAM.LOUGHNA@UCC.IE

ABSTRACT
Encountering Japanese aesthetics from a Western philosophical standpoint holds great potential for expanding definitions of art, beauty, perception, expression, and truth. It also affords valuable opportunities for expanding our definition of philosophy itself. If we are to treat the peculiarities we discover as more than mere cultural curiosities, I argue that implicit to intercultural encounter with Japanese aesthetics is a methodological challenge arising by virtue of the status of the artist in the Japanese tradition. While artistic practices are subjects of philosophical analysis in the West, they are rarely considered to be philosophical practices, whereas in the Japanese tradition, being an artist is one way of being a philosophical practitioner. The issue I consider is whether encounter can be truly "intercultural" if we resist bracketing our definitions of philosophy and our methodological norms, which dictate that artistic practices be considered other than or less than philosophical practices. By way of the landscape painting of Sesshū Tōyō as interpreted by the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō, I propose a new way of seeing the art of Japan, which enables us to expand our definition of philosophy and render productive a double bind inherent to intercultural encounter.

***

Japanese aesthetics, as well as its background of Buddhist, Shinto, and Japanese philosophies, has become the focus of increasing interest in the West and subject to growing scholarly attention. While opening to foreign cultures and their intellectual and artistic traditions is one positive aspect of a broader move towards internationalizing academic philosophy, ethnocentrism can endure beneath what otherwise appear to be well-intentioned intercultural encounters. I look to Japanese aesthetics and philosophy to discuss how this vulnerability becomes discernible. To do so, I first outline some methodological considerations implicit to encounter with Japanese aesthetics from a Western philosophical standpoint. Secondly, I suggest a way of meeting the methodological challenges that arise by considering the Japanese landscape painting of Sesshū Tōyō (雷斎, 1420–1506) as interpreted according to the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多, 1870–1945). I conclude by outlining an intercultural double bind we find ourselves in and propose a productive stance therein.

METHODOLOGICAL AND DEFINITIONAL BRACKETING
An encounter with the intellectual or artistic works of a foreign culture will not be productive if one evaluates these strictly according to the conventions already established within one’s own tradition. An openness to other cultures is a pre-requisite for overcoming the deep Eurocentrism of our tradition, yet even such a stance might never fully erase the deep biases we inherit. If one seeks intercultural learning, I argue, there must be a willingness to work within a new evaluatory context that is not fully reducible to one’s own. Doing otherwise might put any encounter outside the realm of what we can consider “intercultural.” It might, in fact, be the opposite: not intercultural at all but one way of perpetuating Eurocentrism under the guise of foiling it.

It is not entirely difficult to understand why the Western academy might be reluctant. Even for those who are willing, it is by no means easy to manifest productive openness to the thought or art of other cultures. But, more crucially, that kind of openness, while potentially enriching the Western tradition, also brings profound challenges to the methodological norms the discipline is deeply invested in maintaining.

There are many possible provocations evoked when cultures meet. Turning to Japanese aesthetics can incite us to ask important questions about the relation between philosophical and artistic practices. Whereas a strict demarcation between the two prevails in the West, in the Japanese tradition, artistic practices are legitimate sites for embodied philosophical practice. Landscape painting, for example, can be a form of Buddhist practice. Painting is not simply the subject of philosophical speculation but a real way of being a philosophical practitioner. Thus, we find examples of what are referred to as “artist-monks” or “painter-priests” in Japan.

Sesshū Tōyō, one of Japan’s greatest artists, is exemplary in this regard. He was the head of the Shōkoku-ji Rinzai Zen monastery and was known for strict adherence to his meditative practice, which included seated meditation and painting every day of his life from the time he began at the age of twelve until the day he died at eighty-six. For Sesshū, rigorous embodied artistic practice was a way of being a Buddhist practitioner.

Of course, invoking an artist-monk such as Sesshū will provoke arguments regarding the status of Buddhism as philosophy. One could certainly contend that, by virtue of its religious aspects, Buddhism is not, strictly speaking, a philosophy as we understand that concept in the West. An artist-monk might be an interesting subject to study, but their methods have no bearing on how we define what we do as academic philosophers and even less on how we do what we do, so the reply might go. Even within these limiting confines, exploring Japanese aesthetics could be fruitful, but if the grounds for encounter are that our methodological and definitional norms remain fixed, we might pause before claiming that such explorations are intercultural.

To meet a foreign tradition on its own terms requires a willingness to bracket the methods and definitions handed down by one’s own tradition. This does not guarantee that a more inclusive definition of philosophy will be reached. One could legitimately arrive at a claim that artistic practices are not philosophical practices, or
that some intellectual traditions are not justified in calling themselves “philosophy,” but the key proviso must be that such a conclusion is not decided at the outset; it is not the grounds for an encounter, but is rather what is to be determined through the encounter.

If the encounter we seek is with Japanese aesthetics, and if we want to avoid the ethnocentrism of dismissing that tradition’s differences as simple regional curiosities against which our definition of philosophy remains immune, then the requisite openness brings along more than a challenge to the content of our philosophical speculation: the methodological tendencies of our Western tradition and those we invoke to distinguish that tradition from others must be bracketed. While suspending one’s own definitions and methodologies might appear to be quite a demand, let us consider Japanese landscape painting to see how this openness is not as perplexing or threatening as it might appear.

SEEING JAPANESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

If one is curious to learn from Japanese artworks, one should first have seen the works in question before any conclusions are reached. Yet, the idea that we can see a painting based solely on our having a coherent visual representation of the work might obstruct the encounter we desire. Take Sesshū’s famous Splashed Ink Landscape (Figure 1) as an example. Certainly, one’s eyes can admit the light reflecting off of its surface and enable visual representation. Yet, the question of whether we can actually see a painting goes beyond the fact of having a representation. Even for those who have never studied art or philosophy, our Western tradition has theorized about aesthetics for millennia and this has made artworks visible to us in particular ways. And, crucially, this has also made some artworks invisible to us in other ways.

Let us dwell briefly on some broad prevailing factors that shape Western visual experience. Of course, anyone can seek nuanced understandings of artworks, but doing so is against a backdrop of deeply entrenched norms and visual hermeneutics determining what we see art as and how we do not and cannot see it. Until very recently, our Western theories have overwhelmingly sought to define artworks according to their “essential” features. Most predominant is the Greek notion of mimesis, where a painting is a copy of something with a more real essence. Much later, Kant construes the essence of painting as its form. Hegel then turns the tables asserting that form is only the result of color and that color itself is what is essential about painting.

Another prevailing supposition turns essentialist thought towards artists, who determine the essence of their selves as creative genius in the act of expression.

Of course, all four assumptions are much too broad for academic analysis, but the point is that these stand as background assumptions determining how artworks are seen without one needing to analyze or invoke the philosophical texts where these ideas are developed. The power and ubiquity of these assumptions are given by their having become so imbedded in our culture’s visual hermeneutics that they need not be learned explicitly. Yet, employing Japanese landscape painting as an experiment for intercultural methodology demands that we attempt to question these assumptions in order to see artworks according to the visual norms of another culture. To do so, one should attempt to place in abeyance all four of the above essentialist assumptions and thus open the possibilities of (1) seeing art as nature, not a copy thereof; (2) exceeding the idea of form being the essence of painting, since Japanese artists would strive towards formless depiction; (3) exceeding the idea of color being the essence of painting, since Japanese landscape painters rarely used color; and (4) understanding artistic expression not as the creation of an essentialized self but the negation of self. Attempting to bracket these four assumptions might open the possibility of seeing Japanese landscape paintings slightly more on their own terms.

OCULARCENTRISM AND “SEEING WITHOUT A SEER”

The structure of visual encounter has been such a foundational aspect of how we in the West have tended to pursue philosophical investigation that our tradition has been labelled “ocularcentric.” The dominant metaphor for knowledge, understanding, and truth has been derived from the process of gaining a clear visual grasp. Likewise, a great deal of Western art has advanced by ever-refined visual techniques and technologies. To be a philosopher in the West has been construed as the sharpening of one’s vision, to proceed out of the dark and into the light of reason, to gain insight and perspective through speculation; that is, to be a “seer.” No doubt extraordinary achievements have come from this mode of intellectual and artistic engagement, yet to learn from Japanese aesthetics demands a shift away from ocularcentrism, away from the idea of the artist or philosopher as seer. Nishida offers a path in this direction with his concept “seeing without a seer” (mirumono nakushite miru koto 見るものなくして見ること), which not only suggests an understanding of what a Japanese painter achieves when rendering a landscape, but also helps us see landscape painting beyond our ocularcentric visual norms.

“Seeing without a seer” is not the eradication of the seer; it is simply the way a negated self sees. While Nishida has a technical conception of negation we cannot elaborate here, the idea of the self being negated simply means that it is a relational self: a self not defined by an internal essence but one whose existence is constituted by its ever-changing external relations with the world. Such negation is ontological. It is not only the self that is construed as...
relational. So too are all things, phenomena, and actions, including thought, speech, movement, and vision. Thus, “seeing without a seer” refers to a real visual event, but the seer is not ontologically primary; instead, vision is fundamentally relational. One could counter by rightly pointing out that most theories of vision are “relational” since vision is, by definition, a relation between a seer and something seen. Yet, the critical difference is that our dominant Western conceptions, with very few exceptions, cast vision as a faculty of a pre-existing and underlying self. For Nishida, the visual is not merely something a self possesses. As one of its most complex and multivariate relations, vision is one way the self is what it is: a negated and relational non-self constituted by vision but without there being a pre-existing and underlying seer.

**SPLASHED INK LANDSCAPE: SEEING BEYOND REPRESENTATION**

What is immediately striking about Sesshū’s Splashed Ink Landscape (Haboku Sansui 破墨山水図, 1495) are the deformations, which bring its forms as close to incoherent as conceivable while also somehow depicting a coherent landscape. Contemplating this dramatic visual tension, we might ask how we should understand what we see. How should we see what we see? Perhaps, we might ask how Sesshū saw the landscape. Is he representing something that corresponds to what he saw when looking at the scene? Do we see the same landscape he did? Or is it a perspective on the world he wants to guide us towards seeing? While these are reasonable questions, they disclose further ocularcentric assumptions we should overcome in hopes of learning from Japanese landscape painting. These assumptions arise from a dominant feature of ocularcentric metaphysics, namely, the “representational” model of perception, which extends the framework of mimesis by casting perception, like painting, as a copy of a more real object.

Let us attempt to shift away from representationalism by first considering what it could mean to be an artist-monk such as Sesshū in the Zen Buddhist monastic and landscape painting traditions. As opposed to many schools of Buddhism, Zen practitioners meditate with open eyes. While they typically practice facing a blank wall, for a painter-priest such as Sesshū, the act of gazing at a landscape he sought to paint was another form of meditation. But what are they trying to do in these meditative visual practices? Potentially many things, but first we should acknowledge that they are not trying to construct a foundation for the self as an artist. Facing a blank wall or an expansive landscape, Zen artists seek to negate the self, to minimize its presence so that an entire context of relations can express itself. Visually, they seek to minimize their role as seers and enable an expressive event that goes beyond their individual experience. The painter is not striving to be a subject representing an object; they negate their subjectivity such that an alternate visual relation becomes possible. How, though, can we understand that relation?

The difficulty with answering this question is that when bound to the subject-object metaphysics of the representational framework, we remain limited to a mode of questioning that blocks us from understanding the visual relationality a painter such as Sesshū would have sought. While there are innumerable theories of vision taking for granted subject-object metaphysics, nevertheless, when binary opposition is the underlying framework, any theory has two basic ontological positions to describe how visual subject and object relate; the subject is either continuous or discontinuous with the object seen. The dilemma of the representational framework is that neither of these two possibilities enables perception: if a subject were fully continuous with an object, there would be no perception, because perception is a relation and there must be some discontinuity between the relata for a relation to exist. On the other hand, if the subject were fully discontinuous from the visual object, here too no perceptual encounter would obtain. In this case, subject and object would overwhelm and obstruct each other. Neither continuity nor discontinuity can explain visual relationality.

To see a painting such as Sesshū’s requires thinking beyond the binaries of representation, which cast vision as a relation between continuous or discontinuous subjects and objects. This is crucial for our discussion because the type of relation the painter works to achieve with the landscape tells us something important about the visual relation we should cultivate in our attempts to see their paintings. Here, we can make a shift beyond the visual norms of our aesthetic tradition. The goal of the painter is not to make a passive object that an active subject can represent, but in negating both subject and object, a different type of relation emerges, beyond the representational alternatives of continuity or discontinuity. Nishida conceives of a structure of relationality that avoids the representational binaries that impede visual encounter. For him, relationality—whether in time, space, as action, force, between “I and thou,” individual and universal, thing and thing—is best understood as an expressive “continuous discontinuity” (hirenzoku no renzoku 非連続の連続).

It is as the continuity of discontinuity that what is called expressive activity comes into being. Therefore, to say that a thing acts is to say that a thing itself expresses itself. And to speak of internal perception-qua-external perception, external perception-qua-internal perception, must be to say that the world expressively determines the world itself. In the artistic world all things express the self itself. How can we bring this understanding into our attempt to see Sesshū’s work? The key is that it is not just seers but likewise the object that is negated. The painting itself must be understood beyond the metaphysical framework that casts it according to its objective materiality, and instead grasped as a formless event defined not in terms of an essence, but in terms of its relations. That is, the painting too is negated; it is a non-object. There is nothing essential on the objective or subjective visual pole. As continuously-discontinuous with the landscape, a painting arises out of a relation not discernible within subject-object metaphysics. The self does not have a pre-constituted essence, which reaches out to encounter the landscape. Landscape and self are co-constituting.
Thus, as Nishida writes above, "things express the self," especially in the artistic world.

What is crucial for our discussion is that this continuous-discontinuity, which explains the painter’s relation to the landscape, also obtains between us viewers and the artwork. Sesshū’s painting is not best encountered under the assumption that it is an object with an essence we can represent. Just like the landscape, the painting is also a negated object, and it is ever-available to us as viewers to enter into its definition through a continuous-discontinuity. We too are negated visual selves, we can see without an underlying substantive seer, and the painting is a non-object that allows us, like all phenomenal reality, to enter into an ontologically co-constitutive relation. The point is not to have a representation of an object as a finished painting. In fact, what is crucial is that we do not see the painting as finished at all. Its formlessness means that what is definitive of it is not a static essence but the relations it affords. The Japanese landscape painting never achieves a final moment of completion since it is only one node in an ever-shifting relational milieu, ever transforming as it comes into new relations. Seeing a painting such as Sesshū’s is not a connection between a subject and an object whose essences remain untouched by the meeting, but a mutually creative event between a continuously-discontinuous visual non-self and non-object.

This way of understanding painting is challenging for our Western visual norms. We do not tend to approach images assuming that such visually constitutive relations are possible. But, in the Japanese aesthetic tradition, a painting of a landscape is no less natural than the landscape itself. It is, in a very literal sense, not a copy. As Sesshū himself says, “Painting is not imitation of other things,” it is part of nature itself. We must strive to free ourselves of our Western tendency to grasp paintings according to representational metaphysics. The opportunity for visual immersion with Sesshū’s painting is just as present for us as the landscape was available for the artist. Great paintings are sometimes even thought to afford greater possibilities for such an intertwinement than what we take to be “actual” landscapes.

As viewers of Japanese paintings, we have the same opportunity not simply of representing a copy of a landscape, but also of coming into an expressive relation of co-constitution through visual negation/relationality. As viewers, we too can see without being substantive seers. But we potentially go wrong if we conceive of achieving this by educating ourselves to see paintings in new ways. Insofar as novel information about artworks is conceived as an addition to a self, as an accumulation rendering a self increasingly knowledgeable, we risk going in the wrong direction, further solidifying the kind of subjectivity that obstructs our relation to an artwork. The right approach is not building up the self but breaking it down. What we look for are not new theories to describe vision but a different focus on the experience that is already happening before we apply our knowledge. By attending to the relationality obtaining prior to our intellection and theorization, we find that the body is already intertwined in co-constitution with a painting, and in that structure of relationality, seeing still happens, but it is there prior to the presence of a reified seer as a central node that vision can be reduced to. While negating one’s visual subjectivity might sound like quite a challenge, in the next section I discuss how it is a mode of engagement that is not entirely foreign to the Western aesthetic tradition or even our everyday experience.

COLOR(LESSNESS) AND MOTION(LESSNESS)

Whether one’s aesthetic position is Hegelian or not, our Western expectations tend to ready the viewer for believing that paintings are more real if they reflect the full chromatic range seen in the world. Yet, the implicit binary assumption regarding color and colorlessness misconstrues our relation to monochrome Japanese painting.

One way we avoid the reduction of ourselves to mere seers is by expanding the visual by uncovering the motor aspects accompanying vision. With very few exceptions, vision and motion have been treated as two separate but connectable bodily capacities. Contrary to this separation of the motor and visual, Nishida writes that “there is no seeing when faced with things lacking any sort of connection with our movement,” and further that “[w]e act through seeing, and we see through acting . . . . Indeed, artistic creativity is a kind of action in such a sense.”

It is quite natural to notice how things in our perceptual field evoke movement, but color itself is typically understood as an inert property of an object, one that is irrelevant to the perceiver’s moving body. Contrary to this, Nishida writes that “a type of red becomes a force and an activity.” More broadly speaking, Nishida refers to things as “acts” or what he calls “volitional objects” (ishitaishō). In his philosophy, there is no strict division between bodies that move of their own volition and objects that only receive motion externally. Rather, they form a continuity that he calls a “unity of act and external movement.” Color is well documented in modern psychology and behavioral analysis. The colors of objects and environments inflect our motor-determinative forces within a continuity of acts. This finding is well documented in modern psychology and behavioral analysis. The colors of objects and environments inflect our movements. Certain tones excite us, whereas others sedate us. Some tones extend the range of motion and the tonicity of muscles. Color affects the depth of the breath and the speed of cognition. Most of us have little need to pay attention to this level of color’s motor-determination. Yet, highly skilled artists such as Sesshū, by way of a lifetime’s dedication to the visual world, could not only notice the ways that the colored world exerts itself on them but, more decisively, they could also allow these forces to determine their brush strokes. Thus, they enable the colored world to express itself by way of their body’s motor-perceptual negation; that is, how their body’s movement and vision are relational. Nishida comments on how the artist achieves a motor-perceptual continuity with the visual world when he writes that “as the act of pure visual perception develops into language, it . . . naturally moves our body and develops into a kind of expressive movement. This is the creative act of the artist.” Similarly, one viewing a deeply evocative painting such as Sesshū’s is also invited into the bodily...
movements that continue to animate the work even once it is complete.

In Nishida's philosophy, continuous-discontinuity is the structure of the body's relation with the perceptual world, not as a subject representing an object, but through an expressive mutual-negation. Color is not simply a secondary quality of objects a painter or the viewer of a painting represents. Color vision is a way of intertwining with the world through a mutual sensorimotor negation.

If colors do solicit the body’s movements, then we must now ask a question regarding the motor demands of monochrome paintings such as Sesshū’s. While his Splashed Ink Landscape lacks color, a monochrome painting can, nevertheless, call on the colored world just as well or, some have theorized, even better than a color painting. A Chinese saying goes that “Whoever masters the use of [black] ink can paint it in all five colors.” Thus, monochrome painting affords us viewers the same opportunity for motor-perceptual intertwinement. It is this co-constitutive intertwinement, not a representation, which should be our focus when encountering a painting such as Sesshū’s.

But what about those of us who have not dedicated our lives to attuning our bodies to the motor-perceptual pull of the visual world? How can we be in the mode of “seeing without a seer” when beholding a monochrome painting? Although it sounds like quite an undertaking, it is actually only a matter of shifting one’s attention to a stratum of experience that is not normally thematized, but not entirely absent from visual encounter. Sesshū’s painting and its dramatic sweeping brushstrokes are instructive. One does not need to be educated in art history or aesthetics to have a felt sense of the spontaneity that went into rendering his landscapes. We can feel a resonance in our bodies of the painter’s movements.

"Motor-resonance" is a common experience one feels when seeing bodies of highly trained performers enacting amazing physical feats in arts, dance, sports, etc., but a similar resonance is also provoked by the marks in a painting. Splashed Ink Landscape is not an inert object meant only to be represented visually. It is an expression calling on the body and inviting it into its motions. As Nishida explains, the artwork is not a passive object but is one expressive act in a continuity of acts, which also expresses the selves who view it and thus enter into motor-visual co-constitution.

If we can focus on this motor-resonance, then we find that, already in viewing Sesshū’s painting, there is an aspect of our continuously-discontinuous motor-relationship between ourselves and the work, revealing ourselves as already connected to it, as selves already expressed by it, beyond any motor-neutral position of a representational self or seer.

Although rarely thematized in Western philosophy until recently, it is not entirely outside of everyday experience to notice our mutual motor-visual co-constitution when encountering things. A helpful way to notice this is by likening a Japanese landscape painting to a musical score. A score comprises notes on paper, but we all know that it is not meant to be appreciated as marks on paper, but as solicitations for specific movements. Those movements can be those of a musician, a singer, or even a dancer, but even for us experiencing a musical piece, we can also notice our motor co-constitution with the world in the simple act of tapping our feet in rhythm with the music. Although this is perhaps a very minimal motor-intertwinement, the point is that this aspect of our engagement expresses our relation to music much better than a representation of the score would. Likewise, with a painting such as Sesshū’s, we do, in a certain sense, receive visual data from its surface and have something like a representation of the artwork, but seeing it on its own terms will be much more likely if we focus on the motor-resonance evoked by its brushstrokes rather than solely on our static visual representations.

CONCLUSION: DOUBLE BIND OF CONTINUOUSLY-DISCONTINUOUS INTERCULTURALITY

Having considered an alternative way of seeing and moving with Japanese landscape painting, we can now return to the question regarding the methodological implications for intercultural philosophy. Let us consider how, in the past century, numerous domains of Western philosophy, both Analytic and Continental, have sought to articulate alternatives to the Enlightenment or Modern conceptions of selfhood, individuality, or subjectivity. As this project continues to evolve, the implicit methodological challenge of intercultural philosophy becomes all the more pressing. Do we as Western philosophers treat methods of artistic/philosophical practitioners such as painters only as cultural curiosities, only as subjects of analysis, but assume our methodological norms remain untouched by practices aimed at overcoming the forms of subjectivity we theorize about? While one might argue that there is an imperative in intercultural philosophy to do otherwise, I do not believe that this is the best approach. What is more potentially binding is to reveal that resistance to such a methodological challenge actually relies on a fallacy. Let us call it the fallacy of the “given subject.” If we can speak of a broad conception of “the subject” that we can call “Modern” or “Enlightenment,” and if we believe this tells us something meaningful about how we are human at this present moment, then we must recognize that that form of subjectivity is not given, but rather the result of a project, however historically and culturally diffuse, of creating a particular kind of human. Our version of subjectivity is not given; it is the result of many determining factors, some of which include conceptions of selfhood worked out in philosophy. The crucial point for intercultural encounter with Japanese aesthetics is that Western philosophy has not tended to explicitly develop techniques or embodied practices for the determination it has carried out. Japanese landscape painting is, however, a technique in this sense. Thus, if one invokes methodological norms for defining a definition of philosophy as distinct from art practice, then Western philosophy either disavows its deterministic relation to the subject or simply ignores it. In either case, encounter with other cultures will remain, in one crucial way, on the terms of one’s own tradition, i.e., not genuinely intercultural. This is tragic since, as the example of Sesshū’s
paintings illustrates, different forms of visual selfhood only require a shift in focus to a stratum of experience that is always completely available to us, although not typically thematized by our tradition.

If one might be willing to entertain this proposition, one might wonder what to do next. Can we simply assert that aesthetic practices should be included as legitimate philosophical practices and start training in painting as a means of attenuating our Eurocentrism and enabling learning beyond our culture? Here we find a double bind of intercultural encounter. If we were to bracket our methodological norms in hopes of opening up to a foreign tradition, we would then find the other side of the intercultural coin, the inverse of the problem of ethnocentrism, which are the dangers of cultural appropriation and intellectual imperialism. Even for those of us who are open to expanding definitions of what we do based on encounters with foreign traditions, intercultural philosophy must not involve the suspension of one’s own cultural specificity. While we should respond to challenges from other traditions, a simple appropriation of their methods would deny that specificity. How though do we cultivate a kind of openness that places our methodological norms in suspension while avoiding the naive incorporation of foreign practices into our own?

My suggestion is, if we feel the tension of this double bind, we do nothing. This is the appropriate and productive intercultural position. The double bind is what we should aim for. To resolve the tension on either extreme is to exit the bind, but it is a tension that is productive and should be sustained as the bounds of intercultural openness.

To close, we can return to Nishida and notice that such an intercultural position that sustains a double bind accords with his thinking; that is, it is a position of continuous-discontinuity between traditions. We must not seek to reduce intercultural tension by positing an unambiguous discontinuity between traditions, thus closing off and rendering us immune to legitimate challenges to our methods and definitions. Nor should we assume a naive continuity between all intellectual or artistic traditions: this simply forgoes the productive tension for the ease of a false relativism where any intellectual tradition is automatically philosophy. A position of continuous-discontinuity does not resolve the intercultural bind but sustains it as an irresolvable yet productive tension between traditions.

NOTES
1. While Nishida rarely refers to Sesshū directly in his writings, in his first major work he invokes the painter in such a way that foreshadows the ontology of expression he later develops when he writes, “we can say that things move the self or that the self moves things, that Sesshū painted nature or that nature painted itself through Sesshū.” Kitarō Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 135.
5. We should acknowledge that, throughout the twentieth century, many Western artists and schools of art have worked towards non-representational forms of depiction. When speaking of tendencies in Western art and philosophy, my underlying claim is that, despite such artistic efforts, Western culture remains overwhelmingly ocularcentric and wedded to ontological assumptions associated with representation and subject-object metaphysics. Alternatives to representational art are now part of the norm in the West, yet we have not developed associated practices for embracing the visually negative. Shifting one’s form of visual engagement to experience artworks beyond representation is available to us but requires practices that are not typically part of Western visual culture. Thus, many of the experiments in non-representational arts will not be taken up beyond the representational/ocularcentric commitments Western culture remains determined by.
6. This specific question was brought up most prominently in “Molyneux’s Problem,” where the Irish philosopher William Molyneux, along with his interlocutors John Locke and George Berkeley, concluded that vision and motion are two separate bodily modalities.

The Field of Japanese Aesthetics

Thomas P. Kasulis
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
KASULIS.1@OSU.EDU

ABSTRACT
Because of differences in intellectual and cultural history, the academic subfields of Western philosophy and their terminologies do not mesh with native Japanese categories. This is true of aesthetics, which in traditional Japan might be better described as “theories of art and artistry.” To illustrate the probative value of the distinction, this paper explores six tenets underlying Japanese systems of art and artistry that are not stressed in most Western aesthetic constructs.

(1) The creative element in artistic production lies in the medium as much as the artist.

(2) The quality of the artwork depends in part on the audience.

(3) The painter’s last stroke or poet’s final word does not complete the work of art.
(4) The artist is not the primary agency in the artwork’s creation.

(5) Artistic expression is a form of knowing.

(6) The qualities of the artwork reflect the artist’s depth of wisdom.

Kokoro—the inter-responsive field of internal relations among artist, artwork, medium, and audience—is the true force in artistic creativity and the basis for the six tenets of Japanese art and artistry outlined in the paper.

***

The fundamental differences between Western and Asian philosophies seldom derive from their reaching different conclusions about identical questions. Even when addressing a similar topic, the questions asked are likely dissimilar. This suggests that we should be wary of projecting the names of Western philosophical fields or subdisciplines on to Asian, in our present case, Japanese, philosophical activities. Our first question then must be whether the term Japanese aesthetics itself is problematic. To some extent, I have no problem with that choice of words.

When formulating any aesthetic, we can outline either a general theory for all (or most) arts or a theory focused on one specific art. In both cases, we differentiate among the artist, the medium, the completed artwork, and the audience. As for the artist, we may consider intention, style, and perhaps a theory of creativity, for instance. Regarding media, there seems an almost endless variety, limited only by the ever-expanding applications of human imagination to anything from words to paint to stone to architectural materials to food to musical notes. Similarly, the completed artwork might be a literary work, a photograph, a piece of pottery, a garden, a dance (choreographed or performed), a light display, and so on. Finally, the audience may include such onlookers or participants as readers, viewers, listeners, or tasters.

Japan offers its own plenitude of art forms: literary, plastic, performative, folkcraft, and so forth. Furthermore, Japan has a significant corpus of commentaries, many philosophical, reflecting on each art. We even often find a significant overlap in terminology, suggesting the parameters for an underlying general theory of art. I see no harm in grouping those activities and calling it collectively Japanese aesthetics.

Yet, when the Western term aesthetics entered their country in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Japanese felt the need to coin a word for it since it seemed different from any native field of study. Why? Once we go beyond a simple interest in the production and appreciation of art to the rigors of philosophical questioning and establishing norms about that interest, the Western and Japanese traditions have less in common. For this reason, I will often use the phrase “Japanese theories of art and artistry” rather than “Japanese aesthetics” to better capture the more traditional Japanese approach to the subject. My concern is when we invite the term aesthetics into the Japanese cultural context, we do not unwittingly also accept its full Western entourage of cultural assumptions as well (beauty, artistic intention, sublimity, etc.). The incongruity is just as troubling in the opposite direction, incidentally. Key issues and concepts from Japanese theories of art and artistry (kokoro, yugen, wabi, etc.) seldom correlate with those of Western aesthetics. Although I will discuss a few key Japanese terms in this paper, my primary concern is meta-aesthetic. I intend to explore why the two cultural approaches diverge so sharply.

Although my analysis applies to the Japanese arts at large, for the sake of simplicity and limits of space, I draw examples mainly from ink wash painting and poetry. To focus further, I will organize my interpretation around six linked tenets common to most traditional Japanese theories of arts and artistry, tenets that only rarely drive Western aesthetic theories. (1) Creativity in artistic production lies as much in the medium as in the artist. (2) The quality of the artwork depends in part on the audience. (3) The last stroke of the painter’s brush or the last word written by the poet does not mark the completion of the painting or the poem. (4) The Japanese painter or poet is not the primary agency in the painting’s or poem’s creation. (5) Artistic expression is a form of knowing. (6) The qualities of the artwork reflect the artist’s depth of wisdom.

In both Japan and the West, aesthetic theory developed within the context of an established philosophical worldview. In the modern West this included a preference for understanding connections as external relations and an increasingly fixed idea of the self as an individual, autonomous agent. Together, these two presuppositions undergird the assumption that the world exists as external objects independently of the personal subject. In turn, the autonomous subject acts upon the world and can transform it through the power of will and intentionality.

Within that broadly conceived paradigm, the Western presumption arose that the artist creates something novel via the artwork, a thing arising from the artist’s creative activity and intentionality, causing a brand-new item to appear in the world of things. That object might fill what the artist sensed as a lack in the world. Or it might be the product of the artist’s impulse to give external expression to inner feelings or intuition, making it publicly accessible to others through the manipulation of an artistic medium.

Although that description is certainly crude and problematic on many levels of specificity, it underscores a crucial point. Namely, because modern Western philosophy privileges external relations, it tends to view art as a bridging activity. Art serves as an external link between two pre-existing things: artist and world, artist and medium, artwork and audience, inner subjectivity and outward expression, world of value and world of fact, and so forth. In short: art makes connections. And once completed, that artwork endures as an item with its own integrity independent of the artist and of other things in the world. We can diagram the external relation model as Figure 1, wherein A and B can be any of the binaries of discretely existing entities just mentioned.
Traditional Japanese philosophers, by contrast, predominantly construe their worldviews and senses of self in terms of internal rather than external relations. So they do not see art as bridging the binaries of artist/world, artist/medium, artwork/audience, inner subjectivity/outward expression, created values/given facticity, and so forth. Instead, art is a discovery of an already existent or emergent conjunction of those entities. Art is not what connects things, but rather reveals how things interconnect. Figure 2 represents the internal relation model wherein A and B represent the same pairs as before in Figure 1. Now, however, they are intrinsically interdependent rather than intrinsically independent: part of A is part of B, and part of B is part of A. Indeed, A cannot be completely A without its intersection with B and vice versa.

If we consider A to be the artist and B the artistic medium, for example, then tenet (1) in the list above is comprehensible. That is, creative expression does not bridge a gap between the artist and the medium, but lies in the overlap between the two—a collaboration, as it were. This notion is not unique to Japan; we find it expressed by artists around the world. Michelangelo spoke of seeing his figures in the uncarved block of marble and that his role as a sculptor was in freeing that image from its stone prison. Many a potter, East and West, has described the artistic experience as working with the clay instead of working the clay. Japanese calligraphers as well as painters in various cultures speak of allowing the brush and ink/paint to express themselves along with the artist. And what poets have not at some point expressed their creative experience as "the words came to me" rather than "I chose the words"? (The ancient Japanese called that agency of power in words their creative experience as "the words came to me" rather than "I chose the words"? (The ancient Japanese called that agency of power in words kotodama, the "spirit of words.") When we think about art in terms of internal relations, such locations come naturally.

Suppose now in our two diagrams we substitute "audience" for B, while continuing to allow A to signify the "artist." And for this discussion let us take the relator "Art" to be more specifically the artwork. Let us consider first the external relation model depicted in Figure 1. That yields the familiar Western idea that once the artist completes the artwork, the artist's original intention is no longer relevant. The finished artwork stands alone as a thing-in-the-world, independent of both the now discrete artist and audience as an object for their subjective gaze and evaluation. The situation is quite different if we look at it from the standpoint of an internal relation as depicted in Figure 2, a standpoint that will help us understand tenet number (2) in our list, the role of audience in Japanese theories of art and artistry. Figure 2 implies that (part of) the audience is part of the artist, and that (part of) the artist is part of the audience. Furthermore, in their conjunction, they constitute the artwork together. For example, a contemporary Japanese haiku poet and scholar, Hasegawa Kai, has said in an interview:

[A] haiku is not completed by the poet. The poet creates half of the haiku, while the remaining half must wait for the appearance of a superior reader. Haiku is literature created jointly by the poet and the reader.1

East Asian ink wash landscape paintings share the sentiment. Amid the mountains, rivers, and tiny human figures in either huts or boats of many Chinese Song-style landscapes, for example, we commonly find an expanse of open space containing a poem written in exquisite calligraphy. A poet-calligrapher other than the original landscape artist often added the poem later, sometimes centuries later. This suggests that the painting is not complete with the depiction of the landscape but continues as an ongoing work of performance art in which the viewers participate so much that at a later time, one may be invited to continue the artwork by adding a poem. This illustrates not only tenet number (2) about the audience's role in creating the artwork, but also tenet (3), that the painting is not completed with the last brushstroke of the artist. In fact, we can say that the painting is just that: a painting, not a paint-ed, that is, a gerund expressing ongoing activity involving artist, artwork, and audience, rather than an artifact of a concluded activity.

As another example, as many performers East or West attest, the aesthetic value added by an appreciative audience is intrinsic to the value of the performance itself. Master Zeami (1363–1443) of the Nō drama art form insisted that the excellence of a performance depends not only on the script, the actor's talent, and the staging, but also those in attendance:

Even if the actor is an unsurpassed master of a level suited to the play, unless the play is performed for a discerning audience in a grand venue, it will not always be such a great success.2

We can better grasp the complex relation between artist and audience by examining the influential poetics of Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). Norinaga claimed poetry arises from the poet's sense of aware, a classical Japanese term meaning roughly a sensitivity of being so in touch with things as to be touched by them. (Note this is an internal relation between self and the outside world.) Although this leads to the impulse to write poetry, a true poem is not realized until that aware takes form as a poem shared with others, confirmed by and in them. He writes:

In order to feel comfort, one must read the poem to someone else. If the other person hearing the poem finds it has aware, this will greatly comfort the poet. . . . And since this is the intent of poetry, it is a basic principle and not an accident that a poem must be heard by others. Someone who does not understand this might say that a true poem describes one's emotions exactly as they are, whether bad or good, and it has nothing to do with whether or not people hear it. Such an argument
sounds plausible, but it betrays ignorance of the true meaning of poetry.\(^3\)

For Norinaga, the role of the poem’s reader or listener is critical because it allows straightforward, plain expression to attain a stylized sophistication (aya) appropriate to the sensitivities of its cultured audience. The poetic impulse that might have begun as a blatant venting of emotion becomes refined in response to the aesthetic readers with whom it is to be shared. This extra dimension of cultivated sensitivity makes it not only genuine but also resonates with its particular time and place, expanding its capacity to touch and be touched by the responsiveness of others.

It is now becoming clearer why, as tenet (4) implies, Japanese aesthetic philosophies might not locate creativity solely in the artist. The dominant modern Western model, as I have submitted, takes the artist or poet to be a discrete, autonomous agent whose independent will determines and creates the artwork or poem. When we privilege external relations in our understanding of reality, our analysis of the poetic act might go as follows:

Suppose Bashō casts his gaze at a misty mountainside and is moved to write a poem. He draws on his mastery of a vocabulary for the natural phenomena and for the feelings arising from within himself, conjoining them into a verbal scheme he finds satisfying. He writes this down as the poem. After finishing the last word of his literary effort, the poem is complete and he may or may not share it with others. The poem has made the connection between himself and the external world of the mountain mist, and through that connection he has expressed his inner subjectivity via the outward expression of the poem.

The just rehearsed description was framed within the terminology of external relations and would be unacceptable for someone like Norinaga, who favors internal relations. From his perspective, we should instead seek in the poetic act a complex web of inter-responsiveness. The event beckoning our response (kotodama), resonates with the spirit of words (kotodama), words the poet has always known but which come to him in new ways and combinations arising both from the particular situation and from the social-cultural world shared with others. That social world has cultivated a participant audience of aesthetes, comprising sensitive readers and fellow poets.

Tenet (5) claims there is an epistemic or knowing dimension to artistic expression. This runs counter to the is/ought binary of modern Western philosophy that allocates to knowledge the descriptive world of facts, and to art the prescriptive world of norms. Yet, if we view the relation between artists and their media as internal rather than external, the situation assumes a different cast. For the artist and the medium to collaborate in the creation of the artwork, the artist must know the medium in a special sense. Potters know their clay, photographers the qualities of light and color, and poets the nuances of verbal meanings and sounds in ways that no textbook or dictionary can ever fully convey. Instead of bifurcating subject and object, this form of knowing assumes the conjunction of the two.

Returning to our internal relation model portrayed in Figure 2, the A can represent the knower, the B the object known, and the overlap would in this case be not the art but instead the knowledge that is discovered in the conjunction between the two. Although this is no place to discuss the issue, this sense of knowledge as an internal relation obliterates the strict opposition between idealism and realism, because knowledge by its very nature is part of the subject and part of the object. (For this reason, incidentally, rare is the Japanese philosopher who conceives of a disembodied form of knowing. Most commonly, the knower is thought of as not simply mind nor simply body but rather as an invisible bodymind.\(^4\))

According to this way of thinking, if all of philosophy’s disciplines emphasize internal over external relations, the themes or foci of those disciplines would in fact be understood as the overlaps between self and other.
(whether "other" refers to persons or things). See Figures 4a and 4b below for a comparison between external relation-dominant philosophies and internal relation-dominant ones. The former place knowledge, ethics, creativity, expression, aesthetics, and law as existing independently of self and other, forming a link between the two without infringing on their independent integrities. By contrast, philosophies stressing internal relations see those same philosophical foci as a discovery and nurturing of the intrinsic interrelation between self and other and cannot be divorced from them.5

Figures 4a and 4b not only show how the various fields of philosophy focus on different thematic objects, but also hint at how those objects might themselves be related. In Figure 4a, we find no obvious reason to suspect any necessary connection among knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics, for example. In the case of Figure 4b, however, the thematic foci of philosophical inquiry generally share a common region, namely, an area of overlap between self and other. That does not guarantee that knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics are themselves internally related, of course, but it does increase the likelihood they might be. Could that explain, for example, why in Zen Buddhism we find a confluence of discourses about understanding the natural world for how it is (knowledge), about being inter-responsive with its cycles in a responsible way (ethics), and about expressing our harmony with it in creative modalities of poetry, architecture, painting, and gardens (aesthetics), for example?

I visited a Zen master who specialized in the design and maintenance of Japanese rock gardens. As we stood there, quietly gazing at the splendid, serene garden he had designed, I looked him in the eye and quietly asked, “How do you know where to put the rocks?” “I just put them where they want to be.” Knowing the rocks is essential to their aesthetic expression.

I also heard an anecdote from the head of research in a major American electronics company about the invention of the home videocassette recorder (VCR). Both Japan and the United States had been rivals in developing the VCR, struggling with the complexity of having a mylar tape negotiate its way across spinning multiple magnetic heads without getting entangled and jamming. After sharing their engineering formulas about torque, vectors, and strength of magnetic fields, a consortium of American engineers had decided that any such VCR would necessarily be too fragile for home use. So American companies put their focus on developing video discs, even though at the time they were limited to playback only. Meanwhile, in Japan a small team of expert engineers from Sony was given a prototype VCR to work on. After months of tinkering, watching the tape become repeatedly entangled, an engineer placed a paperclip-like piece of metal at a specific point in the tape path within a cassette. Then the tape flowed smoothly without jamming, even when the VCR was slightly jostled. The home VCR was born. When asked how the breakthrough occurred, the engineer reportedly replied, “I just helped the tape go where it wanted to go.”

Both anecdotes exemplify the confluence of cognitive insight with aesthetic sensitivity. The Zen gardener and the electronics engineer creatively addressed their situations by finding common ground between the rock and self, or between the moving tape and self. The more the artist finds the common ground of self and other to be not just aesthetic but also epistemic, ethical, creative, expressive, and socially engaged, the closer the artist approaches wisdom, the focus of our sixth and final tenet.

To move from knowledge to wisdom is a transition from the particularistic to the holistic. Wisdom involves grasping the connections among the connections. To make this more intelligible, we need another diagram, another one with two versions: Figures 5a and 5b. Figure 5a depicts a whole consisting totally of internal relations, whereas Figure 5b depicts that same whole except the relations are not only internal but also holographic. By “holographic,” I mean simply the configuration or structure of the whole (holo-) is inscribed (-graph) in each of its parts.
For example, part P from Figure 5a, when transformed to the holographic version in Figure 5b, now contains the configuration of the entire whole A-U. The same is true for each part of the whole in the diagram. With today’s understanding of recursiveness and fractals, such holographic thinking is no longer exotic. A drop of blood or a single strand of hair at a crime scene reveals the full genetic blueprint of the perpetrator. Yet, in Japan such holographic thinking is nothing new. Holographic models from Chinese and Indian Buddhism lent a philosophical interpretation to archaic Japanese animism and sympathetic magic.

The holographic model opens wisdom to an innovative interpretation. Suppose we think of wisdom as determined not by what one knows, but by insight into how everything fits together, how all the connections are interconnected. Metaphorically, wisdom occurs not when one solves the jigsaw puzzle, having placed all the pieces to reveal the full picture. Instead, wisdom arises when we see how jigsaw pieces interlock, where pieces are missing, and how to approach every situation of lack. Indeed, as the twelfth-century Zen Master Dōgen said, when we fully engage phenomena, we recognize there is always something more left out.

Critics have admired many Japanese artworks for their simplicity or “minimalism,” but not enough credit has been given to the underlying assumption of holographic relations that inspire the approach. If reality is such that the structure of the whole is contained in each of its parts, then an ink wash painting of a single blossom on a withered branch or a haiku of just seventeen syllables may reveal the structure of all reality. For that to occur, however, the artist must have the wisdom to engage the recursiveness, and the insight to express it so that an appropriately wise viewer or reader can take part in the revelation. The paradigm here would be the ink wash painting of the Zen circle as revealing of enlightenment. If both the painter and the viewer are wise, then the painting, the artist, and the viewer together transform the single circular stroke of ink into a fractal expression within a holographic whole, revealing the interconnection of all connections. The emptiness at the heart of that open circle is the shining forth of wisdom, the overlaps of all the circles that philosophy supposedly loves in Figure 4b.

A final point. Everything I have said up to here, including all the diagrams, has been a series of heuristic expressions (called hōben in Japanese, upāya in Sanskrit), pointing the way to an understanding of Japanese theories of art and artistry. As we approach that understanding, though, we now realize that the terms we have been using cannot mean exactly what they ordinarily do in everyday discourse. Most importantly, we have resorted to diagrammatic circles to explain internal and holographic relations. Yet, a drawn circle is an enclosed boundary with an inside and outside, whereas the whole thrust of the analysis is that in internal and holographic relations, that boundary is permeable. Hence, we commonly say, for example, “the boundary between self and other breaks down” or “the self dissolves into the other (or self and other dissolve into each other)” or “the subject-object distinction is overcome.” The literature on Japanese aesthetics, and even Japanese philosophy in general, is littered with such statements, but they are not literally true.

Why not? Because there are no such boundaries separating self and other, or self and world, or you and me to begin with. So there is no boundary to overcome, breakthrough, or dissolve. Great art does not break through the boundaries but instead shows that boundaries are not there, or at least are no more that the wispy surface of iridescent bubbles that glisten for a moment in fragile stability on the surface flow of events and then pop! dissolve back into the fluid field of impermanence, taking us with them.

The heuristic expressions are not more than guides in the praxis of thinking, pointing us to the field where there is no-l (muga), where without-thinking (hishiryō) pays no mind (mushin) to the ephemeral bubbles of artist, event, medium, and audience as they appear within the flow of the field of kokoro. When they conjoin, art is born “just so naturally” (jinen). As in acquiring skill in the praxis of any other bodymind activity—learning the fingering of a musical instrument, studying and repeating the proper forms of an athletic move, mastering the rules of syllogistic thinking—the Way of artistry begins with absorbing what must be eventually forgotten to conscious thought. In the words of Zen Master Dōgen:

To model yourself after the Way of the buddhas is to model yourself after yourself; to model yourself after yourself is to forget yourself; to forget yourself is to be authenticated by the totality of phenomena. To be authenticated by the totality of phenomena is to completely drop away one’s own bodymind as well as the bodymind of others. All traces of enlightenment are depleted, and those depleted traces of enlightenment go on and on.

NOTES


5. My 1998 Gilbert Ryle Lectures explored how the cultural preference for internal or external relations influences the development of philosophical systems. The lectures were published as Thomas P. Kasulis, Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).


SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

GOAL OF THE NEWSLETTER ON ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS

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

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

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

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

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

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

3) Where to send papers/reviews: Please send all articles, comments, reviews, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: A. Minh Nguyen (atnguyen@fgcu.edu).

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

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

Lauren Freeman
LOUISVILLE UNIVERSITY

I’m delighted to present to you this double author-meets-critics issue where leading scholars in immigration justice engage with two timely books, Amy Reed-Sandoval’s Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice (Oxford University Press, 2020) and Serena Parekh’s No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Included in this issue you will find commentaries on Socially Undocumented by Simona Capisani, Ryoa Chung and Lisa Eckenwiler, Peter Higgins, and Carlos Alberto Sánchez, followed by a response from Reed-Sandoval. You will also find commentaries on No Refuge by Mary Troxell, Allison B. Wolf, David Owen, and Sandra Raponi, followed by a response from Parekh.

There are also three book reviews in this issue: Samia Hesni reviews Carol Hay’s Think Like a Feminist: The Philosophy Behind the Revolution; Oluwatomisin Ogungbenle reviews Mikki Kendall’s Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot; and Margaret A. McLaren reviews Caring for Liberalism: Dependency and Liberal Political Theory (edited by Asha Bhandary and Amy R. Baehr).

I hope that you find value in this issue and enjoy it as much as I did.

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The newsletter contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor or send four copies of essays via regular mail. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow The Chicago Manual of Style.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the newsletter, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the editor, Lauren Freeman (lauren.freeman@louisville.edu), a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Dr. Lauren Freeman, University of Louisville, at lauren.freeman@louisville.edu.

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

CALL FOR PAPERS

SPECIAL ISSUE IN HONOR OF BAT-AMI BAR ON

The APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy invites submissions for a special issue forthcoming in spring 2023 in honor and memory of Bat-Ami Bar On. Two different types of submissions are invited for this issue:
1. Papers: philosophical papers should be 4,000–7,000 words (including references and footnotes).

2. Narrative essays: short, narrative style essays should be 1,000–3,500 words in length. These essays should be less formal than standard philosophical papers.

Papers might address some of the following themes, whether engaging directly with Bar On’s work, or addressing the themes in a way which honors the spirit and legacy of her contributions to scholarship, mentorship, teaching, and shaping of the profession.

- Violence
- Political conflict
- Power
- Democratic theory
- War and terrorism
- Trauma
- Fascism
- Refugees
- Obligations of political states
- Defense of self and other
- Emotional responses to violence
- Jewish identity
- Judaic philosophy
- Gender
- Hannah Arendt
- Race, nationality and identity formation
- Military intervention
- Whiteness

Narrative essays might include reflections on the first-person experiences of colleagues or students of Bar On, her professional leadership, interdisciplinary work, lessons learned from her, her personal and philosophical influence, and/or her major achievements as they might inform our future work in feminist philosophy.

SUBMISSION DETAILS
Formatting guidelines for all submissions to the Newsletter are available on page 1 of this issue and on the APA website: http://www.apaonline.org/?feminism_newsletter

Submissions should be prepared for anonymous review and must be submitted by September 1, 2022.

Send submissions and inquiries to: aharbin@oakland.edu AND bmemerick@smcm.edu

CRITICAL REVIEWS

Précis: Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice

Amy Reed-Sandoval
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

When I was in my very early twenties, I decided to live and work illegally in Madrid, Spain. I had studied abroad there as an undergraduate and was obsessed with the idea of going back. After graduating from college at the age of twenty-one, I spent a summer doing soul-sucking work at a call center in Omaha, Nebraska. Each day I would wake up at 3 a.m., hop a bus to the call center, and spend eight hours talking to innocents who used AOL as their internet provider. These poor people would call AOL for technical support, but before they could get connected to a technician, they would have to talk to me, one of the souls miserably tasked with trying to sell them additional AOL products they really didn’t need. I had to follow a script, and only after the tone of the conversation reached a certain pitch of desperation was I allowed to transfer them to technical support. They hated it. I hated it. I also suspect that the managers who constantly listened in on our phone calls secretly hated themselves.

After a terrible summer of this, I had saved up enough money to return to Spain—enough money, that is, to pay a month’s rent and purchase a return ticket if things did not go as well as they did in my dreams. I first entered Spain legally, on a tourist visa. Then I started working illegally: teaching English to people of all ages, and providing Spanish-English translation services for local media outlets. In my capacity as a translator for journalists, I sometimes rubbed elbows (a pre-pandemic expression if there ever was one!) with Spanish politicians and even some celebrities. As an English teacher, I taught several private classes to local business leaders. I would gently correct their grammar in their opulent offices while their secretaries brought me trays of breakfast bollos and café con leche. Money was often tight, but I was able to make ends meet and even spend many weekends and evenings enjoying the beautiful city of Madrid with my Spanish friends. Eventually, my tourist visa expired, but I kept living and working in Spain just the same. Once, a couple of my Spanish friends called me an ilegal, but they did so jokingly, with a tone that indicated that they thought it absurd to seriously apply that term to me. I think I felt more bonded to them as a result.

If you are reading this but do not know me, you likely, and correctly, guessed by now that I am white (or white-presenting), and you may have (equally correctly) inferred that I am a US citizen. It is, after all, the simplest explanation for the fact that despite my legally undocumented status, I was able to earn enough money to enjoy the expensive city of Madrid—spending my nights dancing, dining, and exploring the city with ease—and to work several jobs that brought me into direct contact with powerful Spaniards. I am ashamed to say that when I initially got to Spain, I had not reflected on the white privilege that enabled all of this. I thought I was a cool rebel, flaunting Spanish immigration law in pursuit of what I perceived as a bohemian lifestyle. (The fact that my mother was utterly scandalized by all this was, I will now admit, an added benefit.)

But as time went on, circumstances compelled me to question my self-conception as a jet-setting rebelde. I rented an apartment in a building where a number of Ecuadorians also lived. Though they owned their apartments and had legal permission to live and work in Spain, they were regularly derided, and in clearly racist terms. Some
Spaniards told me that while I was a welcome addition to their country, “South Americans” were not.

After a few months went by, I befriended a young Ecuadorian man who, like me, was living in Spain without legal permission. He worked at one of the language schools where I taught classes, and his job was to distribute flyers advertising the school on a busy street corner in central Madrid. Though I ought to have been paid more than I was earning, I couldn’t help but notice the striking difference between how much each of us was paid when we received our crusty envelopes of Euros at the end of the month. I also noted how differently each of us was treated by our bosses. Furthermore, my friend was also frequently harassed—and frequently in racist terms—when disseminating flyers on the street corner, while I earned respect as a teacher and translator.

So, was I a super-cool, immigration-law-flouting rebel, pursuing a bohemian and European lifestyle despite the associated risks? Or, on the contrary, was I simply a beneficiary of white privilege, obnoxiously playing at rebelliousness while my Ecuadorian neighbors and friends (among others)—including many who, unlike me, were living in Spain legally—were called out as “true illegals,” described as “primitive” and resistant to assimilation, and sometimes even victims of violence? I do not have to tell you the answer.

All of this is not to say that things always went spectacularly for me in Madrid. Once, during a job interview, the manager of a language school responded to me with shock and consternation when I revealed my legal status; I felt embarrassed, and I did not get the job. Furthermore, while I earned enough to enjoy myself in Madrid, there were times when I wanted to fly home to visit my family, but I could not afford to do so. I often felt undervalued in my jobs, and was unable to advance my career due to my legal status. Worst of all, I once had a full month’s salary—a pack of hard-earned Euros handed to me in an aged envelope—stolen from me, and I had to borrow money from friends. I had, after all, long since used up my savings earned at that terrible call center in Omaha.

These were disagreeable experiences, and I was obviously wronged by the robbery, but the experience, I knew I suffered certain hardships, but that these hardships do not rise to the level of immigration injustice. I was, in general, treated with respect in Spanish society—so much so that I chose to live illegally in Spain for years. Because of this respect I received, I was able to meet my basic needs despite my migratory status. I thus emerged from that experience feeling that there was something fundamentally different about my experience as an immigrant in Spain, and the experiences of my Ecuadorian neighbors and friends, along with many others.

I started writing Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice over a decade later, in the context of my doctoral dissertation. It was published as a book, considerably different from the dissertation, about fifteen years after my time in Madrid. While I aim therein to provide a globally applicable theory of migration justice, it is primarily focused on immigration justices in the United States, and at the US-Mexico border, not those of Spain. Nevertheless, the book was directly inspired by what I learned through living and working without legal permission in Madrid.

I argue in Socially Undocumented that it is not necessarily unjust to have the status of a legally undocumented person; similarly, it was not unjust that I had the legal status of a legally undocumented person in Spain. However, it is always unjust, I argue, for someone to be socially undocumented: presumed to be undocumented on the mere basis of their appearance, and subjected to demeaning, immigration-related constraints on that basis. Socially undocumented identity, I argue, is an ethnoracial and class identity, and the social group of socially undocumented people includes people with and without legal authorization to live in the country where they currently reside. Indeed, as I explored in the preceding vignette, my Ecuadorian neighbors had legal permission to reside in Spain, but they were nevertheless derided as “illegals.” On the flipside, as my own story demonstrates, one can be legally, but not socially, undocumented.

Socially Undocumented calls for a new approach to conceiving of and pursuing immigration justice. Rather than swiftly assuming that “legalization”—or the regularization of one’s migratory status—will end one’s immigration-related oppression (though “official” legalization is extremely important), we should ask ourselves how socially undocumented identity “operates” as a social identity, and what social forces create and perpetuate this identity. This, in turn, requires us to consider the obligations of both state and non-state actors in terms of pursuing immigration justice. Furthermore, adopting this “identity focus” compels us to consider how socially undocumented people themselves are actively resisting the oppressive forces that constrain them, and even negotiating and shifting the terms of their identities. In broad strokes, my aim in the book is to integrate a phenomenological, descriptive account of socially undocumented identity with a normative vision of immigration justice.
undocumented on the basis of their “pregnant border-crossings.”

The book contains an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. In the Introduction, I carve out the theory of justice that undergirds this project (see Simona Capisani’s discussion below for further details on this aspect of the book). In Chapter 1, I argue that while legally undocumented status is not necessarily unjust, socially undocumented identity, and its associated oppression, always is (on these points, see Peter Higgins’s contribution below). In Chapter 2, I establish what I mean by "social identity," engaging the respective works of Linda Martín Alcoff and Pierre Bourdieu, both of which emphasize, albeit in different ways, the visible and embodied aspects of certain identities (see Chung’s and Eckenwiler’s contribution for more on this part of the project).

In Chapter 3, I call upon interdisciplinary migration scholarship to argue that socially undocumented identity is, indeed, an embodied identity. In Chapter 4, I explore what it means to be both pregnant and socially undocumented (see Ryoa Chung’s and Lisa Eckenwiler’s contribution below for further details on this chapter). In Chapter 5, which is Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s point of focus in his contribution, I argue that socially undocumented identity is not only embodied, but also the source of a unique hermeneutic horizon. Then, in Chapter 6, I argue that an “open borders” framework is inadequate—and even inappropriate—for the purpose of alleviating socially undocumented oppression (see both Capisani’s and Higgins’s contributions for discussion of this point). In Chapter 7, I argue that the migrant journey that many Latin Americans undertake to the United States is a source of socially undocumented oppression, and call for the demilitarization of the Mexico-US border as an alternative to “open borders” paradigms. Finally, in my Conclusion I briefly explore a range of policy changes and individual behavioral changes that would also serve to alleviate socially undocumented oppression.

Emphasizing Embodiment in Immigration Justice

Simona Capisani
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

In her book Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice, Amy Reed-Sandoval masterfully argues for a distinct way of understanding what it means to be undocumented and the related implications for immigration justice. When political philosophy traditionally engages with questions of justice and ethics of undocumented migration, it conceptualizes what it means to be undocumented in legalistic terms and focuses on the legal status of undocumented migrants. Consequently, the moral "problem" of undocumented migration is either framed as a denial of a legal right to remain in the places undocumented people work and live, or as a violation of a given state’s immigration laws. In short, political philosophical approaches to undocumented migration focus on the denial of legal protections (as entitlements), or the violation of laws when addressing the moral challenges related to being undocumented. Reed-Sandoval demonstrates that such an approach is problematically narrow since “being undocumented” in the United States does not necessarily or merely amount to lacking or having a particular legal status. Importantly, Reed-Sandoval argues that being undocumented involves “the possession of an oppressed social identity—that of being socially, rather than legally, undocumented” (12).

In distinguishing between a social and legalistic understanding of what it is to be undocumented, Reed-Sandoval reveals that not all of those who have legal permission to be in the United States are excluded from the oppressed social identity of socially undocumented, and not all legally undocumented immigrants are necessarily socially undocumented. Some legally undocumented migrants may never be seriously affected by their lack of lawful immigration status in the relevant ways that amount to being oppressed. Others who, based on presumptions of their race, gender, or class, are regarded as undocumented may be oppressed regardless of the fact of their actual documentation status. Reed-Sandoval focuses her discussion primarily within a Latinx-US context in her arguments developing socially undocumented as a social identity-based oppression, but her conceptual framework is intended to apply on a wider scale. She suggests that the concept of socially undocumented is useful in identifying additional instances of identity-based immigration oppression in the global order.

The book incorporates a metaphysical, epistemological, and descriptive account of the identity “socially undocumented” and then develops normative arguments regarding the obligations to address the oppression of this social identity. Reed-Sandoval argues for the distinction between social and legal conceptions of being undocumented in Chapter 1. There, she employs an account of oppressed social groups that emerges from Ann Cudd’s externalist account of social groups.1 Cudd focuses on external elements, such as the perceptions and behaviors of others or objective facts about the world, referred to as “constraints,” as the factors that determine a person’s membership in a social group. In short, on Cudd’s view, a social group is a collection of individuals who share a certain set of constraints on action and whose lives are consequently conditioned by the social institutions that put these constraints in place. A social group is oppressed if the set of these constraints is unjust. On a relational egalitarian framework, the justice-based normative approach Reed-Sandoval utilizes, unjust constraints are those that undermine an individual’s moral equality in relation to others on the basis of their membership in some social group.

With this interpretive account of an oppressed social group established, Reed-Sandoval proceeds to argue that there exists a social group which faces unjust constraints that derive from being perceived to be undocumented. Because the constraints that limit the actions of those who are legally undocumented are not necessarily unjust, there may be cases in which one may be legally undocumented but not oppressed. This is not the case for those who are socially
undocumented. If one is judged to be undocumented on the basis of one’s appearance and is thus subjected to immigration-related constraints on that basis, one’s status as socially undocumented is always unjust.

Chapter 2 begins to develop the conception of social identity at play in Reed-Sandoval’s account of socially undocumented identity. Reed-Sandoval motivates the need for a theory of socially undocumented social identity as opposed to a social group-hood account by arguing that a social identity account centralizes the perspectives and lived experiences of those who are socially undocumented. In doing so, it enables examination of the social forces that enable social “illegality” on the basis of these experiences. Furthermore, it compels questioning the nature of the identity itself. For example, it helps to facilitate theorizing, which examines the way in which socially undocumented identity includes a range of other identities such as race, class, gender, etc. Finally, Reed-Sandoval argues that a theory of identity is better equipped to support antiracist and immigration rights work and activism.

Reed-Sandoval draws important insights and methodological frameworks from feminist philosophy in establishing her account of being undocumented as a social identity. She argues that being socially undocumented meets the criteria of being a social identity. Specifically, it is an identity that is visible as well as an embodied interpretative horizon that is fundamental to the self as it impacts how one views the world and how one is seen in it. In this way, socially undocumented identity can be considered “real” in the way Linda Martin Alcoff argues for in her account of race and gender as “visible identities.”

While Alcoff’s theory of “visible identities” does not include socioeconomic class, Reed-Sandoval argues that class identity is visible and embodied in similar ways to the identity of race and gender on Alcoff’s account. This is due, in part, to how class constitutes “interpretive horizons that render certain things visible and salient to one, while also incline one to interpret those things in a particular way” (77). Furthermore, class identity can be embodied in the relevant ways Alcoff identifies for racial and gender identity. To substantiate these claims, Reed-Sandoval draws from the work of Pierre Bourdieu to supplement Alcoff’s account of “visible identities” and expands the theory to incorporate class as well.

From these foundations, Reed-Sandoval proceeds to argue throughout the remainder of the book that socially undocumented identity is visible and embodied along class, racial, and sex/gender lines. For example, in Chapter 3 Reed-Sandoval provides an interdisciplinary analysis and argues that being socially undocumented is embodied on both racial and class lines. She engages in a historical analysis of the development of socially undocumented identity in the United States through the country’s white supremacist immigration laws as well as key historical moments throughout the country’s development.

Reed-Sandoval’s conception of socially undocumented as an identity introduces metaphysical considerations that have significant implications for the challenge of addressing and rectifying structures which contribute to the oppression of those who are socially undocumented. Reed-Sandoval demonstrates an adept range of normative theorizing in her attention to phenomenological experiences of being socially undocumented and develops such theorizing in light of her ethnographic research. Her interviews with women who had the legal permission to cross the Mexico-US border in the El Pas-Ciudad Juarez area in their pursuit of prenatal care and to give birth in the US highlight the way in which a focus on legal status alone misses forms of oppression. In Chapter 4, Reed-Sandoval demonstrates how pregnant, socially undocumented women can be understood as the most “illegalized” identity in the United States regardless of legal status. Her precise and careful theorizing is set in relief by the way in which she is attentive to the lived experiences she captures in this chapter and in her wider descriptive account of socially undocumented embodiment. Her analysis, which is informed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory, seeks to move beyond focusing on the experiences of the most privileged members of a marginalized social group. By incorporating ethnographic tools in her philosophical theorizing, Reed-Sandoval strengthens her claim regarding the unique forms of constraint experienced by those in the social group of being visibly pregnant as well as socially undocumented and why the US is obligated to address the structures that contribute to the oppression of such social identities.

In Chapter 5, while acknowledging her own limited epistemic access as a non-socially undocumented individual, Reed-Sandoval proposes that the US puts socially undocumented people in a “double-bind.” This double-bind condition is understood along the conceptual lines developed by Marilyn Frye. As Frye famously argues, double binds are situations in which the available choices or options available to an oppressed people are reduced to a set in which all such options expose oppressed individuals to some harm or deprivation. Reed-Sandoval proposes that one potentially important feature of the interpretive horizon of a socially undocumented identity is a particular exposure to a double bind US society is responsible for creating. She argues that socially undocumented individuals are faced with two constraining options: they are often faced with little choice but to perform undervalued labor for the sake of survival on the one hand; and on the other hand (regardless of legal status), they are subject to degrading immigration restraints on the basis of being associated with or performing such labor.

The remainder of Chapter 5 completes Reed-Sandoval’s descriptive account of the social identity of socially undocumented. In this chapter, she also explores examples of socially undocumented responses to the double bind described earlier and how such responses are suggestive of the socially undocumented interpretive horizon. Reed-Sandoval argues that this horizon is one “from which socially undocumented people both perceive and develop spaces and social situations in which their labor, personal projects, and the very presence in the United States will be afforded a respect that is frequently denied to [the socially undocumented] in broader U.S. society” (137). It is through this horizon that one can both understand the double bind and create solutions to challenging it. These proposals
emphasize elements of socially undocumented experience that can serve as resources for combating oppression of socially undocumented identities.

The integration of phenomenological, feminist, ethnographic, and historical analysis in her normative theorizing is a distinctive feature of Reed-Sandoval’s work and approach to immigration justice. This is one aspect that makes her book a valuable contribution to political philosophy in general and philosophy of immigration in particular. It demonstrates the normative significance of being attentive to embodiment in the context of immigration and centralizes the experiences and challenges faced by those judged to be undocumented in the United States. In doing so, Reed-Sandoval’s arguments emerge from a “bottom up” analysis and work within a non-ideal theory context (28). She starts with the perspectives of socially undocumented people and the egalitarian conditions of our current world to develop normative principles for pursuing relational equality in our immigration practices. Consequently, her methodology exemplifies philosophical theorizing that succeeds in developing a normative framework that is useful for assessing, designing, amending, and implementing practices and policies in light of their impacts on the oppressive conditions that contextualize immigrants’ lived experience.

Furthermore, by shifting attention to the social dimension of undocumented migration and by focusing on issues of identity, Reed-Sandoval establishes the foundation for an approach to immigration justice that considers a broader range of policy proposals and which is directly attentive to the linguistic practices and social institutions that contribute to maintaining unjust conditions. This is a second and related aspect of why her contribution to debates in philosophy of immigration is significant. Specifically, her account of socially undocumented social identity illuminates the need to move beyond the “open borders debate” in philosophy of immigration. By demonstrating that socially undocumented oppression would persist even in conditions where coercive state borders are eliminated, Reed-Sandoval reveals that some forms of immigration-based oppression require more than ensuring the right to universal freedom of movement. She develops these arguments in Chapter 6, where she lays a foundation for introducing a new option for alleviating socially undocumented oppression.

Reed-Sandoval does not offer a complete account of policy proposals, but she does argue that her conception of socially undocumented oppression requires, as a matter of immigration justice, the implementation of border policies that would contribute to the elimination of such forms of oppression. She argues for specific obligations of the United States to demilitarize the border and respect Indigenous sovereignty in the borderlands in Chapter 7. These obligations amount to a novel alternative to addressing socially undocumented oppression that does not rely on an open-borders framework. In this chapter, Reed-Sandoval also accounts for the obligations of Mexico and other states to address migration through their territories in ways that alleviate oppressive constraints associated with socially undocumented identity. She grounds these obligations in the relational egalitarian approach to justice, which is employed as the overarching normative framework in the book. According to this framework, certain forms of immigration restriction violate the moral equality of the socially undocumented and are thus unjust.

The normative arguments in the latter half of the book may benefit from further elaboration regarding the nature of the correlative obligation associated with socially undocumented oppression. Practices and policies that lead to unjust social identity formation require some form of address, whether that be revision or abolition. Reed-Sandoval seems to suggest that state actors, and possibly non-state actors, are primarily responsible for fulfilling the obligation to alleviate the oppression that occurs in the context of unjust social identity formation. This seems correct, especially given the ways in which “illegality” are constructed in white supremacist laws, programs, treaties, and other institutional arrangements. Reed-Sandoval’s arguments speak to the structural nature of oppression, and thus imply the advancement of structural forms of remedy and address.

However, some readers may question whether claims to alleviate such forms of structural oppression are addressed to states/non-state actors alone. A question arises as to whether state-based actions are sufficient to alter the practices that cause certain bodies to be “illegalized.” For example, can claims to address unjust social identity formation amount to claims of collective moral responsibility of non-socially undocumented persons that perpetuate or participate in such things as linguistic practices which contribute to demeaning constraints on the basis of assumed identity? Are there other relevant actors, in addition to states, that bear responsibility in working towards the alleviation of socially undocumented oppression? To what extent might non-socially undocumented persons, who are also citizens of a state, have an obligation to advocate for particular policy changes or practices on the basis of their participation in such practices? When Reed-Sandoval argues that we should support strikes and other political actions taken by socially undocumented laborers, she seems to suggest that non-state actors may also include individuals. Again, this seems correct as a matter of justice, but more might be said about whether the nature of the responsibility in question is inherently structural, or whether the account includes elements of individual responsibility, and to what extent this suggests a tension with a primarily structural approach.

Furthermore, on Reed-Sandoval’s account, it is unclear whether members of the oppressed social identity also share an obligation to address the structures that contribute to their oppression. Her account clearly establishes the grounds for empowering members of this oppressed group to lead in efforts in addressing unjust practices as it centralizes the epistemic and embodied interpretive horizon of those who are socially undocumented. However, does this interpretive horizon amount to an obligation to resist oppression as well? Carol Hay defends the controversial claim that people have an obligation to resist their own oppression, though she emphasizes that such an obligation is not overly onerous. On Hay’s view, such an
obligation is Kantian in the sense that it is an obligation the oppressed have to protect their rational nature. Does the social identity conception of “socially undocumented,” embedded within a relational egalitarian approach, also establish grounds to resist oppression? Given the unique socially undocumented perceptual practice and interpretive process and horizon, and its importance for resisting the double bind, Reed-Sandoval seems to integrate a normatively significant notion of resistance in her account. Further exploration about the implications of situating a social identity account within the context of a relational egalitarian normative framework would help clarify which agents are responsible for alleviating socially undocumented oppression and whether the relational egalitarian approach (in this context) establishes other actors, besides states, to undermine oppressive social relations, including members of the oppressed social identity themselves.

In offering a “third option” to alleviating socially undocumented oppression, Reed-Sandoval provides a new possibility for reflecting on additional and ongoing forms of immigration-related oppression and for questioning the legitimacy of our current border practices apart from the moral considerations at play in the open-borders debate. Reed-Sandoval makes the important point that even if a right to freedom of movement could undermine socially undocumented oppression, an open-borders framework is still insufficient for addressing the injustices related to such oppression.

This speaks to the larger point, to which I agree, that it is normatively beneficial to assume borders in order to understand a range of moral challenges that emerge in the context of our current immigration practices (165). Without the operative assumption of borders—roughly understood as they currently operate—the nature of certain moral problems related to immigration may be rendered incomprehensible. For this reason, having an alternative to the open-border framework as a new “conceptual space for a philosophical conversation about the legitimacy of our current system of borders,” (148) is particularly fruitful for identifying and addressing moral challenges and conditions of immigration oppression that would not be resolved by ensuring a right to free movement. For example, under conditions of climate change, where the territorial stability of borders can no longer be assumed, the very legitimacy of our current system of borders may be threatened if obligations to those displaced by climate change are not addressed. Securing a right to free movement may still be insufficient in addressing justice for those displaced by climate change since obligations to address such displacement may amount to more than a legal right to cross external state boundaries. Having the conceptual space to evaluate claims to legitimacy without referring to open borders offers the possibility to develop normative insights that can speak to the specific context within which such displacement is occurring.

A key insight of Reed-Sandoval’s work is that the consideration of the relationship between immigration justice and unjust social identity development is necessary in constructing just immigration practices. On a global scale, this requires examining the impacts of immigration policies and border practices on the embodiment and moral status of certain groups. This is an important addition to an area of political philosophy that is primarily concerned with the violation or affordance of certain rights or legal statuses. Such attention to embodiment in the context of immigration justice offers fertile ground for further understanding forms of oppression related to immigration. The notion of socially undocumented as a social identity also provides us with a new conceptual and linguistic framework that expands our understanding about the ways in which various interlocking forms of oppression characterize the experience of immigrants in the US regardless of their legal standing. In doing so, Reed-Sandoval’s work establishes a much needed normative foundation for recognizing and dismantling the structures that perpetuate such oppression.

NOTES

Socially Undocumented and Structural Health Vulnerability

Ryoa Chung
UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL

Lisa Eckenwiler
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

It is a privilege to comment on Amy Reed-Sandoval’s brilliant and innovative book, Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice is an indispensable contribution to the literature on immigration, especially immigration and ethics, and, indeed, calls for expanding the scope of immigration justice by showing how many migrants face oppression though they are legally documented. Reed-Sandoval argues that “socially undocumented” individuals experience forms of oppression due to prejudices about their identity despite their status as legal residents. In her words, the socially undocumented “endure a common set of unjust, immigration-related constraints on the basis of being perceived to be undocumented” (37).

Overall, the author argues for a relational, egalitarian account of immigration justice focused on social and institutional structures that spawn injustice, inspired by the writings of Elizabeth Anderson and Iris Marion Young. Drawing as well on Linda Martin-Alcoff’s notion of “visible identities,”
Reed-Sandoval’s notably phenomenological approach highlights two key elements of “socially undocumented identity”: visible identity and the epistemically rich notion of the “interpretive horizon.” The bodies of migrants, first, Reed-Sandoval argues, are visibly sexed and racialized bodies. Reed-Sandoval also integrates Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” (78) as it relates to embodiment in particular environs in fleshing out her interpretation of “visible identities” here. The second characteristic (further explored in Chapter 5) consists of the interpretive horizon determined by socially undocumented people’s positionality, or their social locations. An interpretive horizon is another way of capturing the idea that how and what we know is shaped by how we are situated in the world. In this regard, as feminist standpoint theorists argue, those who experience these forms of oppression have a privileged epistemic access to this interpretive horizon of social facts. It is this that should inform immigration policy for the sake of justice on Reed-Sandoval’s account as we explain below.

Chapter 4, the main focus of this commentary, vividly illustrates several dimensions of the author’s thesis. This chapter focuses on the case of Mexican women who are pregnant and cross the US border to receive obstetric and prenatal care in US clinics. It opens with the situation of Salma, who does all she can to avoid appearing pregnant and vulnerable to border control officers by forcing herself into a physical posture that exacerbates fatal risks of her difficult pregnancy and impending delivery. She has all the documents to travel legally between these two countries. However, she is constantly stopped, interrogated, and scrutinized by the American border officers given her visible identity. She must submit to stressful interrogations despite her legal status and deliberate efforts to appear middle class. Despite all, they are treated as socially undocumented, the most “illegalized” social group in the United States.

Following the pioneering work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Reed-Sandoval’s intersectional approach analyzes the compounded discriminations on the grounds of race, gender, and socioeconomic class. There is no doubt that Reed-Sandoval’s book represents an invaluable contribution to the field of philosophy of race regarding the racism experienced by specific social groups within the Latina/o/x population. Those Mexican women who can afford OB/GYN care in the United States are clearly part of an affluent class. However, the phenomenon of racialization that they experience when they cross the border confines them to a working class associated with a specific ethnic population destined for menial manual labor.

Being women and pregnant illustrates the gendered dimension of the most illegalized social group in the United States, according to Reed-Sandoval. Indeed, the history of immigration policies in the United States attests to the stigmatization of pregnant women who represent, literally in its bodily manifestation, a public burden deemed too heavy for society. The fact that these Mexican women are married and come from the middle class is not enough to remove the racist prejudice that weighs on the social, economic, and even marital vulnerability of these women (considered more likely to be abandoned) who carry in their bodies the negative externalities of an unwanted American citizen.

Women’s bodies have always been the site of social conflict over their reproductive rights. In another article (“Travel for Abortion as a Form of Migration,” Essays in Philosophy, 2021), Reed-Sandoval analyzes the situation of women who must travel to access abortion clinics in the context of COVID-19 confinement measures. The journey of these women, even for those with US citizenship or regularized immigration status, who will have to travel from a state like Texas, where restrictive anti-abortion laws are in place, to states where they can access abortion clinics can be likened to a form of migration within US borders. This phenomenon challenges the prevailing methodological nationalism in the philosophy of immigration Reed-Sandoval argues, rightly so. The rise of populist and reactionary movements that challenge women’s rights worldwide is a real and distressing issue in light of the tragic death in November 2021 of a pregnant woman who was unable to access a therapeutic abortion in Poland. Domestic and cross-border migration of women seeking abortions is a disquieting and pressing issue.

Chapter 4 addresses the right of pregnant women to access obstetric and gynecological care during pregnancy and childbirth. However, the phenomenon of illegalization experienced by the Mexican women who cross the border legally but are treated as socially undocumented raises a larger spectrum of health issues for migrants. Health inequalities affecting migrant populations and immigrants (who sometimes fall into the category of socially undocumented regardless of their legal status of residency) are the subject of specific research in the field of public health ethics. We find it interesting to extend our commentary on Chapter 4 of Reed-Sandoval’s book by addressing converging concerns that characterize our work about structural health vulnerabilities and the health of refugees (Chung, Eckenwiler, Hunt).

By structural health vulnerability, we refer to the interaction of two types of injustices that exacerbate health inequalities. We do not subscribe to an essentialist conception of vulnerability but rather to a structural perspective on the increased propensity for health risks that affect individuals or social groups given their position within unjust societies. Societies are unjust to varying degrees because of a complex set of factors that affect individuals’ basic well-being or fundamental rights. We do not claim to offer a comprehensive theory of health injustice but rather a conceptual tool to study the interaction of structural injustices and epistemic injustices in the causation and perpetuation of unjust health inequalities. The notion of structural injustice refers to Iris Marion Young’s understanding that social processes cause harms to identifiable victims even when it is impossible to identify the actors who are causally responsible for producing them. Of course, structural injustices that are produced by the indirect responsibility of a multitude of actors, each pursuing their interests within the legal and institutional framework of established social norms and rules, coexist with injustices that are caused directly and deliberately by actors accountable for their wrongdoing.
according to the traditional model of liability. However, the model of social connection that interests Iris Marion Young is that which concerns indirect responsibility in the production and perpetuation of structural injustices and which escape legal sanctions. Border officials, for example, who inflict stressful and humiliating vetting procedures on Mexican women despite their most legal right to cross into the United States perpetuate structural racism against them. The border officials may not be driven by subjective racist motivations, but they nevertheless reinforce racist prejudices that underlie socioeconomic and political inequalities between dominant and stigmatized social groups. Borders themselves can be understood as structures that generate systemic injustice. The phenomenon of the socially undocumented fits into the multidimensional analysis of the notion of structural injustice as presented by Iris Marion Young, to whom Reed-Sandoval refers to in her theoretical framework (cf. Introduction).

Structural vulnerabilities in health are linked inextricably to the notion of epistemic injustice, by which we mean, in general, unjust differential status between agents and the contents of knowledge. The power relations that exist in the social world are transposed in the world of knowledge. Although the concept of epistemic injustice is described in detail in the fields of philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, and epistemology, the expression was coined by Miranda Fricker, who defines the following two modalities: testimonial and hermeneutic injustice. The situation of pregnant Mexican women who cross the US border and are abusively scrutinized are victims of testimonial injustice whenever their testimony is discredited due to racist and sexist prejudices about their social identity. In many ways, it can also be argued that following Alcoff’s second characteristic of visible identities, which refers to the interpretive horizon of individuals related to their social positionality, these women experience hermeneutical injustice. The phenomenon of the socially undocumented described by Reed-Sandoval suggests that these individuals’ interpretation of trauma and humiliation is not only incomprehensible to members of the dominant epistemic group due to their limited hermeneutical resources, but these women may also suffer from a lack of resources to name and identify aspects of the dehumanizing phenomenon they experience under the border officials’ eyes reflecting the society’s gaze upon them. Reed-Sandoval’s invaluable work in identifying and analyzing the characteristics of the socially undocumented phenomenon, especially that experienced by the most illegalized group in the United States, represents a breakthrough in hermeneutical injustice research. Just as the naming of the notion of sexual harassment and the clinical diagnosis of postpartum depression Fricker presents as examples of hermeneutical breakthroughs for women in the fields of law and medicine, the naming of the socially undocumented represents a breakthrough in the domain of immigration justice.

The book’s ethnographic method of combining qualitative interview-based research, a phenomenological perspective of real-lived experiences, and conceptual analysis based on these data presents a rich array of examples and case studies to illustrate the experience of the socially undocumented and how they endure injustice. This work, as the author puts it, “compels us to take on far wider range of policies, social institutions, societal attitudes, linguistic practices, and ways of relating to each other” (12) if we are to make progress toward justice for migrants and become a “society of equals” (14).

Social Groups, Oppression, and the (Legally) Undocumented

Peter Higgins
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Race, class, and gender, considered as social institutions, undeniably shape the experiences of migrants in significant ways. Since race, class, and gender also produce systematic, unjust inequalities between groups of people, they thus ought to be central categories of analysis in most, if not all, philosophical examinations of migration justice. Amy Reed-Sandoval’s Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice demonstrates masterfully how to reason about migration justice in a way that attends carefully to the consequences of race, class, and gender for migrants and non-migrants alike. Reed-Sandoval’s new book also shows how sensitivity to race, class, and gender generates recommendations for just migration policy that are distinct from those that appear to follow from traditional approaches.

Socially Undocumented focuses on a question that has received limited attention in the literature on philosophy of migration: How should one understand and assess the justice of (particularly United States) migration policy with respect to the undocumented (rather than with respect to prospective migrants)? Undocumented migrants are usually understood to be a collection of individuals defined by a legal status (presence in a country without official authorization). Reed-Sandoval argues that we should replace this understanding with one on which the undocumented are an (oppressed) social group—the “socially undocumented.” The socially undocumented are those who “endure a common set of unjust, immigration-related constraints on the basis of being perceived to be [legally] undocumented” (37).

Thus, Reed-Sandoval argues that socially undocumented status should be regarded as the group-making feature of the undocumented as a social group. This commentary seeks to extend Reed-Sandoval’s analysis by exploring two alternative ways of understanding the social groups in question. On the first, the legally undocumented are a social group unto themselves (not merely a legally defined collection of individuals) and are likely, perhaps usually even if not necessarily, oppressed as such. On the second, the social group “the undocumented” comprises the legally and the socially undocumented alike. I will argue that we should accept one or the other of these alternative understandings of the social group(s) oppressed by unjust, immigration-related constraints.
SOCIALY UNDOCUMENTED VS. LEGALLY UNDOCUMENTED

Lacking legal authorization to be present in a country matters less in explaining the causes of the injustice the undocumented experience than does simply appearing to be undocumented (4). On the basis of this claim, Reed-Sandoval argues that "the term ‘undocumented migrant’ should be taken by political philosophers and policymakers to refer not primarily, or even necessarily, to the legal status of being undocumented but to an oppressed social group" (36-37), namely, the socially undocumented. The socially undocumented have in common that they are assumed to be legally undocumented on the basis of their appearance. Applying Ann Cudd’s account of social groups (Cudd 2006), Reed-Sandoval argues that the socially undocumented are an oppressed social group because the assumption of their legally undocumented status occasions unjust immigration-related constraints (37).

A starting assumption of Socially Undocumented—that migration justice does not require open borders and thus that states may justly restrict immigration to some extent (26)—further helps to explain Reed-Sandoval’s contention that the undocumented should be understood in social rather than legal terms. Reed-Sandoval makes this assumption not only because a focus on open borders can distract from injustices endemic to present social reality, but also because, she argues, the absence of formal restrictions on transnational migration may exacerbate the oppression of the socially undocumented (26). It follows from this assumption that the legally undocumented are not necessarily oppressed: the constraints they face (limitations on their freedom of movement) are not necessarily unjust.

Furthermore, Reed-Sandoval argues, understanding the undocumented as individuals who lack legal authorization to be present in a country confounds the attempt to conceive of the injustices the undocumented experience as oppression. “When we are restricted to understanding the term ‘undocumented migrant’ as a legal status, it is conceptually very difficult, if not impossible, to identify the injustice of undocumented migrant oppression” (37) because “oppression” is something that happens to social groups (or individuals qua members of social groups) rather than to individuals simpliciter.

The final aspect of Reed-Sandoval’s argument for understanding the undocumented in social rather than legal terms is that individuals who are legally but not socially undocumented may experience few to none of the unjust hardships associated with undocumented status. Whereas the legally undocumented lack official authorization for the presence in a country, the socially undocumented are assumed to lack such authorization on the basis of their appearance—in the United States in particular, appearing to be Latinx and working class or poor (56). Thus, as Reed-Sandoval observes, people of Latin American descent are disproportionately targeted by immigration enforcement strategies in the US (35). A socially undocumented person is more likely than someone who is “merely” legally undocumented to be detained by the police and threatened with deportation and, consequently, has more limited freedom of movement (47-48). Further, the socially undocumented are subject to a range of demeaning stereotypes and assumptions—e.g., that they do not belong in the US, that they cannot speak English, or that they are uneducated (48). Finally, finding decent paying, non-degrading work is more difficult for the socially undocumented than it is for the merely legally undocumented, whom people may assume are legal residents. Thus, the merely legally undocumented may be offered work without proof of legal presence, are more likely to be offered minimum wage or better, and are less likely to be required to perform dangerous or degrading labor (48).

Being legally undocumented is neither necessary nor sufficient for being socially undocumented, according to Reed-Sandoval. It is not sufficient because one can be legally undocumented without being taken as such by others. It is not necessary because people who are legally authorized to be present in a country, including citizens, may be assumed to be legally undocumented and therefore be socially undocumented. Even among the socially undocumented who are also legally undocumented, their oppression owes to being socially undocumented, not to being legally undocumented. (Recall Reed-Sandoval’s stipulation that national restrictions on immigration are not unjust in and of themselves (46-47).) As Reed-Sandoval notes, many of the socially and legally undocumented have false documentation asserting their right to legally live and work in the US, and yet they nevertheless routinely face unjust exploitation. (Otherwise convincing documentation is assumed to be fraudulent because of the bearer’s appearance.) Thus, legal status does not explain the oppression of the socially undocumented, even among those who are also legally undocumented (53).

Anticipating the objection that there is no need to posit the socially undocumented as an oppressed social group (because the oppression she is describing is simply Latinx oppression), Reed-Sandoval argues that the socially undocumented and Latinx people are distinct social groups that are not coextensive. It is possible, she notes, to be Latinx without being taken for legally undocumented, and without being taken for Latinx (54-55). Furthermore, people who are assumed by others to be legally undocumented on the basis of their appearance are so judged not only because of apparent racial/ethnic markers but also because of apparent markers of socioeconomic class: as she argues, “the term ‘socially undocumented’ refers not simply to or necessarily to being Latina/o/x but to a more complex interplay of racial/ethnic and class identity” (56).

ARE THE LEGALLY UNDOCUMENTED AN OPPRESSED SOCIAL GROUP?

Reed-Sandoval declines to say that the legally undocumented are a social group, and she questions whether they are oppressed: “If the legally undocumented can be said to comprise a social group on the basis of a shared set of constraints, it is not necessarily an oppressed social group” (46). I wish to suggest, first, that the legally undocumented are usually, even if not necessarily, an oppressed social group.
Using Cudd’s definition, Reed-Sandoval maintains that a social group is “a collection of persons who share (or would share under similar circumstances) a set of constraints on actions.” Constraints, in Cudd’s account, are “facts that one does or ought to rationally consider in deciding how to act or how to plan one’s life, or facts that shape beliefs and attitudes about other persons.” Examples of constraints include “legal rights, obligations, and burdens, stereotypical expectations, wealth, income, social status, conventions, norms, and practices.” As Reed-Sandoval notes, Cudd’s account of social groups is an externalist one in the sense that “what makes a person a member of a social group is not determined by any internal states of that person, but rather by objective facts about the world, including how others perceive and behave toward that person.”

Reed-Sandoval notes some constraints common to the legally undocumented in the US; the legally undocumented cannot vote in US elections or serve on juries, and they lack a legal right to work. I would add to this list that the legally undocumented do not have secure access to a number of fundamental public goods, either because it is prohibited or because attempting to access them risks exposing one’s undocumented status, including police services, health care, and education. The existence of these constraints means that the legally undocumented are a social group.

On Cudd’s account, a social group is oppressed if the constraints that constitute it are unjust. Reed-Sandoval extends Cudd’s account of oppression by arguing that constraints are unjust if they undermine the moral equality of members of the group relative to members of other groups, or if they reinforce extant inequalities of moral status between groups. This understanding of unjust constraints can be applied to explain why the legally undocumented are not (necessarily) oppressed, Reed-Sandoval argues: if we assume that states have a right to restrict immigration (as she does), then the constraints that make the legally undocumented a social group are not (prima facie) unjust.

To be sure, if justice does not require open borders (i.e., if it is possible for states to justly restrict immigration), then one could not maintain that the legally undocumented are necessarily oppressed (i.e., that there is injustice merely in virtue of the group’s existence). But this does not mean that, in some and perhaps many circumstances, the legally undocumented are not oppressed. Analagously, convicted felons are not necessarily oppressed if the state has a right to punish those who break the law, but this does not mean that prisoners in the United States today are not oppressed. In order to determine whether the legally undocumented are oppressed, one must examine whether the constraints they experience in particular circumstances or contexts (e.g., in the US today) undermine their moral equality.

Reed-Sandoval denies that constraints such as not being permitted to vote, serve on juries, or work legally for pay necessarily undermine the moral equality of the legally undocumented. However, there are plausible reasons for thinking that prohibiting the legally undocumented from working undermines moral equality (or at least that it is unjust in some way). After all, the legally undocumented are also prohibited from receiving public welfare assistance. Thus, the prohibition on legal employment leaves the legally undocumented with only one alternative to destitution: employment in the informal economy, where one is vulnerable to labor exploitation in the form of wages below the minimum, wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and employer abuse. The constraint of not having secure access to certain public goods (police services, health care, and education), whether due to legal residence requirements or fear of having one’s legal status exposed, also arguably undermines the moral equality of the legally undocumented, given centrality of these goods to basic human needs.

Thus, the legally undocumented are plausibly regarded as an oppressed group in the US today. The legally undocumented are an oppressed social group in any country in which internal (intra-country) immigration enforcement mechanisms make fulfilling basic human needs more difficult for the legally undocumented than it is for similarly socially positioned citizens and legal residents (e.g., citizens and legal residents of the same race/ethnicity, gender/sex, and economic class). I would venture to say that this is the case in a large number of countries today.

ARE THE LEGALLY AND SocialLY UNDOCUMENTED DISTINCT SOCIAL GROUPS?

I have argued so far that the legally undocumented are an oppressed social group in the United States, and, likely, in many other countries, today. This conclusion is consistent with Reed-Sandoval’s contention that the socially undocumented are an oppressed social group. If we are both correct, then there are (at least) two social groups that are oppressed as a consequence of immigration-related constraints.

But perhaps we are expanding our ontology unnecessarily. One might reasonably hold that, in countries where the legally undocumented are oppressed, the socially undocumented and the legally undocumented are members of a single (oppressed) social group. One way to make sense of how this could be is to think of extant laws restricting immigration and enforcing immigration restrictions as imperfect formal mechanisms for establishing and maintaining boundaries around the identity of the paradigmatic members of a national political community (however that identity is conceived among privileged groups in a particular society). They are “imperfect” mechanisms because they sometimes exclude individuals whose identity conforms to the paradigm, like Reed-Sandoval’s hypothetical Gary, a white, middle-class citizen of the UK who moves to the US without legal authorization for the benefit of his music career.

They are “imperfect” in a second way as well: they fail to exclude all those whose identity is targeted for exclusion, namely, citizens and legal residents for whom apparent racial/ethnic and socioeconomic class markers lead...
others to assume that they are undocumented. The kinds of discrimination and oppression the socially but not legally undocumented experience, as described by Reed-Sandoval, can thus be understood as a way of “correcting for” the limited ability of extant immigration restrictions to exclude all those whose presence destabilizes the dominant conception of national identity in a particular society.

If “the undocumented” is a single oppressed social group comprising the socially and the legally undocumented, then those who are both and experience not only formal, juridical immigration-related constraints (e.g., not being able to work in the formal economy) but also informal, social immigration-related constraints (e.g., discrimination based on stereotypes) are core members of the social group. In contrast, the place in the group of those who are merely legally undocumented (such as Gary) is closer to the margin.

This way of understanding how the social group “the undocumented” is constituted parallels how one might understand other kinds of oppression when using an externalist account of social groups (as Reed-Sandoval does, following Cudd). Externalist accounts have the implication that a person’s membership in a social group can be the result of how others perceive and consequently treat the person, even if the perception that occasioned the treatment is mistaken. This is what makes sense of the existence of socially but not legally undocumented people. Similarly, an externalist account might say that Muslims in the United States (understood as a social group oppressed by Islamophobia rather than as a religious faith community) comprise both people of Islamic faith and people whose appearance is regularly judged by others to indicate Middle Eastern ancestry. People of Islamic faith whose appearance is regularly judged by others to indicate Middle Eastern ancestry are core members of the oppressed group, whereas people of Islamic faith whose ancestry is assumed to be European are (perhaps) marginal members of the oppressed group. Yet people not of Islamic faith whose appearance is regularly judged by others to indicate Middle Eastern ancestry are also members of the same oppressed group.

CONCLUSION

Given Cudd’s definition, the legally undocumented undeniably count as a social group. If a country’s internal immigration enforcement mechanisms make it difficult for legally undocumented people to fulfill basic human needs, then the constraints that shape the life outcomes of the legally undocumented are unjust, and they are an oppressed social group. The claim that the legally undocumented are, in some countries, an oppressed social group complements Reed-Sandoval’s argument for understanding the socially undocumented as an oppressed social group. In contrast, acceptance of the claim that (in countries where the legally undocumented are oppressed) the legally and the socially undocumented are members of the same oppressed social group would require a modest adjustment to Reed-Sandoval’s ontology.

Given that (insofar as the legally undocumented are oppressed) many of the same constraints shape the experiences of the legally undocumented and the socially undocumented alike, and that there are possibilities (as suggested above) for explaining why people in distinctive legal and social circumstances are impacted by the same constraints, I find this modest adjustment a tempting one to support.

NOTES

1. All pages references are to Amy Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) unless otherwise noted.
3. Cudd, Analyzing Oppression, 41.
5. Cudd, Analyzing Oppression, 36.

The Value and Limits of the Socially Undocumented Interpretive Horizon

Carlos Alberto Sánchez
San José State University

In my view, the most significant chapter in Amy Reed-Sandoval’s excellent book, Socially Undocumented, discusses the “socially undocumented interpretive horizon” (hereafter SUIH). I limit my comments to this chapter, Chapter 4, as I find it a rich and important contribution to our understanding of the immigrant experience.

According to Reed-Sandoval, the SUIH belongs to socially undocumented persons, and these are persons who are:

(1) “presumed to be undocumented on the mere basis of their appearance”

and

(2) “subjected to . . . ‘demeaning immigration-related constraints’ or ‘illegalizing forces’ (that is, they are ‘socially illegalized’).”

On this definition, the socially undocumented immigrant identity is a result of judgments and actions of the not-socially undocumented. This construction, via narratives and other cultural notions, is then internalized by immigrants as an accurate description of who they are, which means that their worldview begins to conform to the presumptions and subjugations implied in its appropriation/internalization. It is thus an imposed identity that achieves reality by social coercion (it was not invited and it is not welcome, even if it is assumed) and impacts the undocumented as well as some who are documented, equally. As Reed-Sandoval puts it: “One can in fact have legal permission to be in the United States and nevertheless be socially undocumented.” In other words, “[s]ocially undocumented oppression does not
necessarily track legally undocumented status: one need not be legally undocumented to be socially undocumented, and, furthermore, one can have legal authorization to be in the United States without being socially undocumented.\(^6\)

Socially undocumented immigrant identity is thus a social construction that impacts the immigrant’s lived experience in substantial ways, including the way the socially undocumented interface with the world. This is because identity is “a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out into the world,” which means that “social identities [are] sites of situated reason and social location of knowledge.”\(^6\) In other words, a social identity is a framework for understanding the world, or, with the undocumented, “a socially undocumented interpretive horizon.”\(^6\)

The SUIH is the way that the socially undocumented know their world. This horizon, as limit and boundary, is populated with notions, beliefs, assumption, and attitudes that form, inform, and delimit the world as experienced; these attitudes, beliefs, etc., however, run out to be prohibitive and demeaning of the immigrant identity (given the negative tone of the immigrant narrative that constructs that identity). In Reed-Sandoval’s reading, the limits of the interpretive horizon are the limits of the world. These limits are ultimately “racializing” and “class-based forces that cause certain types of bodies to be presumed to be in the United States without legal authorization, and subjected to demeaning immigration-related constraints,” constituting, what Reed-Sandoval calls, “socially undocumented oppression.”\(^7\)

Ultimately, the SUIH will itself reflect socially undocumented oppression. Hence, as Reed-Sandoval rightly points out, the world seen through the SUIH will be colored by fear and trepidation. For instance, socially undocumented people will “often feel compelled to run and hide from immigration enforcement.”\(^8\) I can testify to the reality of this fear. I began working on the cauliflower fields at the age of twelve. Although I was a citizen (born in Anaheim, CA), my parents were not, nor my cousins, nor the more than a dozen people working beside me. A lookout would be stationed a few miles away, responsible for spotting immigration enforcement patrols; if he saw one, or what resembled one, he would sound an alert and everyone would run into the thicket—everyone, including me. We would hide for hours until the danger passed. The “feeling” that Reed-Sandoval picks out here doesn’t disappear after one escapes the danger, or leaves the fields, or enters academia—in and outside the fields, in the streets, in the classroom, in the courthouses, in the home, it remains; the compulsion to run remains. As such, the SUIH is attuned for survival, capable of picking up threats and dangers to, but also opportunities for, the socially undocumented.

Reed-Sandoval highlights two “features” of the socially undocumented interpretive horizon:

1. “heightened levels of rational and embodied fear of immigration enforcement,”\(^9\) and

2. “a perception of streets and other public spaces in the United States as perpetually insecure.”\(^10\)

Anyone who knows a socially undocumented person, or anyone who is one, can attest to the reality of these features. In my “Philosophy and the Post-Immigrant Fear,”\(^11\) I translated these features into the experience of being socially undocumented in academic philosophy, in which I felt as though my deportation from the academy was imminent with every paper I wrote on non-European philosophy, as though conferences and classrooms were “perpetually insecure” and my ousting was just a matter of time. Reed-Sandoval points out that these are “negative” features of the SUIH that pick out only those vulnerabilities that color the immigrant experience. However, there are also positive, and “transformative,” features that one could point to; these, she makes clear, “are open and dynamic” and can “enable some socially undocumented people to understand, respond to, resist, and perhaps transform some of the negative, oppressive aspects of socially undocumented experience.”\(^12\)

The positive features of the SUIH emerge when one considers that essential to socially undocumented existence is “resistance to a ‘double bind’,” which Reed-Sandoval defines, citing Marylin Frye, as “situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure, or deprivation.”\(^12\) Accordingly, for the socially undocumented, this double bind takes the following form:

On the one hand, they often have no choice but to perform under-valued labor in the United States; failure to do so could very literally result in starvation and death. On the other hand, socially undocumented people with and without legal authorization to be in the United States are “read” as “illegals,” and subject to demeaning, immigration related constraints, on the very basis of performing and/or being associated to such labor.\(^13\)

Those surprised by immigrant farm workers continuing to labor during a pandemic, despite threats to life and health, fail to see their “willingness” to do so as a struggle with this double bind. Immigrants, or the socially undocumented, respond to this double bind either positively or negatively. They can respond negatively by submitting to the fatalism of the double bind, or positively by rebelling against it. The double bind forces action, since failure to act means certain death; as Reed-Sandoval writes, “they must do this work in order to survive.”\(^14\) This means that, broadly speaking, to exist as a socially undocumented immigrant is already an act of social resistance. It is a constant liberatory enactment.

We can thus say that something like a resistance-consciousness structures the SUIH. Reed-Sandoval writes: “a core aspect of the socially undocumented immigrant horizon may take the form of an understanding and perception of, as well as an enacted opposition to . . . [the] double bind.”\(^15\) This manifests in social activism, artistic practice, etc., in which the socially undocumented may involve themselves. This sort of work will feel right and
seem like a good fit for the socially undocumented, since, as Reed-Sandoval puts it, they are “epistemically well equipped” to “perceive and develop spaces and social situations in which their labor, personal projects, and very presence in the United States will be afforded a respect that is frequently denied them in broader US society. It is a horizon that often features an inclination to organize with others.” In other words, those who see the world through the SUIH are, because of it, primed for activism, prepared for the kinds of organization required to confront all threats to their being.

To highlight this rebellious existence, Reed-Sandoval appeals to Mexican regional music, specifically a song by the renowned norteno group Los Tigres del Norte, “El Mojado Acaudalado.” I’ll quote it here because, according to Reed-Sandoval, it helps in understanding the SUIH. Los Tigres sing:

I’m not happy where I am.
Goodbye, goodbye Colorado
Nevada and Oregon
The “wetback” is saying goodbye to you
The “wetback” who was covered in sweat
In the fields of Arizona
And the factories of New York.

This stanza is said to capture both the double bind and the struggle of the socially undocumented. Here, “the narrator clearly perceives the double bind in which he is positioned. US society reaped the benefits of his labor . . . while systematically denigrating him on the basis of performing it.” But this is also “a response to the double bind in question” (emphasis in the original), which consists in “choosing to return to Mexico” (emphasis added) even though he doesn’t have to. It is a choice grounded in rebellion, since, Reed-Sandoval asks, “Why would [he] choose to remain in a place where he is degraded on the basis of his hard work?” Thus, rather than remain and continue to suffer degradation, the narrator chooses to leave because where he is going “he expects to be respected by others for his industriousness in the United states.” We could say that the immigrant is pushed out of the US by systemic oppression and pulled toward Mexico by the promise of respect. Reed-Sandoval concludes that this journey out of and toward exemplifies, “quite literally, an escape from the double bind in question.”

Reed-Sandoval’s reflections on the socially undocumented interpretive horizon, while valuable in every sense, ultimately motivate a question of reach: that is, what, exactly, does the socially undocumented interpretive horizon capture and what, if anything, does it leave out?

Ultimately, then, my only reservation about the SUIH is that it sets the immigrant experience as a whole on too steep an existential hill. That is, it reflects an immigrant experience that is perpetually Sisyphean, as a permanent struggle for survival; as an experience that is fundamentally and essentially reactionary. I’ve thought this myself, focusing only on the fear of being an immigrant, on the anxiety of hitching the immigrant identity to justificatory documents, etc., and how the immigrant responds and overcomes.

But I think there’s more to the immigrant experience than the struggle; I think immigrant subjectivity is more than reactionary. I thus call for a broadening of the epistemic horizon belonging to the immigrant experience and the SUIH.

2. BROADENING THE SUIH

I do believe the SUIH captures an aspect of the hermeneutical reality of the immigrant experience. However, I suggest a broadening by appealing to affective categories that better track the immigrant experience in its phenomenological fullness.

The specific case of my father helps me illustrate my point, and allows me to pick out phenomenological clues that apply to all for whom this lived experience belongs. His case begins with the (very ceremonious) burial of his ombligo—the dried-out strand of umbilical cord left over on a baby’s navel after birth, and which usually falls out a couple of weeks after birth. In my father’s case, once the ombligo fell off—ombligo also refers to that part that does not fall off—and the difference is understood in context—my grandmother buried it under a tree in the hills outside Acultzeramo, Michoacán, Mexico. The reasons as to why this was done are unclear, but my father tells this story often, so it became, for me, part of his immigrant identity. Every time he tells it, nostalgia and longing are clearly evident in his words; he longs to return, he says, to that tree, to find his ombligo and see where he is buried. It is, as if, the ombligo never fell out and he is still attached to it, and it stretches a thousand miles across a border and into the heart of California. He is tethered to it and, in his mind, the purpose of all his struggles is to return to that tree, to unearth his ombligo, and be one with himself again. His departure, his separation, was never meant to be permanent; the goal of his immigrant life has always been to return to his origin.

But what does this have to do with the immigrant experience in general? What does it have to do with the “socially undocumented interpretive horizon”? Recall the “El mojado acaudalado” by Los Tigres del Norte quoted above. In both my father’s story and in that stanza, the actual struggle against the double bind is only suggested. What we have, instead, is a longing, a nostalgia, to return to an origin. There is, in both accounts, a sense that whatever struggle there was or is (viz., the double bind) is only part of a journey. But most importantly, in both accounts, the sense of impermanence is palpable. The anxiety of being in one place, of standing still, can be gathered from my father’s constant references to his native land and in the many stops of the song’s narrator (Arizona, New York, Colorado, Oregon) as he finally makes a decision to return.

These two anecdotes illustrate the need to broaden the scope of the SUIH. I would like to propose a less reactionary conception of the socially undocumented interpretive horizon, one that includes affective and experiential elements such as zozobra, nostalgia, and nepantla, which would describe how immigrants interpret and accept the world as it really is, but also as purposeful and liberating.

Consider zozobra or that anxiety and uncertainty that comes with experiencing the world as unsettled or in constant
motion. While this may seem like a terrible state in which to find oneself, it can also be liberating. Being comfortable with the idea that the world is constantly changing, that things are unsettled, and impermanent, means that one's own unsetledness and uncertainty is not out of place in it. For immigrants, this means that so-called truths are fallible, or doubtful; this means that one can rationally assume nothing and be certain of nothing, and that trust extends only to what is immediately present and possible. If there is confidence, it is in contingency, in the view that things may not be what they seem or that they may change at any moment—e.g., that immigration laws will change without warning, that anti-immigrant sentiment will be better or worse with the flip of some social switch. In this way, one is never settled; one travels from certainty to uncertainty, from yes and no, never settling in some epistemological foundation. Borrowing from a concept in Mexican philosophy, I can call this category “zozobra.” As such, the world is seen through the category of “zozobra,” as offering incompatible and risky life choices—i.e., Reed-Sandoval’s “double bind”—none of which are advantageous, but all of which are expected.

The world seen through the category of zozobra is seen in its contingency. The immigrant imaginary knows this contingency, as it is lived in the act of “crossing” from what is familiar to what is not. Immigrants then find themselves always crossing, re-crossing, and crossing again; boundaries appear, are overcome, and reappear again. The immigrant is always in the process of arriving and departing. Mexican philosophy and Chicana Feminism call this “nepantla.” The socially undocumented recognize this and accept it as a state of being. Thus, challenges and struggles like that presented by the double bind are endured, and so is the suffering that anti-immigrant sentiment attaches to it. Being nepantla means that the crossing is never done. The experience of crossing influences thought in many ways, certainly in the trauma and fear of knowing it as a limit and, since it was crossed, a transgression. Socially undocumented immigrants, like myself, internalize this crossing in our own lives. Becoming a philosopher, for instance, means that I’ve crossed to a realm unimagined by my father, and, thus, that I’ve transgressed some limit. Deportation is not a far-fetched idea for my father who crossed the political dividing line, nor is it for me, who crossed some imagined threshold beyond which no one else we knew had gone. At the same time, however, crossing also means transcendence and going beyond imposed/impossible limits: it means liberation and power. Immigrant parents whose children graduate college certainly feel like something they were not expecting to cross has been crossed. This is a struggle beyond the struggle of the double bind: it is a struggle against internal limits.

We can also include in this broader notion of the SUIH the category of nostalgia. My father’s story about his buried ombligo exemplifies this. He longs to return to his roots, to the origin of his tether. This longing for return is inherent in immigrant reason. The injustice of the world—the zozobra and the double bind—is tolerated because the nostalgia for the origin is greater than the suffering of the present. The world is also seen through this longing: I will do the hard, dirty, risky jobs that no one else will do because one day I will be done and I will go back home, even if my return date is completely uncertain. For some, the return is indefinitely postponed (death); the impossibility of return, however, does not keep the nostalgia from affecting the color of the world. Nepantla and zozobra mean that there is no settling where I am, and as long as this is the case, I will long for the origin. My immigrant father dreams through his nostalgia—when awake and when aslees. He recognizes that his struggle has never been merely for the sake of overcoming a double bind, an oppression, but for the sake of his own liberation in an end beyond my imagination. I recall asking him once why he bought a home in the US if his goal has always been to one day return to the place of his birth. We have to stay somewhere, he said. In this sense, immigrant reason defies the literal meaning of a “mortgage” (a death pledge), since the commitment to real estate is not until death, but until one’s return.

There’s a thinking-through-the-return that constitutes the SUIH. It serves as an expectation of a coming-back, which is grounded on nostalgia, memory, and expectancy. The return home is planned and always on the foreground. It structures interpretive horizons by coloring the present with plans for the future; it displaces the primacy of the double bind by looking beyond it, to a doubling-back to the origin. This is evident in the immigrant’s confrontation with the possibility of his own death and the practice of “postmortem repatriation,” in which the bodies of deceased migrants are sent back to Mexico to be buried in their hometowns. I say this is a category of immigrant reason because, of course, while immigrants expect to die, immigrant reason assumes that death may come while in the process of journeying, of going from one place to another; in other words, away from home. Nevertheless, there is an expectation of a return, even in death. Thus, for instance, time and time again one hears about immigrants who have died in the United States being “repatriated” to be buried. This shows that, in accordance with immigrant reason, there is a desire to die where one was born, and, if all else fails, to be buried there. Jorge Negrete’s famous anthem of Mexican nomadic life says it all:

Mexico lindo y querido
Si muero lejos de ti
Que digan que estoy dormido
Y que me traigan aquí/
Que me entierran en la sierra
Al pie de los magueyales
Y que me cubra esta tierra
Que es cuna de hombres cabales.

Mexico beautiful and beloved
If I die away from you
Let them say that I’m aslees
And bring me here/ /
To bury me in the mountains
At the foot of the magueyales
And let this earth cover me
Which is the cradle of upright men.

—Jorge Negrete “México Lindo y Querido”
The narrator here implores “Mexico” itself to advocate for his return. If he happens to die in a foreign land, he asks that his body be returned so as to be buried in Mexican soil, to be buried in his land, in his history, in the “cradle of upright men.” The nostalgia in these stanzas is familiar; death cannot stop the journey from reaching its completion, which is a return to origins, to the earth, to where all ambiguos are buried. The imploration to Mexico itself assumes a welcoming, a sense that this is what the journeying demands, a final return that not even death can stop. The hope to return is the only hope. Of course, some of the socially undocumented have no such plans for return. Those who only look as if they are immigrant without being so may be those who, unlike their parents, have no connection to a similar origin—they don’t have an option for repatriation. This is something that is worth considering from a phenomenological perspective; for instance, do these phenomenological categories structure my post-immigrant experience as they do the experience of my immigrant parents?

***

Amy Reed-Sandoval’s Socially Undocumented is an instant classic in the philosophy of immigration. My point in this discussion is not to minimize the struggle against the double bind which confronts the socially undocumented, but to suggest an expansion of the SUIH, which I think is a central moment in the book’s characterization of immigrant identity. There will be questions as to how what I’ve proposed here applies to the socially undocumented in a broader sense, but these are reserved for another time.

NOTES

2. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 4, 61.
3. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 5.
4. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 127.
5. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 66; emphasis in the original.
6. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 127.
7. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 128.
8. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 128-29.
9. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 129.
11. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 129.
12. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 129.
13. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 130.
14. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 134.
15. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 136.
17. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 138; translated in the original.
18. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 138.

20. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 138.
21. Reed-Sandoval, Socially Undocumented, 138; emphasis in the original.
24. See, for instance, Sánchez, Emilio Uranga’s Analysis of Mexican Being, 79ff; Pat Mora, Napatla: Essays from the Land in the Middle (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

Author’s Response

Amy Reed-Sandoval
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

I am extremely grateful to my interlocutors in this special issue of the APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy: Simona Capisani, Peter Higgins, Ryoa Chung, Lisa Eckenwiler, and Carlos Alberto Sanchez. They are all exquisite thinkers who have made, and are actively making, vital contributions to immigration ethics. As I embarked upon this special issue with Lauren Freeman and Serena Parekh, I reached out to these particular philosophers because I already greatly admired their respective efforts to theorize various dimensions of migration without losing sight of how social identities influence divergent migratory experiences. Having read these excellent replies by thinkers I so admire, I now also feel honored by the care and depth with which they have engaged my book. I will add that these rich and provocative pieces are worthy of engagement in their own right.

Beyond these commonalities, these pieces differ from one another in many respects, as each contributor has helpfully focused on a different aspect of Socially Undocumented. I begin by discussing Capisani’s and Higgins’s respective contributions, as they each focus on the book’s arguments rather broadly (and, in addition, complement my discussion in the precise). Next, I respond to the co-authored article by Ryoa Chung and Lisa Eckenwiler, which explores my ethnographic and phenomenological account of “pregnant, socially undocumented embodiment” via the lens of what they term structural health vulnerabilities. Finally, I turn to Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s contribution, which critically interrogates my account of what I call the “socially undocumented hermeneutic horizon.”

Simona Capisani has, once again, provided a detailed overview of each section of my book, and helpfully (and successfully, in my view!) outlined how all of the book’s parts fit together. I am grateful to her for this service. Beyond this wonderful overview, Capisani also raises several issues and challenges inspired by her careful reading. First, she questions whether combating and ultimately alleviating socially undocumented oppression ought to be a matter of collective responsibility involving both state and non-state actors alike. Second, citing Carol Hay’s influential
work on the subject, Capisani wonders whether socially undocumented people themselves have a moral and political obligation to resist their own oppression. Finally, Capisani draws attention to a crucially important ethical challenge to which, due to space constraints, I was unable to devote attention: climate refugees.

Regarding the first point: I am in complete agreement with Capisani that addressing socially undocumented oppression requires urgent action on the part of both state and non-state actors. I ground this point in Iris Marion Young’s “social connection model” of responsibility, which calls upon individuals to collectively work against injustices from which they benefit, even if the individuals in question are not, qua individuals, directly morally responsible for the injustices in question. I argue, for instance, that people in the United States who are not socially undocumented should, among other things, support unions in which socially undocumented people are involved (which may involve, say, boycotting certain products if called for by such unions), and resist harmful language, such as the term “illegal” as problematically applied to human beings. The United States government, meanwhile, is required to (among other things) demilitarize its border with Mexico and halt deportations until socially undocumented oppression is successfully alleviated.

Capisani recognizes these aspects of my argument, which leads me to believe that her main suggestion is that I explore in greater depth the extent to which socially undocumented people themselves ought to actively resist their oppression. This is an extremely important question. I agree with Capisani that we must answer it in order to develop a robust and satisfactory account of our collective responsibility to resist the injustice at hand. At this moment, I have two replies. First, I would refer the reader to Carlos Alberto Sánchez’s contribution to this special issue, in which he engages with and expands upon my account of socially undocumented hermeneutic horizons. Sánchez states in that discussion that simply to exist as a socially undocumented person is to engage in an act of resistance, given the double bind in which society at large places socially undocumented people. Along these lines, I would say that the refusal of socially undocumented people to stop living, working, creating art, and building communities is, indeed, an example of an oppressed group resisting its own oppression.

Second, I want to delve a bit more deeply into Capisani’s question, and to consider cases in which socially undocumented people seem to be complicit in their own oppression. When I lived in the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez region, I regularly encountered Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border who complained about their fellow Mexicans who had become immigration enforcement agents and who were perceived as being especially harsh towards other Mexicans in the execution of their duties. There are also undeniable tensions in the US Latin American and Latina/o/x communities around, for instance, the membership of many Latina/o/xs in the Republican party, with its “tough-on-immigration” policy approach. In my chapter on pregnant socially undocumented embodiment, discussed in greater detail below, I also share the words of a “Salma,” who told me in an interview that some Mexicans compared her to “rats abandoning a sinking ship” when she chose to seek prenatal care in the United States while living in Mexico.

Given my positionality (again, I am neither Latina nor socially undocumented), I was initially hesitant to focus on these components of socially undocumented oppression. However, now that I have a bit of distance from the writing of this book, I feel more comfortable saying that socially undocumented people should resist their own oppression when they can safely do so. For instance, it seems to me that withholding support from sociopolitical activities and prejudices that further marginalize the socially undocumented is a safe and available option, even for members of this vulnerable group.

Finally, I wish to say that I thoroughly appreciate Capisani’s discussion of why open-borders frameworks are likely to prove unsatisfactory for the purpose of understanding what is owed to climate refugees at the bar of justice, and I look forward to engaging with this topic further in future work.

Peter Higgins, meanwhile, argues against my claim that while the socially undocumented are, indeed, an oppressed social group, the legally undocumented are not necessarily so. This claim is part of the “core” of my book’s arguments, so I will engage Higgins’s comments at length.

Higgins accepts my claims about the oppression of the socially undocumented. He also accepts that if we assume that states have a prima facie right to control immigration, the legally undocumented—though a social group that shares a similar set of constraints on action—are not necessarily oppressed, for the constraints on action that members of this group share is not unjust. Higgins refers to a hypothetical story I share in Socially Undocumented about “Gary,” a white, middle-class citizen of the United Kingdom who moves to the United States without legal authorization in hopes of achieving fame as a punk rock star. Gary is able to live quite comfortably in the United States, though he sometimes gets annoyed that he cannot vote in US elections, and that he cannot always “land the best gigs” due to his undocumented status. While Gary’s experiences are annoying and perhaps even sad, they do not, I argue, rise to the level of injustice. Unlike socially undocumented people, who are unjustly oppressed on the mere basis of “looking” undocumented, Gary is treated with respect during his time in the United States.

Higgins seems to agree with me about Gary, as he supports my conclusion that one is not necessarily oppressed on the basis of being legally undocumented. But this is not enough, he argues, to show that the legally undocumented are not an oppressed social group. This is because being legally undocumented generally leaves one vulnerable to problematic deprivation—in terms of one’s basic needs for work, health care, and protection from law enforcement. This is partly because legally undocumented people frequently neglect to seek out these things for fear of having their legal statuses being found out. Thus, we should accept that the legally undocumented are an oppressed social group,
even if, problematically, some not-oppressed “Garys" will end up getting included.

Before responding, I want to express great appreciation to Higgins for so carefully developing this argument. Throughout the writing of Socially Undocumented, I have been presented with the objection—by myself and by other readers—that a focus on socially undocumented identity may problematically divert focus from the challenges that legally undocumented people face. Higgins’s contribution offers the most developed and sustained version of this objection that I have encountered. I also want to clarify that my goal is not to deprive the world of resources for bringing us closer to immigration justice. At present, a focus on legally undocumented oppression—though philosophically problematic—may very well be the best tool we have, and Higgins’s commentary helps to illustrate why.

Having said this, I will, at the very least, refrain from wholeheartedly agreeing with Higgins here. We must ask ourselves the following question: When socially undocumented people are oppressed in seeking education, soliciting help from law enforcement, and seeking employment, is it because they are legally undocumented, or is it because they embody a particular racial and class identity—that of being socially undocumented? If the former, then why are white-appearing, middle-class people like Gary (and me, as narrated in the précis), and so many others largely immune to such constraints? And why are such constraints applied to socially undocumented people with legal permission to be present in the United States?

Let us imagine, furthermore, that Gary struggles to get the medical care he needs in the United States—as so many do in the US—and that this access is exacerbated by his legally undocumented status. He therefore leaves the US, returns to the UK, and receives the medical care he needs in a reasonable amount of time. In this story, was Gary oppressed—specifically as a legally undocumented person (I add this clarification because the US health care system is unjust toward most who encounter it, and this may skew our intuitions about this case)? Or, if that is insufficiently compelling, let us imagine that Gary crosses the borders of a Native American reservation, spends some timing living there, and then seeks out health care, education, and other social services from the Native political community in question. If Gary is denied the essential services he seeks, but can receive those services elsewhere at no great cost to himself, is it correct to say that Gary was a victim of injustice vis-à-vis the Native political community in question?

Rather than concluding, along with Higgins, that legally undocumented people are an oppressed social group, I shall propose something of a middle ground. Having considered Higgins’s helpful remarks, I think we should conclude that legally undocumented status regularly, and even reliably, exacerbates socially undocumented oppression, and possibly other identity-based forms of oppression. This move has, I think, at least two main benefits. First, concerns about legally undocumented status will remain highly relevant to the project of pursuing immigration justice, which is what Higgins is clearly calling for. Second, and relatedly, we will not lose our focus on the urgent task of undermining socially undocumented oppression—a task that, as I argue in Socially Undocumented, is often obscured and even undermined by a misguided “legalistic focus” on undocumented experience.

I am not certain that Higgins will agree with my rejoinder, but I want to enthusiastically thank him for pushing me on this point. I wish I had included a version of these replies to Higgins’s argument/objection in the book.

I now turn to two contributions that focus on particular chapters of the book.

First, allow me to consider the co-authored contribution by Ryoa Chung and Lisa Eckenwiler, which offers commentary on the chapter of my book in which I explore what I call “pregnant, socially undocumented embodiment.” I do this by applying the tools of philosophical analysis to ethnographic research I conducted at the US-Mexico border, through which I learned about and from the experiences of some Mexican women who had legally entered the US from Mexico to seek prenatal care, only to be subjected to a wide range of intersecting sexist, racist, and classist immigration-related “constraints” (to use Ann Cudd’s term) at various stages of their journeys.

I find it extremely helpful that Chung and Eckenwiler engage this chapter through the lens of their own extremely powerful, feminist bioethics work on structural health vulnerabilities, described by the authors as “a structural perspective on the increased propensity for health risks that affect individuals or social groups given their position within unjust societies.” This structural perspective, to which, as the authors note, I subscribe in the book, enables us to understand how an entity like the US-Mexico border—which seems utterly different than (and distant from) the operations of one’s doctor’s office—is actually directly implicated, for many vulnerable people, in one’s health care and health risks. On the flip side, I have aimed to show that for many pregnant, Mexican people who cross the US-Mexico border to seek prenatal care in the United States, health care settings are also sites of immigration injustice.

In their discussion of structural health vulnerabilities, Chung and Eckenwiler articulate a framework that, in my view, takes a powerful step beyond Iris Marion Young’s conception of structural injustice, to which all three of us subscribe. That is, they explicitly connect structural injustice to epistemic injustice, which they define as “unjust differential status between agents and the contents of knowledge.” As Chung and Eckenwiler point out, the trauma and social “illegazilation” that many pregnant Mexicans experience when crossing the US-Mexico border and seeking prenatal care is often incomprehensible to socially dominant others. Furthermore, people who endure these experiences may, as the authors note, “suffer from a lack of resources to name and identify aspects of the dehumanizing phenomenon they experience under the border officials’ eyes reflecting the society’s gaze upon them.”

While I devote a chapter of Socially Undocumented to exploring socially undocumented epistemology and
“hermeneutic horizons,” which I discuss below in my responses to Sánchez’s contribution to this special issue, I did not directly explore the structural injustices that many pregnant Mexican women experience in crossing the US-Mexico border as matters of epistemic injustice. I find this suggestion from Chung and Eckenwiler to be extremely promising and helpful. In addition to enabling us to better articulate the complex injustices at hand, their discussion also helps me explain some of my ethnographic research experiences on this subject. I did not discuss, in Socially Undocumented, the enthusiasm with which most (if not all) women I interviewed seemed to answer my questions about their experiences crossing the border for prenatal care. Looking back, and with Chung’s and Eckenwiler’s discussion in mind, I recall having a distinctive sense (though I cannot confirm this) that the women I interviewed had not been given ample opportunities to discuss the injustices they faced—at least outside of their most intimate conversations. Furthermore, they clearly knew that they had experienced injustice—I was, after all, learning about these injustices from them—and this is likely to have augmented their anger and frustration. The ethnographic interviews felt like acts of hermeneutic resource-development.

Clearly, as Chung and Eckenwiler indicate, epistemic injustice is often directly connected to structural injustice, and this holds true in the case of structural health vulnerabilities. Their discussion thus enriches my own exploration of pregnant, socially undocumented embodiment, as well as my understanding of the powerful role that ethnographic research can play in philosophical research. I am extremely grateful to both authors for encouraging me to further consider this project along precisely these lines.

Finally, I turn to the challenging, powerful, and often personal contribution from Carlos Alberto Sánchez. Unlike me, Sánchez writes as a socially undocumented person and philosopher, and his engagement with my chapter on socially undocumented interpretive horizons draws upon both his own experiences growing up as someone who was simultaneously legally “documented” and socially undocumented (he narrates some of his experiences working in cauliflower fields from the age of twelve, and constantly fearing raids by immigration enforcement despite his US citizenship), and those of his father, who moved to the United States from Michoacán, Mexico, and displayed for Sánchez a complex array of strategies that both resisted and transcended the double binds of socially undocumented oppression.

Before responding directly to Sánchez’s rich and interesting remarks, I want to pause to reflect on positionality, and the ethical and philosophical challenges associated with writing about the oppression of a social group of which one is not a member. As I explore in the book, in writing Socially Undocumented I tried to constantly bear in mind the lessons I learned from Linda Martin Alcoff’s “The Problem of Speaking for Others.” Therein, Alcoff argues that those of us who write about an oppression we do not experience should strive to speak with (in the sense of participating in a dialogue that may be challenging and critical, not in the sense of collective voice), rather than to, those about whom we write. Furthermore, one should not present one’s words as a “final sentence” or “take” on the subject matter—rather, one should be engaged in a dialogue in which members of the group in question get the final say.

Of course, one’s ability to speak with is others-dependent. Without a doubt, the greatest joy I have experienced in the development of Socially Undocumented has come from hearing from readers who are themselves socially undocumented—often immigration activists and university students—and who have frequently offered questions, critiques, and encouragement. Sánchez, in writing explicitly as both a socially undocumented person and an expert in Mexican and Latinx philosophy, has contributed to making this book what I always hoped it would be: a conversation. (I will add that I encourage those who believe that positionality is irrelevant to philosophy to read Sánchez’s contribution for clear evidence of why it matters.)

Sánchez explores two features of the socially undocumented hermeneutic horizon that I highlight in the book, namely, heightened fear—both rational and embodied—of immigration enforcement, and a perception of public spaces, including streets, as unsafe. Endorsing this aspect of the horizon, Sánchez writes that “anyone who knows a socially undocumented person, or anyone who is one, can attest to the reality of these features” (see Sánchez’s contribution to this special issue).

He also further develops these concerns by showing how he experienced socially undocumented oppression in academic philosophy, where he regularly felt that a form of deportation from the academy was imminent every time he wrote or presented on non-European philosophy. Sánchez also underscores my discussion of the “double bind” in which socially undocumented people often find themselves—i.e., they must engage in labor associated with migrant status in order to survive, but they are socially condemned on the basis of so doing. I argue, as Sánchez notes in his contribution, that socially undocumented people are epistemically well-equipped to perceive this double bind and resist it through protesting, community organizing, mutual support, and other practices.

Without denying that these are, indeed, components of socially undocumented epistemologies, Sánchez then argues for the importance of expanding upon this account of socially undocumented hermeneutic horizons, such that its content is not merely reactionary vis-à-vis the aforementioned double bind in which socially undocumented people find themselves. He then explores and employs a range of concepts from Mexican and Chicana philosophies—particularly nepantla, zozobra, and nostalgia—both to augment my account of socially undocumented horizons, and also to highlight a broader range of resistance practices in which socially undocumented people regularly engage. I refer the reader to Sánchez’s wonderful contribution (if they have not already read it) for a clear and vivid exposition of these very terms. Here, I briefly discuss how Sánchez’s broadening of my account of socially undocumented interpretive horizons has both epistemological and political benefits.
First, I believe that Sánchez is absolutely right in offering this descriptive account. I can only hope that others similarly explore this very question, for as Alcoff notes, following Gadamer (and as I explore in my book), interpretive horizons—including those of distinctive social groups—are constantly shifting in response to various factors, including historical and political changes. Thus, the project of describing the socially undocumented interpretive horizon will always be incomplete—at least until socially undocumented oppression ceases to exist. Second, I believe that beyond broadening my own account, Sánchez’s contribution also helps explain my own (limited) focus on socially undocumented perception and resistance of the aforementioned double bind. Literally every example of socially undocumented resistance I explore in Socially Undocumented involves socially undocumented people responding to the uncertainty of zozobra, the repeated border crossings of nepantla, and the bittersweet tugs of nostalgia. For instance (and as I explore in the book), when Dolores Huerta coined, on behalf of the United Farmworkers Union, the expression si se puede! she was expressing herself as a nepantler—a creative border crosser and “mover”—in the face of the overwhelming uncertainties of immigration politics and labor struggles. Furthermore, the use of dichos in such struggles, which I also explore, is a creative employment of nostalgia on the part of socially undocumented farmworkers.

Beyond these epistemic benefits, Sánchez’s contribution also supports further development of Socially Undocumented as a work of political philosophy. One of the main burdens of the project has been to challenge the idea that “legalization,” or the “regularization” of one’s migratory status, signals the end of undocumented oppression. A socially undocumented interpretive horizon, defined, in part, in terms of zozobra, nepantla, and nostalgia, will reflect the fact that many socially undocumented people constantly understand their migratory experiences in terms of uncertainty, continuous border-crossings, and painful nostalgia—all of which are creatively called upon, as exemplified by Sánchez’s father’s active story-telling of his ombligo, buried in Michoacán, and remembered in the United States. This often holds true even after legal status is “achieved.”

I conclude these thoughts by once again thanking my interlocutors for their rich, challenging, generous, and productive contributions to this special issue. Each contribution has helped me to further develop the main arguments of the book. Capisani’s essay has helped me to reflect more upon the possible obligations of socially undocumented people to resist their own oppression. Higgins’s contribution has pushed me to clarify the role that legal “undocumentedness” plays in immigrant oppression, including socially undocumented oppression. Chung and Eckenwiler have inspired me to consider “pregnant, socially undocumented embodiment” as both a structural and an epistemic injustice. Finally, Carlos Sánchez has helped to develop my descriptive account of socially undocumented interpretive horizons by calling upon Mexican and Chicano philosophical concepts such as zozobra, nepantla, and nostalgia. Without a doubt, this special issue constitutes an extremely important contribution to the project of describing, understanding, diagnosing, and ultimately fighting socially undocumented oppression.

NOTES
1. See Chung and Eckenwiler, this issue, 8.
2. See Chung and Eckenwiler, this issue, 9.

Précis: No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis (Oxford 2020)
Serena Parekh
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

OVERVIEW
The summer of 2015 marked the beginning of the so-called European refugee crisis. Though people had been entering Europe as asylum seekers for a long time, the rate intensified dramatically that year as more than one million asylum seekers sought refugee status. Most refugees crossed into Greece and Italy, countries that were largely unprepared for the large numbers of new arrivals. Refugee camps quickly sprung up, producing scenes of utter desolation and poverty. Refugees began walking across the pastoral European countryside, children and belongings in tow, camping out at European train stations, hoping to find their way to more welcoming countries. These shocking and heart-rending scenes were eventually met with hostility as borders closed and fences were erected to keep refugees out. Anti-refugee sentiments spread, and right-wing anti-immigrant parties gained power in many countries in Europe, and ultimately, around the world. For most people, this was the refugee crisis—a crisis for European and other Western states trying to cope with the large influx of desperately needy people who had nowhere else to go.

But this is only part of the story. Deeply connected to this first crisis is a second one that is less visible and less understood: it is a crisis for refugees themselves who are unable to find genuine refuge anywhere in the world. The second crisis is this: if you are a refugee in the twenty-first century, the international community has put in place three options for you and none of them provide refuge. Refugees are offered the option of living in an underfunded and insecure refugee camp where they have a roughly 1 percent chance of someday being resettled; they can move to an urban center and live informally with family and friends, working illegally, with little to no help from the international community; or they can hire a smuggler and spend their life savings on a dangerous journey across oceans and deserts to seek asylum in a Western country. All three of these options deny refugees a minimal level of human dignity.
This book was written for a public audience, and one of the main goals was to make visible this second crisis that often remains invisible to Western audiences. Media accounts tend to focus on the impact of refugee flows on the countries accepting refugees and most of the political discussion on the topic are about the first crisis as well. Most philosophical accounts focus on the moral obligations that arise from the first crisis, such as whether we have a moral duty to take in refugees and asylum seekers, neglecting the treatment of refugees while they are refugees. I argue that we cannot understand our moral obligations to refugees without understanding the second crisis and our failure to treat refugees with dignity.

Let me say a little more about the second crisis and how this ought to shape our ethical response. I argue in the book that most refugees in the twenty-first century are unlikely to receive refuge. By refuge, I mean the ability to live with a certain minimal level of human dignity while they wait for a long-term solution (either to go home safely or to be resettled permanently elsewhere). This can be seen in some of the data on the global refugee situation: 90 percent of refugees will remain in the Global South, either in inadequate refugee camps or without any international aid in urban centers. About 10 percent will leave and try to seek asylum directly in a Western country, which requires risking their lives, engaging smugglers, and often being detained in camps or prisons if they do not die on their journey. Only 2 percent of refugees will be able to find a new home or be able to return home in a given year; the rest will remain in this period of limbo for years, often decades—people are refugees for on average seventeen years—without access to the basic conditions of human dignity.

I argue that we should understand this situation as a kind of structural injustice. The outcome—that 2 percent of refugees have access to refuge in any meaningful sense, while the rest are stranded in circumstances that don’t reach the threshold of a minimum standard of dignity—is unjust. Yet, as I show in the book, this is an injustice that was not deliberately or intentionally caused by any individual state, and, for the most part, did not originate in deliberate malice. Most often, states are acting according to widely accepted rules and norms. When the policies of Western states around immigration, deterrence, and security are taken all together, however, the outcome is that the majority of refugees are structurally prevented from accessing refuge and the minimum conditions of human dignity. When we understand the situation as a structural injustice and take seriously the second crisis, the crisis faced by refugees around the world, we see that one of the duties that Western states have to refugees is to address the political structures that unjustly prevent refugees from accessing the minimum conditions of human dignity while they are refugees. Once we understand Western states’ roles in creating and perpetuating this structural injustice, we will see that not only do we have strong obligations to resettle refugees and accept asylum seekers but also that any ethical response to the global refugee crisis must entail changing these unjust structures. We must find ways for even those refugees who will not be resettled or receive asylum to have the minimum conditions of human dignity.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

No Refuge aims to persuade all readers, academic and the general public alike, that Western liberal democracies have a moral obligation to rethink the way that refugees are treated during their displacement and to ensure that refugees can access refuge and dignity in the long term. Yet because many people outside of professional philosophy find the language of morality uncomfortable or inappropriate when it comes to refugees, I give an overview of the concept of a moral obligation by looking at its roots in philosophy and religion. I examine the consequentialist, Kantian, religious, and human rights grounding for morality in order to demonstrate why a moral perspective is fundamental to addressing the crisis that refugees experience. I show that there is an overlapping consensus among these different views that we have robust moral obligations to refugees.

I then look more carefully at philosophical discussions about our obligations to refugees. For many philosophers, whether or not we should accept refugees, either by offering them asylum or by resettlement, is the key ethical question. I examine in detail the philosophical debate surrounding states’ moral obligations both to asylum seekers who have come onto their territory (either legally or illegally) and to refugees waiting in camps for resettlement. I give an overview of three strong moral arguments for allowing refugees and asylum seekers into our countries, in fairly high, though not unlimited, numbers. I also explain three arguments for the opposing view, for why our obligations to refugees do not necessarily include resettlement or asylum. These debates over morality can seem abstract, but they are anything but. The debate between those who believe we have moral obligations to asylum seekers and those who prioritize cultural homogeneity or state interests makes a real difference in the lives of millions of people around the world.

Though I agree that we must take seriously our moral obligations to resettle refugees and grant them asylum, I show why we must also think morally about the vast majority of refugees who will never be resettled nor even seek asylum. To do this, I try to give readers a sense of what life is like in UN-run refugee camps and in many urban centers where refugees live with little to no help from the international community. I demonstrate that neither option allows refugees to actually gain refuge, that is, access to basic rights, security, or adequate material resources. This is why I claim that refugees are denied the minimum conditions of human dignity. I highlight the moral significance of the fact that these are the two main options for refugees provided by the international community. This is an important point because many who focus on our obligations to resettle refugees tacitly assume that refugees are well cared for in refugee camps and in many urban centers where refugees live with little to no help from the international community. I demonstrate that neither option allows refugees to actually gain refuge, that is, access to basic rights, security, or adequate material resources. This is why I claim that refugees are denied the minimum conditions of human dignity. I highlight the moral significance of the fact that these are the two main options for refugees provided by the international community. Though I agree that we must take seriously our moral obligations to resettle refugees and grant them asylum, I show why we must also think morally about the vast majority of refugees who will never be resettled nor even seek asylum. To do this, I try to give readers a sense of what life is like in UN-run refugee camps and in many urban centers where refugees live with little to no help from the international community. I demonstrate that neither option allows refugees to actually gain refuge, that is, access to basic rights, security, or adequate material resources. This is why I claim that refugees are denied the minimum conditions of human dignity. I highlight the moral significance of the fact that these are the two main options for refugees provided by the international community. This is an important point because many who focus on our obligations to resettle refugees tacitly assume that refugees are well cared for in refugee camps and that such camps are a morally adequate alternative to resettlement. Because this is not the case, this chapter demonstrates that we need a larger moral framework to think about what Western states owe to refugees.

For the roughly 10 percent of refugees who find refugee camps and informal urban settlements to be inadequate, asylum is their last hope. In order to receive asylum, a potential asylum seeker must come directly to the country
it hopes will recognize them as a refugee. Even though there is a universally recognized right to seek asylum, most Western states have put in place deterrence policies to discourage and prevent asylum seekers from seeking asylum in their countries. These policies make seeking asylum difficult and often deadly. In fact, they essentially require that refugees hire human smugglers. Increasingly, those who do make it to the West to claim asylum find themselves in circumstances similar to the ones they are fleeing; living for long periods in impoverished camps or closed off in detention centers. These aspects of the second crisis—the price we ask asylum seekers to pay to claim asylum—is rarely discussed when considering what we owe to refugees. I aim to bring this phenomenon to the forefront and highlight its moral implications.

In the last part of the book, I argue for a novel interpretation of the refugee crisis as a global structural injustice. The outcome is a structural injustice because no one country or set of countries intentionally created this system. It is an outcome that can be understood as the cumulative effect of many different policies around refugee resettlement, refugee camps, humanitarian aid and development aid, immigration, and border security enacted by various countries around the world. To make this argument, I draw on the work of Iris Young, who argued that many global problems have a similar structure. Sweatshops, for example, were not the result of anyone doing anything wrong. In fact, everyone is doing what they’re supposed to be doing: consumers are searching for the cheapest goods; corporations are maximizing profits for their shareholders; even the foreman who pushes workers to work faster, longer hours, and take fewer breaks is only doing what he was hired to do. Given this, how do we talk about injustice that is done to people who work in sweatshops, or the refugee system, can be evaluated morally even though these injustices do not have someone who can be held directly responsible.

I conclude the book by arguing that Western states and their citizens have a political responsibility to change these structures, and I outline a number of ways this may occur. My hope is that No Refuge will contribute to a wider discussion about how we can more effectively help refugees meet the minimum conditions of human dignity while we work towards finding deeper solutions to the crisis of global displacement.

**Structural Injustice and Social Sin**

Mary Troxell  
**BOSTON COLLEGE**

While philosophy has been open to dialoguing with other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, it has been more reluctant to mine theological sources for insights. This is understandable insofar as theologies seem intended for audiences who share their faith traditions and can be, at their worst, anti-rational. In addition, theology is often identified with the worst aspects of organized religion, providing justification for patriarchy, homophobia, and religious violence, for example. However, to overlook any contributions from theological sources is to overlook a rich repository of ethical thought. Parekh points to the contributions theological ethics can make in her book when she discusses the ethical obligations to “the stranger” that is central in many religious traditions, especially the Abrahamic religions. After explaining why theology can contribute to our thinking about refugees, I will describe the notion of social sin, a term employed by liberation theology and applied to immigration ethics by theologian Kristin Heyer, as a particularly useful term in the context of Parekh’s analysis.

The theology I will discuss is Christian, and specifically Catholic. Other theological orientations can provide rich insight as well, but my reasons for focusing on Christian liberation theology is twofold. As a book written for largely a US audience, 70 percent of Americans identify as Christian. Sadly, many Christian faith communities have been in the forefront of defending some of the most egregious aspects of US policy regarding displaced persons. Arguing for the ways that Christian theology stands against these policies holds the promise of reshaping the views of many ordinary citizens. Liberation theology is an especially important source for thinking about structural oppression because it is a theology that was born from the margins: it was created by the poor and oppressed in Latin America and seeks their liberation.

**NO REFUGE**

Serena Parekh has done an invaluable service in her book, No Refuge. The book is an accessible introduction for the general reader to both the refugee crisis and the philosophical frameworks that address the issue. At the same time, she introduces a position that both reframes how Western states regard the refugee crisis and reorients how Western states regard their ethical obligations. Central to her argument is that these harms are in large part due to the policies that Western states implemented to prevent resettlement in their own countries. Since Western states created these harms, their obligation to address them are stronger than the obligations traditionally recognized in which Western states are agents of aid but not agents of harm.

Parekh’s analysis, and her significant contribution to the field of immigration ethics, is her calling attention to what she terms the second refugee crisis, which generates a set of harms distinct from those that philosophers and policy makers typically address. Philosophers and politicians have typically focused on the ethical obligation to rescue refugees, which directs the question of obligation to matters of admitting refugees into one’s country or providing aid. According to this view, the refugee crisis was created by the conditions in the host countries that caused asylum seekers to flee. Western states’ ethical obligations are thus framed by their role as rescuers who step in to help those who have been harmed or abandoned by their states. In short, states that produce refugees are at fault, and Western states step in because of the humanitarian principle.
However, Parekh argues, this standpoint overlooks the crisis that Western countries have created, which is an indirect consequence of the policies Western states have introduced to address the refugee crisis. These policies are due in large part to the principle of nonrefoulement, which generates strong obligations to nations in responding to asylum seekers. To circumvent these obligations, wealthier nations create policies that prevent refugees from entering their countries, which results in refugees relocating in refugee camps, living informally in cities, or paying smugglers to get them into countries in dangerous ways. In all three of these options, the minimum requirements of human dignity are not met for refugees. Parekh describes these options in detail and shares the heartbreaking true stories of refugees who are forced into choosing among these alternatives.

In order to understand the nature of this harm and the obligations they generate, Parekh draws upon Iris Marion Young’s account of structural injustice. This approach, Parekh argues, is more appropriate than the standard approaches in addressing the second set of harms born by refugees because these harms are often indirect. Parekh focuses on two aspects of Young’s notion of structural injustice. The first concerns motivation: the harm need not be intentional. According to Young, structural injustices do not require clearly identifiable agents producing the harm: rather, the injustice is the unintended outcome of the ways in which different policies and decisions of different actors come together to create an unjust structure.

The second aspect of Young’s account that Parekh underscores is that it is a forward-looking rather than a backward-looking account. The focus is not on looking to the past to assign blame but rather on assigning responsibilities to make things more just in the future. Young employs the term political responsibility to capture the kind of responsibility structural injustices entail: “Responsibility is based on a social connection model . . . individuals bear responsibility for structural injustices because they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes.” Thus the response is political not in the sense that it is the job of political leaders to solve it but rather that persons are responsible insofar as they participate in the systems that create the injustice. While ethical obligations are typically framed in terms of duties, Parekh prefers Young’s notion of responsibility, which generates obligations, but ones that are open-ended and allow for more discretion. At the same time, responsibilities must be assigned. Responsibilities are determined by how entities or persons are situated with respect to the injustice. Regarding the second refugee crisis, Western states have a special responsibility to address this injustice, Parekh argues, because Western states set the norms and have the greatest capacity to shape the system. In addition, wealthy states can address the crisis without suffering a significant burden.

Parekh makes a convincing case that Young’s approach is more appropriate than the dominant frame employed by Western states and their members in thinking about their obligations to refugees. I would like to argue that the theological notion of social sin complements Young’s account and augments it in an important way: it identifies the obligation to unmask the ideologies that shape the norms regarding the ways Western states respond to refugees. Without such an unmasking, Western powers are more susceptible to replicating new forms of oppression. Before introducing the notion of social sin and its context, it is helpful to examine the benefits of turning to theological approaches to the refugee crisis.

**WHY THEOLOGY?**

Charles Mills has pointed out that Western political philosophy’s orientation toward ideal theory has been ahistorical, and thus has a knowledge gap regarding the ways imperialism and white supremacy shape the tradition’s notions of equality and human rights. The theology of the Abrahamic religions, on the other hand, hold the notion that God reveals the God-self in history. Thus, theology never can leave history behind: to determine who God is and what God requires of humanity, one must first be aware of how histories of domination and exploitation inform and distort self-understanding. Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas’s genealogy of “Stand Your Ground,” which identifies the religious and scientific roots of the culture of racism in the United States, is a model of theological anthropology in this regard.

A theological perspective is also helpful because, in the case of the United States, the rationale for controlling our borders and excluding immigrants was largely theological. The movements to exclude refugees and immigrants were founded on the threat such outsiders would pose to the United States’ Christian values. The legacy of these justifications can still be found today in, for example, former President Trump’s travel ban, which targeted Muslim immigrants. Thus, it is important to point out that such justifications are defensible neither philosophically nor theologically.

Theological vocabularies have the power to mobilize in a way that political or philosophical vocabularies at times fall short. Michael Sandel points out that Barack Obama deliberately integrated the language of his faith into his speeches because he was aware of their power in prior social movements in the United States: “If liberals offered a political discourse emptied of religious content, they would ‘forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understood both their personal morality and social justice.’”

We can see the power of religious language in the ways climate scientists have embraced Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si* to embed the climate crisis in a moral framework. The encyclical has been applauded by environmentalists. Indeed, the *Quarterly Review of Biology* dedicated its September 2016 issue to commentaries by climate scientists on *Laudato Si*, which, the editors write, “gave hope to all who are concerned about long-term ecological sustainability.”

In the case of the plight of displaced persons, theology promises to be a particularly rich source, as welcoming the stranger is a foundational value to all of the Abrahamic religions. The command to aid the stranger is the most
common command in the Hebrew Scriptures after the command to worship one God.⁹ Indeed, religious communities have been the locus for providing aid to displaced persons in the United States. This speaks to the ways faith mobilizes action. In addition, this aid has provided faith-based communities the opportunity to hear the stories of asylum seekers and understand the concrete realities that lead them to leave their homes. The Sanctuary Movement in the United States can be traced to the responses of clergy members providing pastoral care to hospitalized Salvadorean asylum seekers.⁷

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, which grew out of a pastoral movement to revitalize the faith among the poor, was a movement that originated in Brazil and spread throughout Latin America. This theology developed as a new way of thinking about who Christ is and what Christ desires from humanity in light of the oppression of marginalized people in Latin America. This theology also examined the Catholic Church’s role, both historical and current, in supporting structures of oppression and exploitation. For centuries, the Catholic Church, almost without exception, enforced and supported the power of European colonizers in their oppression of indigenous peoples. Moreover, the Church encouraged the poor of Latin America to resign themselves to their own suffering.

Liberation theology originated out of small ecclesial communities, made up of the poor, who in their reading of scriptures, recognized the liberating message of their faith: God was on the side of the poor and desired the liberation of the poor. Liberation theology views poverty structurally: “By poor we do not really mean the poor individual who knocks on the door asking for alms. We mean the collective poor, the ‘popular classes,’ . . . the workers exploited by a capitalist system, the underemployed, those pushed aside by the productive process.”¹⁰ Thus the focus of oppression was structural, and liberation theology made use of Marx’s analysis of exploitation in unpacking the nature of this oppression.

From this perspective, theology begins with praxis: passionate and committed involvement and critical reflection arising out of involvement living in solidarity with the poor. Because the principal suffering of the poor comes from exploitation and marginalization, living one’s faith means working to eradicate such injustices. While conventional Christianity points to prayer, scripture, or worship as the principal means of knowing God; liberation theologians hold that one knows God through solidarity with the poor and work for their liberation: “To place oneself in the perspective of the Kingdom means to participate in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed.”¹¹

While liberation theology originated in the 1960s, its message speaks to the heart of Jesus’s teachings. Jesus promised to bring good news to the poor and set the captive free.¹² He provided the criterion from which souls will be judged only one time in the gospels, and that criterion was to care for the vulnerable: to feed the hungry, drink to the thirsty, showed hospitality to the stranger, and visit the sick and imprisoned.¹³

Social Sin

In a conference of bishops held in Medellin in 1968, Latin American bishops formalized the teachings of liberation theology. In this conference, they adopted the notion of social sin to capture the institutionalized violence suffered by the poor at the hands of the powerful, including the Church itself.¹⁴ The failure of the Catholic Church to address structural injustice, liberation theologians argued, was in part due to an individualistic understanding of sin in modern Christianity. Christians tend to regard righteousness in an apolitical, private way: praying, going to services, being good to one’s family. In this way, identifying as a “good Christian” was consistent with being complicit in the face of gross injustice. Liberation theologians emphasized that tolerating unjust systems is a form of sin and was the primary form of sin in a world where the primary source of suffering is structural injustice: “sin is not considered an interior reality. . . . Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of humans by humans, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races and social classes.”¹⁵ Social sin exists in the unjust structures that cause oppression, but also encompasses “distorted consciousness and collective action and inaction that facilitate injustice and dehumanization.”¹⁶

I would argue that this approach enhances that of Iris Marion Young’s, as it requires persons in positions of privilege to not only address injustices but also to grapple with their own ignorance regarding their responsibility for injustice, an ignorance that comes from “the ways we are susceptible to a captivating environment or cultural blinders that prevent us from seeing rightly.”¹⁷ As with Young’s account, social sin moves away from an individualistic account of blame and obligation, and recognizes the complex, often unintentional structures that are responsible for injustices. However, while Young’s account focuses on strategies to address injustice, social sin also focuses on identifying the socially constructed perspectives that perpetrate oppression. This can include the cultural or religious symbols that reinforce unjust structures as well as the “false consciousness created by institutions and ideologies that allow people to participate in a network of oppression with self-righteousness.”¹⁸ This false consciousness can lead to complacency in the face of oppression and distort the approaches, often well-meaning, of those in power regarding treatment of the vulnerable.

Addressing this false consciousness requires examining histories of domination to learn the origins and purposes of these ideologies. Thus, while Young’s approach is future-oriented, the notion of social sin requires an excavation into the past. This is not for the purpose of assigning blame; rather, it is in order to identify the myths that perpetrate ignorance and complacency in the face of oppression. Critical race theory provides a good model of how facing up to a nation’s own history can help uncover the ways that ideology shapes perspectives.

Feminist theologian Kristin Heyer has applied the notion of social sin to the ethics of immigration, specifically regarding the immigration of Latin American immigrants into the United States.¹⁹ Like Young’s notion of structural injustice, she posits that social sin “incorporates the reality
of unjust institutions that contribute to border crossings.\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, social sin also is comprised of “ideologies and symbolic systems that perpetrate blindness to such realities.”\textsuperscript{21} This includes “the cultural and political patterns inherited from the colonial past, or economic and social practices resulting from Latin America’s role in global capitalism.”\textsuperscript{22}

Parekh notes that Western states have shaped the norms regarding the treatment of refugees: “One global norm that wealthy countries have perpetrated, for example, is that states are free to treat refugees and asylum seekers however they think best, even if this fails to adequately respect generally accepted human rights.”\textsuperscript{23} Tracing the history of dehumanization and exploitation helps to disclose the ways that Western states are desensitized to the concrete suffering of immigrants from the Global South. The current complacency or hostility to immigrants at the United States’ Southern borders today, for example, cannot be separated from a long history of such dehumanization that shapes the nation’s identity, according to Heyer: “Pervasive, internalized ideologies make us susceptible to myths; operative understandings influence our actions or inaction. When bias hides or obscures values, it becomes more difficult to choose authentic values over those that prevail in society.”\textsuperscript{24}

Heyer points to the law-and-order rhetoric regarding addressing the plight of immigrants on the Southern Border as one such myth. Legislative debates tend to focus on national security, and regard immigrants through a law-and-order lens, as is illustrated by Trump’s campaign promise to “Make America Safe.” This framework scapegoats immigrants as threats to the rule of law despite well-established evidence that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than American citizens. At the same time, Heyer notes, this law-and-order rhetoric contrasts sharply with the practices of Border Patrol agents: they operate without accountability or transparency, and detainees are denied any form of due process.\textsuperscript{25}

A particularly shocking image of the Border Patrol has emerged recently in their treatment of Haitian asylum seekers: border agents are on horseback, brandishing whips at men, women, and children alike. Reporters have pointed out the resemblance between the Border Patrol agents and overseers on slave plantations. Addressing the structural injustice of this development requires reshaping the United States’ norms regarding the treatment of Haitian asylum seekers. Examining this issue in the context of social sin would also necessitate examining this development in the context of the history of slavery in this country and the symbolic power of Haiti, a country that originated from the most successful colonial slave rebellion in history and threatened the very institution of slavery.

NOTES
6. Michael Sandel, Justice (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 256. He is quoting from Barack Obama’s Call to Renewal Keynote Address June 28, Washington, DC.
7. See the editor’s description of the issue at https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/journals/qrb/pr/160901.
14. Understandings of social sin existed prior and outside of the liberation theology tradition. However, liberation theology was unique in emphasizing the unintentional or unconscious nature of social sin. For a history of the term, see Kristin Heyer, “Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors,” in Theological Studies 71 (2010): 410–36.
16. Heyer, Good Fences, 413.
17. Heyer, Good Fences, 424.
19. Heyer refines the notion of social sin employed by liberation theology insofar as she recognizes both its unconscious and deliberate elements. Liberation theology emphasizes unconscious elements, while later magisterial teaching emphasizes the role of personal choice in order to affirm the freedom of the will. For an overview of the divergent understandings of social sin, see “Social Sin and Immigration,” 410–25.
23. Parekh, No Refuge, 173.
No Refuge for Latin American (and other so-called Global South) Nations?

Allison B. Wolf
UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES

In her 2020 groundbreaking book, No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis, Serena Parekh presents us with a much-needed corrective for understanding and responding to the refugee "crisis." Parekh eloquently notes that philosophers (and others) have wrongly taken the "crisis" to be one for receiving states trying to manage the influx, rather than focusing on the crisis for refugees themselves, especially the fact that they cannot actually find safe refuge. This is not only wrong because it pits concerns about national sovereignty against human rights protections for refugees, says Parekh, but also because this framing of the moral debate inaccurately depicts Western states as the (potential) rescuers of refugees, while simultaneously ignoring how these same states and their policies contribute to an unjust refugee system and generate the second crisis. As Parekh notes, Western states have tolerated, financially supported, and even encouraged a situation in which the vast majority of refugees are effectively not able to access refuge. Globally, refugees are not able to access the minimum conditions of human dignity. All of the options that the international community offers to refugees who are in dire need of aid and protection may serve to keep refugees alive, but they do not provide sufficient autonomy, dignity, or security.

Western states do not simply passively allow an unjust system to flourish, however. To the contrary, they actively maintain this unjust system by implementing policies to keep refugees away from their shores via "deterrence regimes" that make it near impossible for people to seek and receive refuge in their countries. In large part, they are supported by various international agreements, like the 1951 UN Refugee Convention requiring states to follow the principle of non-refoulement (not to send people back to a nation where they are at risk) but not requiring them to take in refugees from other places. Worse, the options for refugees provided by the international community—refugee camps, urban settlement, and migrating to seek asylum in the West—are terrible and dangerous.

Based on this, Parekh moves to suggest ways forward. First, she argues that Western states are morally obligated "to ensure that refugees can access the minimum conditions of human dignity while they are waiting for a solution to their situation." But we must go further and, following Iris Marion Young, Parekh notes that we must also "frame the crisis for refugees as a kind of structural injustice—an injustice that wasn't intentionally caused by any particular state but that nonetheless we must take responsibility for" so that we see the Global Refugee System as unjust and that it is Western states that are politically responsible for working to improve it. In other words, even if Western states did not intentionally produce the injustices many refugees face, because of their role in creating the system, the fact that they benefit from it, and the fact that they have the power and resources to effect change, Western states are politically responsible for improving the global refugee system in the ways Parekh indicates.

It is important to note that while Parekh acknowledges that the nations of the Global South must protect human rights of refugees, these nations are not her focus in this book. Instead, Parekh chooses to focus on wealthy Western states because (1) these states have the resources to help; (2) these states claim to adhere to principles of justice, fairness, and human rights that require them to act in certain ways to adhere to their stated values; and (3) Western states have played a powerful role is shaping and creating the second crisis for refugees. Despite the fact that it is refreshing to see an author take Western states to task, especially as a US citizen who wants to hold her government accountable and who thinks we often are too quick to let these nations off the hook, it is on this point that I want to push back on Parekh a bit.

Generally speaking, I am concerned with limiting attention to Western states for the following reasons. First, while I am very confident that this is not what Parekh intends, exclusively focusing on Western nations’ obligations risks reinforcing ideas about white saviors and the need for these nations to “save the day” for refugees from and residing in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Second, centering Western responsibility risks condescending to the majority of nations who actually house most of the world’s refugee seekers ("you all do your best but let’s let the adults take over") and can inadvertently legitimize a paternalistic response where the United States and Europe must lead efforts to help refugees because only they can protect their human dignity.

Third, focusing on Western states’ moral obligations to the exclusion of the moral obligations of nations in the so-called Global South threatens to undermine the agency of those nations. And, finally, failing to hold non-Western and/or less wealthy nations to account not only lets those countries off the hook and implicitly propagates a view that they are somehow less important in this struggle, but also leaves many injustices endured by refugees in those parts of the world ignored and without response.

To help illustrate my concerns, especially the last two issues, allow me to discuss my own adopted country of residence—Colombia—which is currently trying to figure out how to respond to various displaced and refugee populations, most prominently Venezuelans and Haitians. Let me begin by providing some context, starting with the Venezuelan situation. As of late 2019, over 4.5 million Venezuelans had left their country, over 13 percent of its total population. By March 2020, the number reached 5 million, or 16 percent of Venezuela’s total population. In 2020, the number of Venezuelan nationals who fled their homeland was estimated at over 5.2 million and is expected to surpass 7 million in 2021, making it the world’s largest exodus.
Almost 30 percent of these displaced migrants go to Colombia, making the South American nation the primary recipient of Venezuelan nationals (UNHCR and IOM 2020). As of September 2020, the Colombian migration authority—Migración Colombia—approximated that 1,715,831 Venezuelan nationals were living in their territory. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the Colombian government’s response to it that forced tens of thousands to return to Venezuela, the population of displaced Venezuelans in Colombia remains high and is expected to continue rising in 2021.

At the same time as Colombia tries to determine the best way forward with respect to Venezuelans, new groups of refugee seekers are making their way through Colombia. According to the Colombian government, at least 33,000 migrants—mostly from Haiti, Cuba, Senegal, Ghana, Somalia, Guinea, Congo, and Burkina Faso—have crossed Colombia into Panama in 2021 and currently there are an estimated tens of thousands of Haitian asylum-seekers stranded in northern Colombia, primarily in the small Colombian Caribbean city of Necocli. Unlike the Venezuelan population, however, none of these asylum-seekers actually intend to stay in Colombia. Instead, their goal is to take ferries from Necocli across the Gulf of Uraba and then continue to the even smaller Colombian border town of Capurgana, where they will begin their journey through the jungles of Panama known as the Darien Gap. They hope to then continue on the other side up the Pan-American highway to the United States, where they plan to seek asylum.

The problem is that there are now so many refugees trying to make this trek that there is now a bottleneck in Necocli. More specifically, while the capacity of the ferries crossing the Gulf of Uraba of between 500–750 people per day (depending on the weather conditions) there are around 1,500 arriving per day. And so thousands of asylum-seekers are in a holding pattern in Colombia. As Necocli’s Mayor Jorge Tobón reports, “They’re stuck, they’re desperate, they’re anguished, with an uncertainty about when someone will sell them a ticket . . . They’re crammed into hotels or small rooms of humble residents. . . . In a room of 15 square meters, 20 people are living there and spending the night.” Worse, the hospitals lack the capacity to treat so many people, the town’s trash collection system cannot keep up so there is trash in the streets, and with so many people using the municipality’s water, the outdated aqueduct system has collapsed.

How should Colombia respond to these situations? Although Parekh herself is not focused on these questions, many of her solutions nevertheless seem germane. For example, I think it is clear that Colombia is morally obligated to ensure these groups have access to the minimum conditions of human dignity. In fact, Colombia’s ombudsman, Carlos Camargo, agrees and said his office has asked municipal, departmental, and national officials to develop contingency plans to address the backup in Necocli and “guarantee the safe return and protection of human rights of this population.” Similarly, I think Colombia must follow Parekh’s recommendations to try to integrate refugees into Colombian life, let them work in the formal economy, and work collectively to create refugee policies and not make them unilaterally. The issue, then, is not that Parekh has nothing to offer to nations like Colombia. The problem, though, is that if we take Parekh’s cue and focus on what Western nations owe refugees, it seems that the question with which I am concerned—namely, what moral obligations does Colombia have toward these refugees?—never gets asked. But it must. To fail to do so not only lets Colombia off the hook, but also fails to analyze and respond to the actions it has taken.

Allow me to briefly elaborate. While it is true that Colombia may not have all of the resources it needs to secure good living conditions for millions, it can and must provide access to the minimum conditions of human dignity and maintain safety of refugee seekers. And when it fails to do so, it should be called out, especially given that it is a middle-income economy with many natural resources and economic promise. Granted, the nation is rife with ubiquitous economic inequality and corruption, but sometimes (often?) these decisions not to direct resources to poor and other vulnerable populations result from a lack of political will to do so more than lack of ability. In fact, we have evidence that when Colombia wants to act, it can. In response to the Haitian backlog in Necocli, Colombia’s Institute for Family Welfare has set up a tent there to help families with children, where the kids are weighed and measured and their nutrition levels assessed. So, while wealthy Western states can and should do more, there are moral obligations that Colombia can and should meet; we should show the South American nation the respect it deserves by demanding that they do what they can.

This leads me to a second issue, which is that when we assume less wealthy nations, like Colombia, have no (or few) moral obligations (or that we do not focus on them), when they do act, we often fail to adequately scrutinize those responses. Let’s take the Temporary Protective Status Decree, for example. While I agree that Colombia should be lauded for this action, the statute is far from perfect. It leaves many vulnerable populations unprotected, leaves exploitative and violent working conditions (especially for cis and trans Venezuelan women) in place, and does nothing to address the increasing violence and xenophobia Venezuelans face on a daily basis. Moreover, one has the impression that the Colombian government sees its job as done—it legalized many in the hopes of securing more international funding—providing little hope that other migration injustices will be resolved going forward. Similarly, although sending food and health-care assistance for children during a pandemic is important, the government could do more (such as giving refugee seekers some sort of work permit and allowing children into the schools). But when we focus primarily on the actions and moral responsibility of wealthy Western states (of which there are many affecting these situations in Colombia, such as the US visa and asylum policy that forces folks to take
this risky journey in the first place), these other issues do not get raised. And this not only contributes to the plight of refugees, but also may obscure or prevent us from discovering other moral obligations of the very wealthy Western nations that Parekh wants to hold to account and call to action. Let me provide just one more example.

Some might suggest that I am painting too rosy a picture of what Colombia can do, and they may be right. First, I admit to being a bit defensive against various problematic and false stereotypes about the country that I have come to appreciate that may lead me to go too far to the other extreme. Second, and more germane to this conversation, an objector would rightly point out that even if what I said were partially true, it is simply a fact that Colombia does not have enough resources to adequately fulfill its moral obligations to asylum-seekers and displaced migrants. That is, we could fix all of the corruption, economic inequality, and internal conflicts, and Colombia would still not have the resources to spare to meet all of its justice obligations. And the evidence supports the objector. For example, even though The World Bank estimated that Colombia spent “roughly $900 million [in 2018] to meet only the basic needs of Venezuelan migrants, . . . [its] 2019 campaign . . . to help raise funds to assist Colombia in settling Venezuelan migrants raised only $32 million.”

The 2020 appeal called for over $782 million to assist Venezuelan refugees and migrants but, as of Dec. 1, had only been 37.5% funded. Additionally, during 2020, the United Nations released a report noting that Colombia will need $641 million to meet the needs of this population in 2021, but little widespread response was forthcoming at the time of writing (early 2021). The Brookings Institute now calls the Venezuelan refugee crisis the least funded such crisis in modern history.

This lack of international response should be strongly condemned; yet again the United States (in this case) and its policies have contributed to structural injustice in the refugee system, Colombians and the asylum-seekers themselves are paying the price, and the US needs to step up but fails to do so. Ironically, though, we cannot see this as easily if we limit our inquiries to the obligations of wealthy Western nations, we needed to take the Colombian’s obligations seriously first in order to see what they realistically can and cannot do and why before we could even discover the US obligations. So taking the moral obligations and responsibilities of the nations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa seriously and not pretending that they do not exist or are less important has the paradoxical effect of not only treating that these nations with more respect, but also of better identifying and clarifying the moral obligations of wealthy Western nations to help refugees—Parekh’s express objective.

I hope that these observations are seen as reflecting the strengths of Parekh’s work rather than its faults. No Refugee uses feminist philosophy and engaged empirical analysis to challenge conventional philosophical approaches. It highlights a mistake in our philosophical discussion (framing refugees as a “crisis” for wealthy nations) and refocuses us on what really matters: the lives and experiences of refugees themselves. Beyond that, I tend to think when we are left to critique what is not in a book, it is a testament to what is there. So let us continue Parekh’s work by bringing our Latin American, Asian, and African neighbors into the discussion so that all of the nations of the world can do their part to improve the Global Refugee System and, most important, the everyday lives of the estimated 26.4 million refugees around the world.

NOTES

2. Parekh, No Refuge, 104.
4. Parekh, No Refugee, 22-23.
13. Álvarez and Suárez, “Colombia Coastal City Crowded with African, Haitian Migrants.”
14. Álvarez and Suárez, “Colombia Coastal City Crowded with African, Haitian Migrants.”
17. Parekh, No Refugee, 183.
18. Parekh, No Refugee, 191.
On No Refuge as Public Philosophy

David Owen
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Serena Parekh is an exceptional scholar of refugee and forced displacement studies, and this book builds on and extends the important contribution of her previous book, *Refugees and the Ethics of Forced Displacement* (Routledge, 2018), which focused on the problems of encampment or warehousing of refugees. While she revisits those problems in this book, she extends her analysis considerably in order to bring into focus what she refers to as “the second crisis” or “the hidden crisis,” namely, that refugees are essentially trapped in a condition of our making in which the minimal conditions of human dignity are not available to them in camps, in urban setting, or in dangerous transit to seek asylum in the Global North (three options that exhaust their choices). Through vivid and lucid prose descriptions of the two crises and compelling use of individual stories, she makes clear the ethical stakes of refugee protection and the responsibility of the Global North for the post-flight predicament in which refugees now find themselves.

These considerations of prose are significant in part because this is intended as a work of public philosophy. *No Refuge* is written for the interested and intelligent lay reader. This raises the immediate question of how we should read this book—as a work of philosophy or of rhetoric? Or should we follow Cicero in insisting that a constitutive part of philosophy’s ideal of reflectiveness is that it engages us at an affective level?

Let us at least acknowledge that the fact that this book is intended as a work of public philosophy matters for its composition because its primary aim is to persuade its public readers to see the current predicament of refugees in a particular way and to motivate readers to action on the basis of that perception—indeed, the book concludes with examples of how individuals can respond in the face of state inaction. *No Refuge* is probably best characterised as an exercise in “re-orientation in thinking” designed to bring the American or European reader from a narrow and inaccurate frame in which they see their (Northern) State as having obligations of rescue towards poor benighted refugees, which the reader may perceive it as discharging well or badly, to a wider frame in which they come to see their State as an active participant in the development and reproduction of a structure of injustice that denies refugees access to the minimal conditions of human dignity.

The central claims that Parekh advances are twofold. First, that working out our ethical and political responsibilities requires an adequate descriptive framing of the contemporary refugee regime—of its composition and its functioning—in order to elucidate the ethically salient features of this regime. Second, that we need to develop a two-layered frame to address the injustices confronted by refugees which involve both direct injustices (for example, by the home state or by border guards at an admitting state) and structural injustices, namely, the operation of the refugee regime to prevent refugees being able to access what Parekh takes to be the requirement owed to refugees, namely, the minimum conditions of a decent life.

In Chapter 1 of her book Parekh provides a nuanced account of the difficulties of giving a determinate answer to the question “Who is a refugee?” or even of whether there is any determinate answer to this question, but she ends up adopting a concept of the refugee defined in terms of those who have fled their country because their basic human rights are severely threatened—and endorsing the view that it is the degree of threatened harm that matters rather than the source of harm. This is something of a pragmatic choice in order to get the main argument of the book started without engaging in too much controversy—and enabling her to go on to consider a variety of grounds on which our moral or political obligation to refugees may be justified. It is not, though, a choice that is innocent of implications. Although we might agree that the issue for the scope of refugeehood can be addressed in terms of the degree of human rights directed harm threatened, it does not follow that the sources and types of harm are not salient for the question of what is owed to particular refugees. If we compare the person fleeing persecution by the state to those fleeing civil war or those fleeing famine, it is not at all obvious that what we owe each of them is the same. Nor that providing each with the “minimum conditions of human dignity” when specified in terms of an adequate level of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and personal security is sufficient to meet our obligations to them.

Couldn’t Parekh simply reply, first, that she is concerned to persuade a public audience for whom the notion of the basic conditions of human dignity gets a rhetorical grip and, second, that the current conditions of most of the world’s refugees are so bad that even achieving a widespread commitment to such minimum conditions of a decent life would be a major improvement? These are fair points. But I do think that this choice constructs problems for her argument further down the line—and I’ll come back to these—but let me first sketch out the main argument proposed by Parekh’s book.

In Chapter 2, Parekh considers three grounds on which moral obligations to refugees might be proposed. The first is an account based on causal responsibility (perhaps better, “outcome responsibility”) that generates an interactional notion of reparative justice (you broke it, you
fix it) of the kind that James Souter has recently developed with great subtlety in his work Asylum as Reparations. The second is an account based on the legitimacy conditions of an international order of sovereign states of the kind that Gillian Brock, Joe Carens, and myself have recently proposed and which the refugee regime is conceived as a legitimacy-repair mechanism. The third is an account based on humanitarianism as a moral commitment represented by the parable of the Good Samaritan which is appealed to by, for example, Betts and Collier in their co-authored work Refuge as well as many others.

Parekh then raises what we might think of as “quasi-objections” to each of these views. She notes that the “you break it, you bought it” principle has great intuitive plausibility and hence gets a grip on us as actors, but that the scope of the principle is narrow and it cannot accommodate many cases of refugee flows that are not the direct result of the wrongful actions of external states. In relation to the legitimacy view, she claims that it provides clear guidance on what obligations states have, but that its coolly rational character means it is less likely to motivate people than the “you break it if you bought it” principle. Its lack of intuitive affective power means, she fears, that in practice, it’s harder to see how it might convince people to accept more refugees or significantly help refugees in other locations when they believe that it goes against their interests. On the Good Samaritan view, she argues that it is has considerable affective power but “doesn’t tell us much about what kind of help is required,” and also doesn’t help us navigate between the moral claims of refugees and of states in providing guidance on how much states are obliged to help or to sacrifice in support of refugee protection.

I call these “quasi-objections” because I don’t think any of them are deeply compelling rebuttals of these principles or that Parekh intends them to be so. So we may note that pretty much no one denies the narrow scope of the “break it, bought it” principle; that the legitimacy view is focused on grounding norms of international law and institutional practice; and the humanitarian principle may not be able to say how much states should be willing to help or sacrifice, but can perhaps develop an account of fair processes for determining this. But if these quasi-objections are not intended as rebuttals, then what role are they playing?

My hunch is that they are intended to serve as indicators of what Parekh takes to be needed for her “public philosophy” purposes and as rhetorical ground preparation for her own proposal. What she is aiming to provide, I think, is an ethical basis for thinking about refugees in the wider frame that she will articulate that meets the desiderata identified by these quasi-objections in that it has:

1. Immediate intuitive grip
2. Affective power
3. Provides clear guidance on state obligations

It is this that the ethical frame of structural injustice is meant to provide. Does it?

Recall the wider frame that Parekh is aiming to provide is one that encompasses the second crisis in which refugees are prevented from attaining the minimally decent conditions of a human life as a product of the interaction of the policies of a diverse plurality of states. It is this that the concept of structural injustice is meant to capture, and Parekh uses Marilyn Frye’s image of the bird cage to provide an intuitively gripping image for the phenomenon of structural injustice.

The point of this image is to draw attention to the idea that in our normal close-up perspective, we typically only see the one wire of the bird cage that is directly in front of us and hence wonder why the bird could not just fly around it; but it is only when we step back and see the whole structure of wires that it becomes clear to us that, and how, the bird is caged. In the case of refugees, we might imagine each wire as the policies of a particular state. Looking at the wire in front of us amounts to saying, “They don’t need to come here, there are plenty of other places they could go.” Only when we step back do we see that all the pathways to the minimal conditions of a decent life have been shut off. As soon as we see this, the image gains affective power; it can motivate actors that endorse the thought that all human beings are entitled to, at least, the minimal conditions of a decent life and who now recognize that their own state’s actions are contributing to this state of affairs. But does it provide guidance for states or citizens?

Parekh successfully shows that states of the Global North can be held responsible for their important role in generating this structural injustice and that because they have the power to change the situation they should do so. But that does not by itself get us very far. It simply tells us that the states of the Global North should act in ways that ensure that refugees can access the minimum conditions of a decent life, which, let us remember, is specified in terms of a range of basic human rights concerning food, clothing, shelter, education, medical support, and access to employment. But it doesn’t tell us anything much about how this should be done.

Consider Young’s point about structural injustice involving what Sartre calls “counter-finalities,” namely, that the product of outcomes that are not intended by any of the actors also applies to attempts to reform or transform such structures. Among the implications of this point is that if each state of the Global North pursues its own preferred option for addressing the structural injustice, the collective effects produced by these individual actions may not suffice to address the problem and may create new problems. What is needed, then, is action in concert by the state of the Global North in cooperation with states of the Global South as Parekh recognizes. We might also, though, want to argue here that given that refugees are the most vulnerable to unintended outcomes of any such changes, their voices should be represented in any such process.

It is here too that Parekh’s focus on treating the concept of refugeehood in terms of minimal standards of human dignity has two significant side-effects. The first is that, to a significant degree, it aligns Parekh’s view with the “protection there” agenda advanced most notably by
Betts and Collier as a refugee protection/development nexus, and it is notable that she discusses the example of Jordan in which Betts's idea of the use of Special Economic Zones has been trialled as well as the case of Uganda that Betts and Collier also highlight alongside other ideas such as cash transfers to refugees. This type of view focuses precisely on securing socioeconomic autonomy construed in terms of basic needs. What this does not do, however, is address the loss of political membership and political rights suffered by refugees and which are constituent feature of refugeehood. In this respect, it is somewhat puzzling that Parekh has a discussion on political integration in her conclusion because, as far as I can tell, nothing in her appeal to the minimum conditions of human dignity or to structural injustice normatively underwrites the proposals she makes there. It would require at least an argument that political rights are instrumentally necessary (or prudent) for securing socioeconomic autonomy to underpin her suggestions—and no such argument appears to be made. The second side-effect is that when thinking about resettlement, Parekh—like Betts and Collier—uncritically follows the UNHCR view which addresses resettlement in terms of need, and fails to acknowledge that those who are fleeing persecution may have a special claim to resettlement and access to robust rights-protecting membership of a new state.

These concerns do not, however, detract from my overall admiration of this work as a piece of public philosophy. Parekh's main task is to show us, academics and public alike, that grasping what obligations we have to refugees requires that we engage with it through a frame that is phenomenologically adequate to the contexts in which refugees find themselves and the choices that are available to them. Shifting this frame to encompass “the second crisis” is a necessary move, on this view, if we are to understand our own moral position and its responsibilities. This is a claim that Parekh's work fully vindicates—and it is one those implications for public discourse are significant and far-reaching.

NOTES
1. Parekh, No Refuge, 84.
2. Parekh, No Refuge, 87.

REFERENCES

Our Shared Responsibility for Refugees
Sandra Raponi
MERRIMACK COLLEGE

Serena Parekh's No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis provides an important theoretical framework for understanding our moral responsibility to refugees. While her previous book, Refugees and the Ethics of Forced Displacement, was directed at philosophers and other scholars, No Refuge is directed at a much wider, public audience. Impressively, I do not think anything significant is lost in the analysis, and much is added. No Refuge not only provides a persuasive analysis of our shared responsibility to reduce the unjust outcomes of our collective refugee policies and structures, it also presents a compassionate understanding of the plight of refugees. No Refuge has the potential to change hearts and minds, not only because of the strength of its analysis, but also because of Parekh's compassionate discussion of the experience of refugees and her thoughtful response to common objections and challenges.

I will focus my comments on four areas: (1) Parekh's analysis of the refugee crisis as a structural injustice and our shared responsibility to address this; (2) the extent to which a shared responsibility framework is reflected in recent developments in international refugee law, such as the Global Compact on Refugees; (3) the role of personal stories; and (4) Parekh's response to the problem of despair.

PAREKH'S ACCOUNT OF OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Discussions of "the refugee crisis" in the media and in political discourse in 2015 focused on the large numbers of refugees who entered Europe, how this affected Europe, and what European countries should do. Parekh focuses on the larger underlying crisis for refugees themselves and on the responsibility of Western states. A vast number of refugees have not been able to find refuge and they have not been able to attain the minimum conditions of human dignity.

Parekh sets out the overall problem based on data from 2019. Sadly, the numbers have continued to grow. According to the most recent data available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced people grew to 84 million in mid-2021. Of these, 26.6 million were recognized as refugees (refugees are people who are forcibly displaced outside their country of origin), while the rest were internally displaced. Around half of these refugees are under the age of eighteen. There were 4.4 million asylum seekers in mid-2021. These are refugees who reach the border of another state and claim asylum in that state. While these numbers are overwhelming, Parekh puts this in perspective and reminds us that in a world of over seven billion people, it should be possible to find a safe place for all refugees if there were only the political will to do so (4).

Parekh argues that most philosophical and political discussions of how states should respond to refugees have been inadequate because they have focused on resettlement in Western states. Unfortunately, only about 1 percent of refugees have been resettled through UNHCR in the best of years, and it has been far less than 1 percent in recent years. 55,680 refugees were resettled in 2018, 63,726 were resettled in 2019, and only 22,800 were resettled in 2020, and 39,266 were resettled in 2021. As of August 2021, only 19,900 refugees have been resettled this year. Given this reality, Parekh argues that it is crucial
that we consider our moral responsibilities to all refugees, particularly those who languish in camps and urban areas and those who take dangerous journeys in the hopes of being granted asylum in a Western country (7). Parekh’s book makes an important contribution to the urgent and much-needed discussion of our responsibility towards the vast number of refugees for whom resettlement is not an option.

What happens to the vast majority of refugees who are not resettled? The majority remain in the poorest countries. About half live in squalid camps run by UNHCR with insufficient food and security and with severely limited freedoms. As Parekh explains, refugee camps were once viewed as a temporary solution, but now, the average length of time that one remains a refugee is seventeen years. The other half live in urban centers in poor conditions with little or no access to international assistance, and they are often exploited. Parekh argues that in both scenarios, refugees do not have the minimum conditions of human dignity. Given these two terrible options, it is understandable why many refugees try to bypass this system to seek asylum in Western countries, risking their lives and the lives of their children.

As Parekh discusses, the situation today is much different than what is set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. There are three scenarios considered in the Convention: (1) voluntary and safe return to one’s home country; (2) integration into the host country; and (3) full resettlement in another country. The Convention lays out an extensive list of rights, including the right to work (self-employment and wage-earning employment), public education, and freedom of movement. Up until the 1970s, most refugees were integrated into the local population. This is drastically different from the current situation in which the vast majority of refugees spend many years with limited freedom in refugee camps and with limited rights and support in urban areas. Refugees are usually not able to work, and many children are not able to attend school.

Parekh asks, how should we think about the responsibility of Western states and its citizens towards refugees? Parekh considers different philosophical, moral, and religious approaches to this question and demonstrates the inadequacy of these accounts. According to a corrective or historical account of moral responsibility, states that have caused a particular refugee situation have a duty to fix this by resettling and helping these refugees. For example, during the Vietnam War, the US accepted Vietnamese refugees. The US is currently resettling Afghan refugees, but only to a very small degree by focusing on people who assisted the US military. Parekh argues that this model is limited because the causes of refugee situations are often complex, it is often difficult to prove direct causal connections, and states who believe that their past actions were justified refuse to take responsibility when these actions lead to forced displacement.

Parekh makes a very strong case for favoring Iris Young’s account of our shared responsibility for structural injustices as the best approach to this problem. Under this account, individuals, states, and other agents bear responsibility when, through our combined actions, we contribute to processes that produce or sustain unjust outcomes (169). Although some of the harmful consequences of our refugee, immigration, and border policies may be unintended, we nonetheless have a responsibility to mitigate the harm caused.

Parekh argues that the manner in which Western countries have responded to refugees has worsened their situation. Western states have deliberately made it more dangerous to reach Western countries, they have made it more difficult for refugees to claim asylum in their countries, and they have made it more difficult for refugees to have access to the minimum conditions of human dignity (6). For example, consider the agreements that the European Union has made with Libya and Turkey to prevent refugees from entering their borders. Refugees in Libya have been confined in overcrowded and unsanitary detention centers, and they have been physically abused, tortured, and subjected to other forms of cruel treatment. Some have been forced to work or sold into slavery. Parekh connects the actions and policies of Western states to serious human rights violations (7).

Parekh argues that our primary moral duty is to address the political structures that unjustly prevent refugees from accessing the minimum conditions of human dignity. We all have an obligation to work together to transform these structural processes and make the outcome less unjust. Parekh argues that this may require us to work together to reevaluate and change our institutions and to monitor their effects to ensure they are not harmful. It may require us to help each other see how particular policies and actions are connected to a particular structural injustice and to work, collectively, toward addressing it (170).

Parekh observes that few countries are going to admit that they are responsible for the current outcome in which the vast majority of refugees are not able to access the minimum conditions of human dignity. The political responsibility model allows us to approach this question in a different way:

It stresses that we are responsible not because we have done something wrong, something that we should feel guilty about, but simply because we participate in unjust structures that are unfair to refugees. It is also a view of responsibility that allows discretion on what we can and should do to address this responsibility. There are different ways that an individual or collective entities like a state may be connected to an injustice, and so we must be able to think about responsibility in these different ways, keeping in mind that it is always forward looking—aiming to make structures less unjust—not to find fault, blame or punish. Political responsibility is not something that can be determined through a causal connection to the harm. (171)

While other philosophers use the language of duties or obligations to talk about what we owe refugees, Parekh suggests that “responsibility” offers a better way of
thinking about structural injustices (171). She writes that a duty is a specific moral requirement that makes clear what we are obligated to do, while responsibilities allow for more discretion in determining how to rectify structural injustice (171).

One concern that can be raised against the structural injustice model is that it allows too much discretion. It is less clear who should do what, or what the priorities should be. I think that maintaining the corrective model while supplementing it with the shared responsibility model allows us to determine some of these priorities. States would then have a stronger obligation to help refugees who are displaced as a result of that state's military actions or interference with a country's political or economic system, and they may be expected to give priority to resettling and assisting these refugees. While the causal connections may be difficult to prove in some cases, they may be harder to deny in other cases. States that have contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions may be expected to do more to mitigate the harm caused to climate refugees. This is compatible with Parekh's overall account since she supports a two-layered frame that includes both direct, intentional injustices (this includes direct harm, violence, and human rights violations against refugees), and indirect or structural injustices that prevent refugees from being able to find refuge (160).

Second, one may be concerned that while we shouldn't feel guilty or be blamed if we are genuinely not aware that our actions or policies are contributing to unjust outcomes, once we are made aware of this, we can be blamed if we refuse to rectify this. Parekh acknowledges this on page 170. Unfortunately, if states are not willing to admit that they are responsible for the current unjust outcomes, they may also be less willing to address this problem. We will need to criticize them and hold them accountable.

THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY MODEL IN INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE LAW

Parekh provides a useful philosophical framework for justifying, interpreting, and further developing contemporary international refugee law. The 1951 Refugee Convention acknowledges in the Preamble that “the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries,” and that, given the international scope and nature of the problem, a satisfactory solution “cannot be achieved without international co-operation.” It assigns to UNHCR the task of supervising international conventions for the protection of refugees and recognizes that the effective co-ordination of measures depends upon the cooperation of all states with UNHCR.

Recent developments in international refugee law have continued to emphasize the importance of international cooperation, and they have also promoted a model of shared responsibility and burden-sharing. In the 2001 Declaration of States Parties to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, states committed to developing comprehensive strategies to improve refugee protection within “a framework of international solidarity and burden-sharing” (Article 12).

This article sets out the goal of strengthening response mechanisms in economically challenged countries that host large-scale or protracted refugee situations in order to ensure that refugees “have access to safer and better conditions of stay and timely solutions to their problems.”

The language of sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably is affirmed in the third goal of the 2002 Agenda for Protection and in the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The 2016 Declaration developed a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) with the following objectives: (1) ease pressure on host countries; (2) enhance refugee self-reliance; and (3) expand access to third country solutions; and (4) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Second, one may be concerned that while we shouldn't feel guilty or be blamed if we are genuinely not aware that our actions or policies are contributing to unjust outcomes, once we are made aware of this, we can be blamed if we refuse to rectify this. Parekh acknowledges this on page 170. Unfortunately, if states are not willing to admit that they are responsible for the current unjust outcomes, they may also be less willing to address this problem. We will need to criticize them and hold them accountable.

The CRRF also aligns with Parekh’s account of our shared responsibility by promoting a “whole-of-society” approach that involves “national and local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, regional coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society partners, including faith-based organizations and academia, the private sector, media and the refugees themselves.” Parekh’s No Refuge and her presentations on our shared responsibility towards refugees is an example of how academics can contribute to this goal, particularly since No Refuge is directed at a broader public audience.

These features are also present in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees. The Global Compact has been described as historic. One hundred eighty-one states voted to adopt it. Only the US and Hungary opposed it, while the Dominican Republic, Eritrea, and Libya abstained. According to the Guiding Principles, “the global compact emanates from fundamental principles of humanity and international solidarity, and seeks to operationalize the principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing to better protect and assist refugees and support host countries and communities.” It includes the same three objectives from the CRFF and adds an additional one to expand access to third country solutions. Specific arrangements to share burdens and responsibilities are to be negotiated through a Global Refugee Forum every four years and operationalized through voluntary but dedicated contributions and pledges.

These recent international declarations and agreements emphasize that all states have a shared responsibility to improve the living conditions of refugees and to enhance the agency, regardless of where refugees are located. They recognize the importance of coordinating the actions of states, and they also extend this shared responsibility...
to various non-state actors. The challenge is to pressure states to honor these international commitments.

THE ROLE OF PERSONAL STORIES
Unfortunately, well-reasoned philosophical arguments are sometimes not enough to challenge people’s prejudices and fears or to motivate people to take necessary collective action. Various fears about refugees have been fueled by politicians and the media. Parekh not only addresses these fears with compelling arguments and evidence, she also includes personal stories throughout the book that generate a personal connection to refugees. These personal stories allow readers to understand the experience of refugees in different situations and to cognitively empathize with them.

Personal stories also help to counteract what Paul Slavic and other psychologists have called “psychic numbing.” When the number of victims or the number of people who need help is large, rather than increasing people’s motivation to help, many people become numb to the problem—with the exception of good utilitarians. As will be discussed further in the next section, people can become overwhelmed by the large numbers and this can lead to inaction. Many human beings tend to be more responsive to particular individuals who need help and personal stories. This is referred to as the “identifiable victim effect.”

Paul Bloom and others have highlighted problems with relying on, and appealing to, empathy to address moral or political problems. It can be partial, biased, limited, and unreliable. It can lead to excesses, and it can be manipulated to unfairly attack others instead of motivating positive action. However, Bloom and others also recognize the importance of cognitive empathy—being able to understand what it’s like for someone who has to flee their home and is then unable to find refuge—as well as the importance of a rational kind of compassion that can motivate us to take action to help others. Parekh does not attempt to persuade her readers by simply using sad personal stories to appeal to our emotions. Rather, she uses individual stories to help us understand the nature of the problem, what is needed to address this injustice, and why it is morally unacceptable to let this situation continue.

MOVING BETWEEN DESPAIR AND RECKLESS PESSIMISM
While there is much more I would like to discuss about Parekh’s comprehensive book, I will end with an issue that I have struggled with both personally and in teaching and giving talks about refugees. When discussing the global refugee crisis, many people comment that the problem seems overwhelming or impossible to solve, and they express feelings of hopelessness and despair.

The refugee crisis seems to get worse each year as more people have been forced to flee their homes. The response of many Western states has also gotten worse. Fewer refugees have been accepted for resettlement in the last few years. Refugees have been spending longer periods of time in overcrowded and underfunded refugee camps, detention centers, and in other living situations far below minimum standards of human dignity. More countries have taken draconian measures towards asylum-seekers—separating children from their families, putting children in detention centers, taking measures to keep asylum-seekers in other countries where they are unsafe and subject to serious human rights violations, letting asylum-seekers drown at sea or starve in the desert, and even prosecuting individuals and humanitarian organizations that have tried to save refugees by rescuing them at sea or providing water in the desert.

As Parekh reminds us, in a world of seven billion people, it is possible for us to absorb all refugees (4,175,190). Unfortunately, there does not appear to be sufficient political will or sufficient recognition of our shared responsibility to address this problem. Instead, political attitudes seem to have moved in the opposite direction. Refugees and asylum-seekers have been demonized and xenophobia has grown.

In addition, the pandemic has presented new challenges. Governments have used the pandemic to stop asylum seekers and to halt refugee resettlement, including for refugees who have been approved for resettlement after a long and difficult process. There are concerns that as countries deal with economic recovery from the pandemic, there will be less willingness to provide resources to improve the condition of refugees. Another challenge we face is the large number of people who will be displaced due to climate change. As Parekh notes, some estimate that the amount of climate refugees may be quite large by 2060—from 50 to 200 million refugees (41).

How can one not feel depressed, pessimistic, and hopeless? It is natural to be overwhelmed by problems of this scope. Unfortunately, this can lead to inaction.

In the final chapter of her book, Parekh considers Hannah Arendt’s analysis of “reckless despair”—believing that a problem is so bad that we can’t do anything about it. This is reckless because it usually leaves the injustice in place and allows the status quo to continue unchecked. She writes that Arendt also cautioned us to avoid “reckless optimism”—a kind of optimism that believes that making a difference will be easy and we can be certain that we can make things better. This optimism is reckless because it doesn’t appreciate the depth of the problem and all that would need to change in order to address it (196).

Parekh argues that both attitudes are problematic because they ultimately lead to inaction: “they prevent us from engaging deeply with the problem and doing what is in our power to change it” (196). She argues that we need a different attitude to deal with complex global problems that involve profound human suffering and that do not have simple solutions. She writes,

I hope that readers take a nuanced stance and acknowledge that though the problem for refugees is complex and will not be easy to change, it is an injustice so profound that we cannot ignore it. As the philosopher Kate Norlock put it, we need an attitude of “sustained moral motivation, resilience and even cheer” that would allow us a “willingness
to return to the same task repeatedly, to maintain efforts and to continually renew commitments.” (196)

We also need to remind ourselves that though it sometimes seems improbable, the status quo can change (196).

Rebecca Solnit’s writing on hope is also helpful here. In *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, Solnit provides a conception of hope that is distinct from passive or reckless optimism and that is able to counter reckless despair. Solnit writes,

It’s important to say what hope is not: it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and tremendous destruction. The hope I’m interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act. It’s also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings. . . .

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don’t know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes—you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is . . . the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know.  

One of the problems with social structures, is that they often come to appear natural and inevitable. We need to imagine that a different world is possible. As Parekh writes,

Of course we put refugees in camps—where else would we put them? Of course refugees aren’t allowed to work; otherwise there would be too much competition with citizens for jobs. Of course we only resettle a handful of refugees; we can’t be expected to do more than that if it’s unpopular with our citizens. Yet these structures are not inevitable, and they can be challenged in many different ways. Many individuals have, in fact, challenged them. (196-97)

Parekh begins her book with a quotation from a filmmaker working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: “If you look at the statistics, you get depressed, but if you look at the people, you find hope” (vi). Parekh includes stories of people who have helped refugees at great personal cost, with an attitude of defiance. These stories can inspire us and remind us of the importance of our shared responsibility to do what we can to help refugees and to address injustice, even when others fail to do this, even when it’s difficult, and even when we do not know if our efforts will be successful.

Parekh ends her book with this:

I’ve written this book with the belief that we cannot change unjust situations until we fully understand them. . . . My hope for this book is that understanding will lead to action and more people will respond like the courageous individuals . . . described. Our response must be nothing less than to insist on the rights and dignity of refugees wherever they are. (200)

I hope No Refuge will be read by many and that it will inspire its readers to do what we can to secure the rights, dignity, and well-being of refugees.

**NOTES**


---

**Response to Critics**

Serena Parekh

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

It’s an honor to have a group of scholars you deeply respect discuss your work. I would like to sincerely thank each of them for their careful reading of my book and their thoughtful engagement with the ideas in it. A special thanks to Lauren Freeman for suggesting and editing this symposium and for bringing together this diverse group of scholars.

Mary Troxell focuses on an aspect of my book that has not received much attention from philosophers, namely, my discussion of the religious foundations for our responsibility for refugees. Many philosophers consider themselves secular, and if they are religious, their philosophical work does not usually rely on religious foundations. From this perspective, this part of my book is unusual. I appreciate that Troxell made clear why including a discussion of religion was important for my project. She writes that this is a book written for largely a US audience, 70 percent of Americans identify as Christian. Sadly, many Christian faith communities have been in the forefront of defending some of the most egregious aspects of US policy regarding displaced persons. Arguing for the ways that Christian theology stands against these policies holds the promise of reshaping the views of many ordinary citizens.
No Refuge was intended as a work of public philosophy, so I wanted to address the widest possible audience, including both people with faith commitments and those without. Troxell’s comments helped me see how I could have made this connection in an even deeper way.

In No Refuge, I show that there is an overlapping consensus among secular and religious philosophies that we have strong obligations to help refugees. Though there is disagreement about what these obligations are, I try to show that there is no moral argument that can justify the way we treat refugees around the world. I argue, in particular, that anyone who has roots in one of the Abrahamic traditions has strong reasons to support refugees. My argument is based primarily on the injunctions that are found in all three traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—to give special concern to refugees. As Troxell notes, “Welcoming the stranger is a foundational value to all of the Abrahamic religions.” I hoped that this argument would provide a motivation to continue reading the book for those who are religious but skeptical about whether or not we have moral obligations to refugees. This argument does not, however, connect specifically to my later discussion on structural injustice. Troxell’s discussion of social sin bridges these two parts of my book.

Troxell introduces the ideas of social sin and liberation theology. Social sin refers to “the institutionalized violence suffered by the poor at the hands of the powerful, including the Church itself.” This concept defines unjust social structures as sinful and therefore as something Christians should be concerned with. Liberation theology holds that “tolerating unjust systems is a form of sin,” and it identifies those systems as “the primary form of sin in a world where the primary source of suffering is structural injustice.” These concepts provide deep theological support for the argument that we ought to be thinking about justice structurally and not just individually. This perspective is important not only when it comes to addressing the global refugee crisis, but other important challenges such as climate change.

This theological approach dovetails nicely with the argument I make in No Refuge. I take Troxell’s point to be the idea that Christian faith requires a structural approach to injustices such as the refugee crisis. The idea of “welcoming the stranger” seems to require only individual action: perhaps donating money to a refugee NGO or organizing canned food drives to help newly resettled refugees. But understanding Christian obligations to refugees in this way does not push believers to think about the problem structurally. Liberation theology and the idea of social sin require Christians to move beyond only thinking about what to do as individuals to welcome the stranger. Instead, liberation theology and the idea of social sin ask Christians to think about injustice structurally, to take seriously the problems inherent in the status quo, and to think about the ways that we may unintentionally be contributing to the harms experienced by refugees. This framework seems much more demanding but also more appropriate for a complex global injustice such as the refugee crisis.

My view in No Refuge differs from Troxell’s analysis, at least on the surface, in terms of the emphasis we each put on the necessity of looking backwards. I think, inspired by Iris Young, that responsibility ought to be primarily oriented towards improving conditions in the future. Social sin, by contrast, requires us to examine the past in order to identify the myths and ways of thinking that perpetuate structural injustice. Some of these myths—such as the idea that justice requires that we simply enforce “law and order” at the border—allow us to remain complacent in the face of grave injustice. The concept of social sin asks believers to bring these myths and norms to light and to interrogate their truthfulness and implications for the most vulnerable. This way of examining our beliefs can help us to see how we are often desensitized to the suffering of refugees, which normalizes our neglectful and often cruel policies towards them. For this reason, the kind of backwards interrogation social sin requires is important. I thank Troxell for persuading me of the value of this way of thinking about the past for addressing structural injustice.

Allison Wolf’s response provides a global perspective on some of the themes raised in my book, and she points to one of its shortcomings, namely, my exclusive focus on relatively wealthy liberal democracies. While acknowledging my reasons for not discussing the obligations of countries in the Global South, Wolf pushes back against my limited focus for a number of reasons. I’m very sympathetic to her critique, especially the point that by focusing exclusively on Western countries, we are letting countries in the Global South “off the hook,” failing to push these countries to adequately protect refugees and ignoring many of the injustices that refugees living in these countries endure. I’d hoped that by discussing the conditions that refugees face in refugee camps and urban centers in the Global South I would bring to light some of the problems faced by refugees in these countries. But Wolf’s critique is, nonetheless, an important one.

Wolf describes the current situation in Colombia for asylum-seekers from Venezuela and around the world. Given the anguish and suffering of these asylum-seekers, it’s a fair question to ask what Colombia’s responsibility is and what it might mean to expect Colombia to provide the minimum conditions of human dignity, which I claim all countries have a responsibility to provide for refugees. Wolf points out two important features that we should keep in mind when thinking about the responsibility of countries in the Global South like Colombia. The first is the sheer desperation of the situation: refugees are “stuck, they’re desperate, they’re anguished, with an uncertainty about when someone will sell them a ticket. . . . They’re crammed into hotels or small rooms of humble residents. . . . In a room of 15 square meters, 20 people are living there and spending the night.” Second, the Venezuelan refugee crisis is among the least funded refugee crises in history. Taken together, these reasons highlight the importance of international cooperation, a point that Raponi stresses in her response.

Here Wolf makes a valuable point: it is only by taking seriously Colombia’s responsibility to refugees that we can see the ways that international policies (such as policies
about funding refugee crises) contribute to structural injustice. These funding policies make it harder and sometimes impossible for middle-income countries like Colombia to provide the minimum conditions of human dignity for refugees. Wolf explains,

Colombians and the asylum-seekers themselves are paying the price, and the US needs to step up but fails to do so. Ironically, though, we cannot see this as easily if we limit our inquiries to the obligations of wealthy Western nations; we needed to take the Colombian's obligations seriously first in order to see what they realistically can and cannot do and why before we could even discover the US's obligations.

In other words, if we genuinely believe that Colombia, like all countries, has an obligation to provide the minimum conditions for human dignity, we must also ask what is preventing them from doing this. In this case, it may primarily be a lack of international support. While it may also be a lack of political will—as Wolf points out, when the political will is there, Colombia can do a lot—the lack of adequate funding to meet the demands of the situation is a real obstacle for Colombia, and one that Western states are positioned to respond to.

I agree with Wolf that we ought to be insisting on the rights and dignity of refugees in the Global South. While Wolf is perhaps rightly critical of Colombia's response to Venezuelan refugees, it’s harder to criticize their actions from the outside: I find myself reluctant to do so in my own work. I worry that as a scholar based in the US, such criticism will come off sounding hypocritical.

Colombia and other countries in the Global South lack the material resources of wealthier countries, but they are often already hosting more refugees than wealthier countries and doing more for these refugee populations than many wealthier countries do. As Wolf explains, in March 2021, Colombia provided Temporary Protective Status to almost one million displaced Venezuelans in the country, thus allowing them to work in the formal economy and gain access to health care and education. This stands in stark contrast to the treatment of Central American refugees in the US who are often detained and then deported to Mexico while they wait in terrible conditions for a chance at an asylum hearing in the US.

Wolf is right that Colombia can and should do more, but I think that as a US-based scholar, my criticisms are more powerfully aimed at US policies. I would be delighted if my work was used by scholars in the Global South to extend my criticism of countries that fail to provide the minimum condition of human dignity. Like Wolf, they may see connections between my work and the treatment of refugees in their country. I thank Wolf for raising this possibility.

I appreciate David Owen’s characterization of No Refuge as an exercise in “re-orientation in thinking” designed to bring the American or European reader from a narrow and inaccurate frame in which they see their (Northern) State as having obligations of rescue towards poor benighted refugees . . . to a wider frame in which they come to see their State as an active participant in the development and reproduction of a structure of injustice.

This way of phrasing the orientation of my book helps to distinguish it from other philosophical work on refugees. I hope to move the debate away from thinking of the problem of refugees as one of distributive justice, where the good to be distributed is political membership. Instead, I think we should focus on the larger, structural harm. In particular, we need to pay more attention to the ways in which we have created a global system that renders some—refugees and asylum-seekers—vulnerable to domination and oppression while benefiting others—namely, those of us living in relatively wealthy, stable countries that have benefited historically from colonialism and neo-colonialism and now have a strong interest in keeping people out, or at least being in control of who enters. In other words, I do think we’ve been focusing on the wrong harm, and No Refuge is an attempt to reorient the attention of philosophers as well as the general public to this different way of understanding the problem.

Owen raises some objections around the criterion that I suggest we ought to aim for, namely, that we ought to focus on providing the minimum conditions of human dignity for refugees. In particular, he denies that “providing each with the ‘minimum conditions of human dignity’ when specified in terms of an adequate level of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and personal security is sufficient to meet our obligations to them.” He rightly anticipates my response that the “conditions of most of the world’s refugees are so bad that even achieving a widespread commitment to such minimum conditions of a decent life would be a major improvement.” Yet I agree that the “minimum conditions of human dignity” aren’t sufficient to fully exhaust our obligations to refugees. But nonetheless, in a non-ideal world, I think it is the goal we should be aiming for. In a world where even the most basic conditions of dignity aren’t being met and where even widely agreed-to duties like nonrefoulement are routinely violated, establishing a minimum floor seems like a prudent goal.

Here, my commitment to non-ideal theory becomes clear. I think in an ideal world, it makes sense to set out norms that would allow us to fulfill our obligations to refugees, such as resettlement, asylum, or sanctuary (options which Owen discusses in his book, What Do We Owe Refugees?). However, though this is important as an ideal that we should aim for, we need to take seriously the fact that states are not likely to comply with these norms. In the more than seventy years that we’ve had the global refugee protection system, resettlement, a widely accepted way to discharge our obligations to refugees, has not succeeded in adequately addressing the needs of refugees. In fact, fewer than 1 percent of refugees are resettled each year. This is why I think it is important to address the non-ideal circumstances in which the vast majority of refugees only have access to refugee camps or informal urban settlements and in which most do not have access to the
basic conditions of human dignity. While I believe that resettlement and asylum remain extremely important as a durable solution, we ought to be paying more attention to the vast majority of refugees who will never be able to avail themselves of it. For these reasons, I argue that we must insist on the minimum conditions of human dignity for refugees while they wait for long-term, durable solutions. I agree with Owen that this does not fully exhaust what we owe to refugees, but nonetheless think that it’s where we ought to be starting.

Another criticism Owen offers of No Refuge is that I don’t pay enough attention to political agency or show how this is part and parcel of the minimum conditions of human dignity, and I think he is correct in this critique. He’s also right that my emphasis on the “protection there” approach prioritizes social and economic rights rather than political rights and inclusion. I am of course concerned with the loss of political rights and agency that come from losing membership—my last book, Refugees and the Ethics of Forced Displacement, was devoted precisely to this issue—but I agree with Owen that I do not highlight this sufficiently in No Refuge. In the final part of my book, I do argue that resettlement is part of what is needed to dismantle structural injustice, and I show throughout the book how problematic our asylum policies are because they prioritize deterrence over protection.

One may be concerned that while we shouldn’t feel guilty or be blamed if we are genuinely not aware that our actions or policies are contributing to unjust outcomes, once we are made aware of this we can be blamed if we refuse to rectify this. Parekh acknowledges this on page 170. Unfortunately, if states are not willing to admit that they are responsible for the current unjust outcomes, they may also be less willing to address this problem. We will need to criticize them and hold them accountable.

Raponi and I also differ in our views about the role that guilt and blame should play. Raponi writes:

> One may be concerned that while we shouldn’t feel guilty or be blamed if we are genuinely not aware that our actions or policies are contributing to unjust outcomes, once we are made aware of this we can be blamed if we refuse to rectify this. Parekh acknowledges this on page 170.

Unfortunately, if states are not willing to admit that they are responsible for the current unjust outcomes, they may also be less willing to address this problem. We will need to criticize them and hold them accountable.

Here we disagree. I don’t think that admitting responsibility for harm caused by past actions is necessary to take responsibility for the future. I can imagine, for example, the newly democratically elected leader of a country that was formerly authoritarian deciding that from now on her country will fully commit to human rights, without believing that they were responsible for past institutional failures. Or a young person who first learns of all the environmental damage that has been done before and during his young life, and though he does not believe that he is responsible for causing this harm, he nonetheless is resolute in his decision to make the climate cleaner and climate policy more just in the future, even if this requires personal sacrifice. In both cases acknowledging guilt is not necessary for forward-looking responsibility.

I’ll end by commenting on Raponi’s discussion of despair and hope, which many of us experience on a day-to-day basis, especially those of us who read, think, and teach about the global refugee crisis. Despair and hopelessness aren’t just uncomfortable feelings. They can threaten the whole project of working towards refugee rights since they lead people to turn away from the problem and focus instead on other issues. Given what I describe throughout the book, I agree with Raponi’s statement: “How can one not feel depressed, pessimistic, and hopeless?”

It’s true that there are many reasons to despair for refugees: from the global rise of xenophobia to the increasing cruelty towards asylum-seekers arriving in Western countries—children in cages in the US, offshore processing in Australia, criminalizing people rescuing refugees in Europe. But is there any reason for hope?
BOOK REVIEWS

Think Like a Feminist


Reviewed by Samia Hesni
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

The world would be a better place if everybody read this book. In Think Like a Feminist: The Philosophy Behind the Revolution, Carol Hay gives us a philosophical analysis of intersectional feminism that is valuable to theorists and everyday thinkers alike, seamlessly blending the history of feminist thought and theory with investigations of pressing contemporary issues. The book begins with a history of the term “feminism” and its accompanying activism, then takes us through illustrations and definitions of oppression, and theories of gender and sex. The rest of the book turns to discussions about gender-based violence, resistance, solidarity, and questions about the value and efficacy of feminism itself. And Hay does all this with pithy, infinitely accessible, and delightful writing. This book educates and inspires. The themes I will focus on are solidarity and intersectionality as they come up in the book, and as they interact with Hay’s earlier work, and with feminist philosophy, queer theory, and trans studies.

One of the many things Hay does particularly well in this book is center the importance of the many and often multiply-marginalized identities that (white) feminism has historically left behind. As Hay notes, patriarchal oppression is not the only game in town. And it is intimately bound up, historically and today, with racism, white supremacy, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, classism, and other forms of oppression (12). Taking inspiration from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) basement metaphor for intersectional oppression, Hay writes:

Crenshaw “saw that intersectional oppression can work like being in a basement, where people who are disadvantaged on the basis of one or a few identities stand on the shoulders of those who are disadvantaged by a larger number of identities. Rather than focusing on those who need help the most, anti-oppressive movements have historically tended to concentrate on getting people who are closest to the basement’s escape hatch out, ignoring those who are worse off.” (111)

Sneak preview: in the afterword to the March 2022 paperback edition, Hay revisits this metaphor, emphasizing that now more than ever, “the whole point of social justice is to make the world better for those who are worse off than we are.” It’s true that we haven’t done this yet. But, Hay says, it is in our power to get there. In being brutally honest about the failings of feminism, Hay is optimistic that keeping these failures at the forefront will allow those with privilege within liberation movements to fight for the liberation of the worst off.

Another inspiring part of Hay’s picture of resistance is her emphasis of shifting the focus away from individualism and towards a way of understanding things socially, culturally, and structurally. To a reader who faces oppression along any dimension, Hay says: “you’re not the problem here; the world is” (65). For someone picking up this book and thinking about feminism and oppression for the first time, this is a powerful message. And for someone thinking about it for the hundredth time, it lands just as powerfully. Hay not only presents this message, but she explains clearly how the very opposite of this message is itself one of the tools of patriarchal—and many other, related and intertwined—oppressions. Being made to believe that you are the problem reinforces the dominant ideology that the world is fine. And in turn, this can create a complacency or a felt helplessness about the state of the world. So, in teaching us this important fact, Hay, like many before her, is helping us undo oppression by writing about it.

Much of Chapter 4, “The Social Construction of Sex,” discusses the historical and contemporary failures of feminism to do right by transgender women, and the transgender community in general. In much the same way as she challenges white feminists to do better on issues of race and racial equity, Hay pushes cisgender feminists to do more to fight transphobia and cis-normativity. This is good. Yet, I wonder if Hay is overly optimistic about the ability of feminism to do this. One thing that comes to mind is the historical rift between a largely cis-centric feminism and transgender theory and politics. In expressing the possibility and the imperative for feminism to encompass, champion, and center trans rights, I would have loved to have seen more of a discussion of transfeminism in the text. As Talia Mae Bettcher writes: “the discipline of philosophy has been extremely slow to register trans feminism as an explicit point of departure.” This is one reason much
academic (and activist) literature around transgender theory and politics has made a break with feminism.1

One question asked by those who are skeptical of feminism’s ability to truly center trans rights is “What can feminism offer us, other than historical continuity with anti-oppression and liberatory aims, that queer theory and transgender theory can’t?” Hay’s answer is, I believe, that the best version of feminism is one that is centers trans issues, just as it centers the experiences of all marginalized identities. I think Hay’s book gives us the tools to make this powerful (and, again, inspiring) point, and I’m curious to know more about what this would look like. Julia Serano, whose work Hay discusses in Chapters 4 and 6, has a slightly different picture of transfeminism, on which an inclusive feminism includes rethinking (and reclaiming) attitudes towards femininity itself, in order to avoid transmisogyny. Serano’s picture, too, seems consonant with Hay’s, especially Hay’s nuanced discussions of femme and femininity in her introductory chapter on oppression. Hay might also imagine a transfeminism like that coined by Emi Koyama (2003), where the liberation of trans women is “intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond.” For Koyama, like for Hay, feminism at its best is coalitional, mutually supportive, and affirms the way in which all women face oppression, and as such must participate in their collective liberation. We can hear echoes of Koyama’s Transfeminist Manifesto in Hay’s calls for solidarity. “transfeminism embodies feminist coalition politics in which women from different backgrounds stand up for each other, because if we do not stand for each other, nobody will.”2 Both Koyama and Hay understand that coalition is not simple, and both give us pictures of resistance on which activism is central to their theories. As Hay reminds us, facing—and fighting—oppression is exhausting. It is difficult, it is work, and it is infinitely worth it. The calls for—and insistence on—solidarity in Hay’s work are important, and crucial for the increased recognition of and engagement with transfeminism in feminist philosophy and beyond.

This brings me to another thing that Hay does really well: situating (an ideal version of) contemporary feminism in its historical and present-day context. As she notes early on in the book, feminism is often criticized on the left for being too old-fashioned, and on the right for pushing for too much too fast. Hay considers whether feminists are trying and failing to please everyone, or else stuck in a kind of limbo. She gives us a comforting “no” to both questions. By stressing the intimate link between feminist theory and feminist activism, Hay gives us a rock-solid sense of the kinds of everyday behaviors that feminist commitments and activities can give rise to, and the impact that has on the world. This book is full of actionable advice: from how to talk to children about feminism and oppression, how to think more carefully about sexual consent, and how to respond to, and support those who suffer from gender-based oppression and violence.

Philosophical discussions of resistance and responses to oppression are familiar territory to Hay, and I love the way solidarity runs through much of Hay’s work. In her earlier (2005) work on duties to resist oppression and harassment, Hay argues (convincingly!) that women have self-regarding duties to resist harassment because they are harmed by patriarchal ideology. If we extend this line of argument, we might ask whether men, if they are also hurt by the patriarchy, also have a duty to resist women’s oppression. I think Think Like a Feminist gives us the tools to answer the question with a yes. Much of this book reads like an homage to bell hooks’s formative book, Feminism Is for Everybody. And much as the same way that hooks slowly peels back the layers of the white supremacist cis-hetero-patriarchy to show us that the world would be better for all of us if we embraced feminism, Hay does this with Think Like a Feminist (notably adding more about trans rights and issues, and with a more inclusive and capacious view of gender). In this and so many other ways, I take Hay to be carrying on the important path lit by hooks and many others: inviting everyone to think like a feminist.

NOTES

REFERENCES

Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot

Reviewed by Oluwatomisin (Tomi) Ogungbenle
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Mainstream feminism has failed to be inclusive of all women. Or at least, this is what Mikki Kendall argues in her book, Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot. She contends that mainstream feminism has historically prioritized the liberation of white women, often at the expense of the basic needs of Black women and other marginalized groups. I unpack her book in three folds. First, I discuss how Kendall believes that mainstream
feminism has failed to be inclusive of Black women and other marginalized groups. Second, I examine other issues the author believes should be a concern for mainstream feminists but that are presently overlooked. Lastly, I review a practical solution Kendall offers for mainstream feminism to be more inclusive.

Kendall creates the hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen in response to the failures of mainstream feminism. White women have pleaded for solidarity amongst all women, yet their reciprocity has been minimal at best and nonexistent at worst. White women contribute to and reinforce growing myths about Black women specifically and marginalized people as a whole. For example, Kendall recognizes that rapists receive blame for their immoral acts; however, our society approves of rape culture when it fetishizes women of color. She uses Aaliyah and Pocahontas as her compelling examples, stating how it is easier for blame to be placed on these girls rather than their predators (50) and discussing how white women treat Pocahontas as a sex symbol rather than an underaged girl who was a victim of rape culture (56). She considers how hypersexualization based on gender expression, skin color, and age feeds into the false rhetoric that such a group are “fast-tailed girls” (66), despite society subjecting these Black girls and women to sexual abuse throughout American history. This narrative thereby places rape blame on the women themselves, which mainstream feminism has contributed to. To better illustrate how white women specifically, and mainstream feminism generally, have contributed to the oppression of Black women, Kendall gives an account of when she was sexually harassed at work and then blamed for it by her white female supervisor who accused Kendall of being too friendly and dressing inappropriately (which she was not) (105). And yet, Black women are supposed to be flattered by the attention we receive.

Respectability politics have tried to govern the behaviors of Black women. Kendall argues that such politics have been established by white supremacy, even if enforced by Black people themselves. One example is policing not only the language and tone, but also the outward appearance of Black women and, specifically, their hairstyles as not being acceptable or “professional.” When Black women do succumb to such standards, they are welcomed by backhanded compliments such as “being pretty for a Black girl” (100). Kendall argues that the problem is intensified when respectability becomes a precursor to being treated with dignity. Mainstream feminism, therefore, contributes to the exclusion of Black women by insisting they are acceptable so long as they adhere to white mainstream standards, rather than offering protection for cultural differences.

Acting without conscious racial bias also supports white supremacy. Kendall gives the example of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who identifies as Black without any concern for the lived experiences Black people undergo (123). She also discusses other ways in which white women make their racist aims clear, for example, voting for Donald Trump despite his shameless misogyny. More specifically, white suffragettes such as Laura Clay and Belle Kearney were explicit about their racist objective of only supporting women who were white and educated (177-78). Some white women, Kendall argues, are led by racism to vote against their interests (183). It is not enough to not be racist; that is simply the bare minimum. Kendall notes that being driven by fear to remain silent when others are racist is a clear depiction of white feminists supporting the status quo (172).

People from marginalized groups are placed in double-binds: situations where there are only a few choices and all of them are bad. Lack of resources means that Black women like Kendall had to make hard choices (241). An example of such a difficult choice is abortion. While many mainstream feminists support abortions, they often fail to grasp that the desire for members of marginalized groups to obtain an abortion is influenced by systemic issues surrounding class, race, and poverty, as marginalized people are susceptible to poorer health outcomes and lack of recourses to best raise a child (235-36). Instead, the discourse surrounding abortion and marginalized groups glorify promiscuity and irresponsibility as the reason why such a service is needed and sought out by these marginalized women.

In recent years, there has been a lack of affordable housing. This housing crisis disproportionately falls on marginalized groups. Specifically, women in abusive relationships are forced to remain put for two main reasons: they need a place to live and they lack the resources to leave (206). Rather than working to provide affordable homes, white women are often involved in broader gentrification efforts and see this as a solution for the housing crisis (210). In theory, gentrification brings services and jobs to communities. Even so, gentrifiers hold the belief that mixed-income neighborhoods lower the exposure to poverty. However, their solution of young, white women opening fashionable businesses in low-income neighborhoods is futile. This solution exposes long-term residents of these gentrified neighborhoods to homelessness or a lifetime of inadequate housing as they flee (or, are sometimes forced to leave) these gentrified neighborhoods. While new job opportunities do surface in these gentrified neighborhoods, marginalized residents are not necessarily getting hired. The promise that a mixed-income neighborhood would lower the exposure to poverty is mistaken, as these are the same neighbors who are not familiar with the neighborhood norms/culture and therefore call the police over mundane things. Gentrification forces those most in need into blighted areas, where they once again struggle to access the most basic level of goods and services (211-12).

Anything that affects the lives of all women should constitute as a feminist issue. Kendall mentions several challenges that Black women and other marginalized groups encounter, yet such challenges are not being acknowledged as feminist issues by mainstream feminism. For instance, gun violence. Kendall admits that she is not a victim of gun violence from a domestic relationship, but that is only because her ex-partner did not have a gun. The presence of guns in domestic violence incidents makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed. During this violence, Black women cannot seek help from law enforcement, as that will only invite further violence to her and her partner. Mainstream feminists’ solution to
domestic violence is carceral feminism, which continuously separates the homes of Black families. Ultimately, Black women are left to defend their spouses to protect their homes (26). Gun violence is killing children from marginalized groups. Gun violence is preventing children in marginalized groups from getting an education. Gun violence is a community health problem. Kendall urges mainstream feminism to consider gun violence as a feminist issue not only when it plays out in cases of domestic violence or mass shooting, but also when it impacts marginalized communities at disproportionate rates (29).

Like gun violence, Kendall discusses hunger as another topic that mainstream feminism fails to engage with as a feminist issue. She first gives the testimony of how she has managed to escape from poverty, but this is not the reality for many women. Kendall notes that roughly 66 percent of households faced with hunger are single-mother homes (33). Specifically, when Black mothers face food insecurity, Black babies are viewed as meal tickets (232-33). Lack of access to nutritious meals forces those in marginalized groups to turn to whatever they can for consumption, often at the expense of their health. Focus has shifted to creating obesity programs and not combating the root issues of hunger itself (37). Instead, there have been strict protocols on government-funded programs such as SNAP, thus creating barriers to food security. This thereby feeds into the repugnant ideology that marginalized people should accept their fate because they do not meet certain parameters to receive federal aid (43-44).

Kendall offers several solutions to a more inclusive mainstream feminism. The first is for white feminists to be accepting of inconvenient truths. She asks white feminists to stop viewing themselves as oppressed. Without this self-realization, the work of mainstream feminism will ultimately be misdirected and unaccommodating (250, 256). Next, Kendall urges mainstream feminists to be guided by the lived experiences of marginalized women. She introduces a term many of us are familiar with to best grasp this solution—intersectionality (252). Intersectionality, as we know, is the recognition that a single factor cannot represent an individual enmeshed within a societal context, but rather multiple vectors form one’s lived experience. The new type of feminism Kendall advocates for, hood feminism, recognizes the intersectionality between gender and other identities. This will allow mainstream feminists to view all forms of oppression as a feminist issue. Lastly, mainstream feminism is instructed to be angry about the issues impacting marginalized groups. The right anger can help push so-called allies on these issues to become genuine accomplices as we strive for a more inclusive feminism (257).

I hope to have brought to light some of the key themes of Mikki Kendall’s important book, in particular, her compelling argument that mainstream feminism ought to be more inclusive of Black women and other marginalized groups. Through this review, we observed how mainstream feminism has contributed to and reinforced the growing myths about Black women and other marginalized groups; other issues the author believes should constitute feminist issues; and finally, some solutions to aid mainstream feminism’s desire to be truly comprehensive and just.

Caring for Liberalism: Dependency and Liberal Political Theory

Reviewed by Margaret A. McLaren
ROLLINS COLLEGE

Can liberalism accommodate the dependency critique raised by feminists? Caring for Liberalism: Dependency and Liberal Political Theory brings together essays that answer this question in a variety of ways. Eva Feder Kittay in Love’s Labor (1999) argued that liberalism must take into account the “fact of dependency,” that is, the fact that all humans begin their lives as utterly dependent, some remain dependent, and even those who are able to meet their material, physical needs as adults will likely experience times of dependency during illness, accidents, or old age. The dependency criticism of liberalism strikes at the core of liberal theory which is often viewed as perpetuating a split between the public and the private, fostering individualism, and harboring the assumption that humans are independent. Recognizing the fact of dependence directly counters the assumption of independence, challenges the public/private split, and raises questions about the extent and value of individualism. Acknowledging our dependence as humans brings to light that care and care work are essential to society and thus need to be included in political and social theory.

Caring for Liberalism brings the liberal tradition into conversation with care ethics, querying not only how care can be included in liberal theory but also asking which aspects of liberalism help secure justice for carers and the cared for, and which aspects are transformed by the introduction of the plethora of issues raised by care and care work. The book is divided into four parts: historical sources, key conceptual issues, working with Rawls, and policy.

Three initial chapters provide a historical perspective by examining three figures in the liberal tradition: Rousseau, Kant, and Mill. In “On Domination and Dependency: Learning from Rousseau’s Critique of Inequality,” Christie Hartley and Lori Watson explore notions of dependency, inequality, and domination in Rousseau’s work. Notably, they claim that Rousseau’s notion of dependency offers the insight that “[d]ependency is not a special problem
for justice but fundamental to properly appreciating the problem of justice itself” (41). Dependency, on their view, ranges from help meeting basic material needs, to cooperative social and economic relationships, to the human need for “recognition respect” (acknowledging an individual’s standing as a moral person) from others. In “Kantian Care,” Helga Varden argues that Kant’s work has been misinterpreted as characterizing the self as purely rational. A closer look at Kant’s corpus reveals that his notion of self includes social and emotional aspects (51–59). Varden connects this richer concept of self to Kant’s rights theory to argue that Kant’s work can provide a “multifaceted analysis of care relations” (53). In “Mill’s Liberalism,” Wendy Donner claims that Mill recognized that care work is valuable. She argues that despite Mill’s writing that the “common arrangement” of marriage entailed gender-specific roles with women doing the work of caregiving and social reproduction, he values care and believes it must be balanced with the other virtues for both men and women. Taken together, the historical part of this anthology mines the classic liberal tradition for resources that support the centrality of care and dependency to any social or political theory. Because liberalism has been criticized for the omission of care, the ignorance of dependency, and a view of the self as atomistic and purely rational, much of this section defends these thinkers from misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

The next section, “Individualism and Autonomy,” takes up central conceptual issues for liberal theory. Addressing the heart of liberal theory, Daniel Engster claims that the freedom and autonomy central to liberalism is not possible without a “relational care perspective” (98). Engster shows that care and freedom are not opposed; both are essential for liberal theory. In his words, “[a] caring liberalism is not a new breed of liberalism but rather a better—because fuller and freer—liberalism even by the standards of liberalism itself” (98). Serene Khader addresses the relationship between feminism and liberalism in her chapter, “Individualism, Embeddedness and Global Women’s Empowerment.” Khader specifically engages with liberal feminism and its commitment to individualism (121, 137) arguing that feminism does not require a concept of normative individualism (121). Ultimately, she concludes that liberalism is too individualistic to promote gender justice in part because of its commitment to an individualistic social ontology (136-37). Moreover, she notes that liberalism also plays a role in justifying imperialism, specifically with respect to the ways that development theory imposes liberal notions of freedom and independence on women in the Global South.

Part III, Working with Rawls, focuses on how to accommodate care and dependency in Rawls’s liberal theory. Asha Bhandary draws upon Kim Anderson’s work on indigenous care practices to expand the ways we think of reciprocity in caregiving. Bhandary seeks to develop a “theory of liberal dependency care” (146) that views caregiving as part of the basic structure of society. Viewed in such a way, caregiving arrangements must be transparent and subvert racialized and gendered patterns of caregiving structured on racial and gender subordination. Bhandary argues that liberal society should broaden its notion of customary care arrangements as well as the notion of reciprocity. In “Moral Desert, Rawls’s Justice as Fairness, and the Gendered Division of Labor,” Cynthia Stark argues that genuine equality of opportunity requires abolishing the gendered division of labor (181). Working within a Rawlsian framework, Stark challenges the received view of Rawls as having no pre-institutional notion of moral desert, thus desert having no role in assessing political institutions (171). She shows that “an enforced division of labor based on the doctrine of natural sex differences [described earlier] would not likely arise within that basic structure” (176). Gender-just basic structures would need to be designed in such a way that educational opportunities for boys and girls—and, I would add, kids of all sexes and genders—are equal, jobs would not assume that the worker has a wife who can perform (unpaid) care work, and work and the public domain would not be treated as a male domain (177). In “Political Constructivism and Justice in Caregiving,” Amy Baehr reworks Rawls’s idea of the political conception of justice to center caregiving. She amends Rawls in significant ways, first, by changing the original position to include two additional facts: human dependency and past group-based injustice (188). Additionally, she points out that Rawls’s political conception of justice begins from the point of view of heads of households who historically have not been primary caregivers; shifting the perspective to women (especially poor women and women of color) and people with disabilities changes the assumptions (considered judgments) we begin with when constructing a political conception of justice (192). This shift centers the concerns of care, consequently highlighting the importance of having principles of justice that support care and equitably distribute caregiving.

The final three chapters of the book address which policies and institutional designs best support caregiving and caregivers. Elizabeth Brake calls our attention to the exploitation of caregivers and urges us to conceptualize caregiving as work. Aiming to expose the exploitation of unpaid caregivers, Brake argues that “liberalism has the theoretical resources to address such exploitation” (217). She illustrates how both emotional and material care can be imbalanced and asymmetrical attributing this to women’s socialization as carers in patriarchal society (222). Taking on the Marxist critique that liberalism cannot address exploitation, Brake argues that “gendered socialization of attitudinal caring and emotional labor falls under the remit of liberal justice” (227). Furthermore, “so far as [these] hierarchies of race, class, and gender emerge from the basic structure, they are injustices.” (227). The solution is to recognize caregiving (both material and emotional) as work and regulate and compensate it. Some issues arise from this proposal: How would an imbalance of emotional labor be quantified? How would compensation work in relationships that are not legally recognized? Brake raises these issues and suggests that the main import of viewing care as work may be symbolic. By recognizing care as work, we may begin to challenge the gendered and heteronormative assumptions surrounding care work, as Brake says, “queering care” (229). However, Brake ends her article by noting that care ethicists and socialist feminists may object to her strategy of seeing care as work because it extends the commodification of intimate life.
In the “Free Market Family: Liberalism, Families, and the Government’s Responsibility to Regulate the Market” Maxine Eichner points out that families are the basic unit through which caregiving, particularly, but not only, of children is provided. She rightly notes that the fact of dependency means that liberalism must extend its purview beyond a defense of freedom and equality. If liberalism is concerned with justice, it must “regulate societal institutions in order to support the circumstances that families need to thrive” (239). Eichner shows how markets, especially the long work week in the US combined with the expectation of an unpaid caregiver at home, undermine the well-being of families. She points out that the market is merely one aspect of the economy and that economy in its original sense meant an extended family unit (250). Thus, properly understood, economy should include provisions to support the conditions for families to flourish. What type of support would be needed for families to flourish? Eichner suggests five ways the state should support a “pro-family” policy:
1) Care for babies and toddlers in the home by providing year-long paid parental leave as well as a monthly stipend to cover some of the costs of raising a child; 2) Subsidized day care and pre-K; 3) Limit inequality by raising minimum wage and raising taxes for the wealthy; limit insecurity by having more flexible work policies combined with unemployment and retraining programs; 4) Strong social safety net, provide basic income and housing for families who need it; 5) Ensure work/life balance through limiting work hours, paid vacation, predictable schedules, part-time work with benefits, flex time, and paid family leave. These pro-family policies would support caregivers and those cared for. As Eichner says, “The transformation of the liberal project required by the recognition of dependency makes regulation of markets to support families critical” (260).

In the final chapter, “Justice and Legitimacy in Caregiver Support,” Gina Schouten discusses the trade-offs between gender egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism. Policies that support caregiving in terms of distributive egalitarianism, such as paid caregiving leave, or basic income seem to do so in a way that is gender neutral. But given the gendered socialization and the workplace norms that disproportionately reward male workers, distributive egalitarian policies may serve to more deeply entrench the gendered division of labor (271). However, drawing on Anca Gheaus’s argument, Schouten asserts that in highly unequal societies it is more important to benefit the least well-off than to equalize advantages among the well-off (274). How then should a feminist egalitarian reconcile the trade-off between poverty amelioration and gender justice? Schouten points out that the gendered division of labor harms women of all socio-economic groups (275). She then offers some resources from within liberalism to criticize the gendered division of labor—liberal and democratic values, political legitimacy, and ideal citizenship—demonstrating that the gendered division of labor hinders autonomy (281). In the end, she concludes that both distributive injustice and the gendered division of labor are problems for liberal legitimacy, but liberalism has the resources to challenge these injustices.

The essays in Caring for Liberalism offer a rich and varied approach to integrating care and dependency in a liberal framework: recovering resources from traditional liberal theorists, addressing core conceptual issues, extending Rawls’s theory of justice, and offering policy recommendations that would support caregivers and those cared for. Still, some broader questions remain unaddressed, such as the following: Even if liberalism has the resources to address dependency and care, does it provide adequate accounts of oppression, exploitation, and group-based injustice? Nonetheless, every social and political theory must account for caregiving, and this collection is an important resource for feminists, political theorists, care ethicists, and anyone concerned with how liberal theory can accommodate dependency and care.

CONTRIBUTORS

Simona Capisani is a postdoctoral research associate in the Climate Futures Initiative in Science, Values, and Policy at Princeton University, a joint appointment held in Princeton’s University Center for Human Values and the High Meadows Environmental Institute. She holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of California, Irvine as well as a Feminist Emphasis Certificate from the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her areas of specialty are in political and social philosophy, feminist philosophy, climate justice, and climate-related mobilities, migration, and displacement. She is currently developing a normative framework for climate mobilities justice grounded by the right to livability.

Ryoa Chung is co-director of the Center for Research in Ethics and full professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Montreal. Her fields of research are international ethics, feminist philosophy, and global health justice. Her latest article, “Structural Health Vulnerability: Health Inequalities, Structural, and Epistemic Injustice,” is published in the Journal of Social Philosophy (2021).

Lisa Eckenwiler is professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy at George Mason University, where she teaches courses in bioethics and global health ethics. Her research centers on vulnerability and global structural health injustice with special interests in humanitarian health ethics as well as the ethical significance of place for health justice, or “ethical place making.” Prof. Eckenwiler is a Fellow of the Hastings Center and serves as vice president of the International Association of Bioethics.

Samia Hesni is an assistant professor of philosophy and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies at Boston University. Their main research interests are in feminist philosophy, social/political philosophy, and philosophy of language. Their current research is about normative discourse and social negotiation: examining the ways in which speakers use language to propose, enforce, reinforce, and modify power dynamics within linguistic interactions. They have future projects on the role of kindness in social movements.

Peter Higgins is a professor of philosophy and department head of History & Philosophy at Eastern Michigan University. He primarily writes on migration justice, which he approaches from a feminist perspective. Peter is the
Margaret A. McLaren holds the George D. and Harriet W. Cornell Chair of Philosophy at Rollins College. Her most recent book, *Women’s Activism, Feminism, and Social Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2019), develops a social justice model for transnational feminism emerging out of women’s grassroots activism in India. She is the editor of *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization* (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017) and the author of *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (SUNY 2002). Her articles on transnational feminism, decolonization, women, globalization, human rights, care ethics, feminism, cooperatives, economic empowerment and Foucault have appeared in a numerous journals and anthologies.

Oluwatomisin (Tomi) Ogungbenle is an MA candidate in healthcare ethics at University of Louisville. She holds a BA in medical humanities with a minor in sociology from Baylor University. Her interests in (bio)ethics and philosophy primarily stem from her desire to foster a more inclusive and equitable system. She hopes to focus her future research on underserved communities (more specifically Black women and persons living with disabilities) and their importance to all modern bioethical concerns, especially considering the rise in reproductive genetic technologies.

David Owen is professor of social and political philosophy in the School of Economic, Social and Political Sciences at the University of Southampton and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. His most recent book is *What Do We Owe to Refugees?* (Polity 2020). He has also written widely on Nietzsche, the Frankfurt School, and democratic theory.

Serena Parekh is a professor of philosophy at Northeastern University in Boston, where she is the director of the Politics, Philosophy, and Economics Program and co-editor of the journal *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*. She is the author of three books, including her most recent book, *No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Oxford 2020), which won the North American Society for Social Philosophy Book Award, the Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award, and was a finalist for the PROSE award for Philosophy from the Association of American Publishers.

Sandra Raponi is associate professor in philosophy and the director of the Social Justice Program at Merrimack College. She was a legal intern at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Geneva). She has published articles on the right to food, Kant’s theory of cosmopolitan law, and the role of coercion in domestic and international law. Her article on grounding a tort of torture in international human rights law was cited by the Supreme Court of Canada. She works on political, legal, and social philosophy with a focus on global justice, human rights, international law, refugee justice, and online speech.

Amy Reed-Sandoval is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is the author of *Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2020), and co-editor of *Latin American Immigration Ethics* (University of Arizona Press, 2021). She is also the founding director of the Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands program at the Mexico-US border.

Carlos Alberto Sánchez is professor of philosophy at San José State University, where he has taught for over sixteen years. He is the oldest son of Patricio and Guillermina Sánchez, immigrant farmworkers from Acuitzeramo, Michoacán, Mexico. Author, translator, and editor of books on Mexican philosophy, Dr. Sánchez has also published on issues in the philosophy of immigration and the philosophy of violence. He is the current chair of the APA Committee on Hispanics/Latinx in Philosophy and the previous editor of the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy.

Mary Troxell is an associate professor of the Practice of Philosophy at Boston College, where she primarily teaches in the PULSE Program for Service-Learning. She has published articles on Schopenhauer, Kant, and Heidegger, and more recently on intellectual empathy and social justice.

Allison B. Wolf is an associate professor of philosophy and researcher at the Center for Migration Studies at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia, where she teaches feminist philosophy, philosophy of immigration, political philosophy, and ethics. She is the author of *Just Immigration in the Americas: A Feminist Account* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020) and co-editor of *Incarinating Feelings, Constructing Communities: Experiencing Emotions in the Americas through Education, Violence, and Public Policy* with Ana María Forero Angel and Catalina González Quintero (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). She is currently working on issues around immigration justice in a South-South context in the Americas as well as researching connections between feminist epistemology and skepticism.
FROM THE EDITOR

Lori Gallegos
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

It has been just over twenty years since the publication of the first issue of the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy. The early issues of the newsletter tell the story of a group of Latin American philosophers beginning to forge a collective identity, determined to create a space for Latin American philosophy within the profession. Through the launch of the newsletter, the hard-won establishment of the APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, robust participation in APA meetings, tireless engagement with one another’s work, and dedicated mentoring, these scholars are to thank for the rich and growing field that we know today.

One philosopher who figures prominently across this twenty-year history is Jorge J. E. Gracia, who passed away last July. In a Memorial Session for Gracia at the APA Eastern Division meeting this year, Eduardo Mendieta underscored the importance of Gracia’s leadership—along with that of Ofelia Schutte and Linda Alcoff—in “making the APA a place within which Latin American and Latinx philosophers could do work that would be acknowledged, celebrated, and studied.” Mendieta, who was the founding editor of the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy, noted that Gracia helped to establish the endowment for the APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought. Additionally, this group of scholars worked to secure the APA’s acknowledgment of Spanish as a philosophical language, adding “Latin American” and “Hispanic” philosophy to the list of recognized AOSs and AOCs on its website. Gracia was also a dedicated mentor who sought to support students so that they could both succeed in the discipline and pursue interests in Latin American and Latinx philosophy. According to Mendieta, Gracia believed that “if Latinx, Hispanic, Latin American philosophy was to get a place within the US academy, we had to train and mentor colleagues who also had to have a foot firmly planted in an orthodox, more established, discipline or tradition.” Gracia himself managed to make significant contributions to multiple fields, including in medieval philosophy.

It’s difficult to overstate the importance of Gracia in our field. Manuel Vargas, one of the authors in this issue, shares, “For me, and a lot of mid-career or older philosophers working on Latin American and Latinx philosophy, Jorge Gracia was an important role model, mentor, and friend. He was one of the people who really opened up these fields for academic philosophers, helping us see that there were topics and figures there to study, but also, that it was possible to have a career working on these things. He was also incredibly generous with his advice and time. We are massively indebted to him, and his passing is a huge loss for a community of scholars spanning all of the Americas.”

Even those of us who did not have the opportunity to work closely with Gracia have been significantly impacted by what he has accomplished in the profession. In this issue of the newsletter, we seek to honor Gracia with two articles that focus on his work. We also feature the top three papers that were submitted to the APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, which Gracia helped to establish.

The issue begins with the winner of the 2021 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought—an essay titled “Is Latina Mestiza Identity a Being-in-Worlds?” In this award-winning essay, Ernesto Rosen Velásquez puts Mariana Ortéga’s Latina feminist phenomenology into conversation with the work of Afro-Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon. The essay examines the question: Does the description of marginalized lived experience as explained by Latina feminist phenomenology necessitate a radical break with existential temporality as described in the existential analytic? By taking the zone of nonbeing as a point of departure for theorizing, Velásquez shows how Fanon problematizes Ortéga’s proposal that Latina mestiza identity is both multiplicitous and one.

Our second essay received an Honorable Mention in the 2021 Essay Prize competition. Author Gabriel Zamosc challenges the way authors like Miguel León-Portilla and James Maffie postulate an epistemological problematic in Nahua thought, which they believe had its roots in the metaphysical outlook of the Nahuas. Zamosc argues that their view rests on a misreading of the poems that are the evidence from which we interpret Mesoamerican thought. Ultimately, he suggests that the Nahuas might not have had an epistemological problematic as much as they had an existential one.

Our third essay—which was also awarded an Honorable Mention in the 2021 Essay Prize—is written by Teófilo Reis. Reis discusses the work of Brazilian philosopher Lélia Gonzalez. The article shows how Gonzalez anticipated the idea of intersectionality when elaborating the concept of Amefricanidade and the idea of Afrolatinamerican feminism in the 1980s. Reis points to some of the distinctive features of Gonzalez’s intersectionality, and draws our attention to the ways that Gonzalez’s thought sparks dialogue with more recent works that take up the topic of intersectionality.
In the first article about Gracia’s work, Manuel Vargas enters into conversation with Gracia’s core writings about the following questions: “How should we think about the nature of the social identity group commonly called Latinos or Hispanics, the nature of Latina/o/x philosophy, and perhaps relatedly, of Latina/o/xs in philosophy?” The article offers a novel set of considerations for evaluating Gracia’s central arguments. Vargas’s conclusions are both critical and optimistic about the ideas in Gracia’s work.

The second article on Gracia’s thought is by Susana Nuccetelli. Nuccetelli evaluates Gracia’s attempts in his later work to give a positive account for the nature of Latin American philosophy. Nuccetelli finds that although Gracia insightfully critiques competing accounts about the nature of the field, Gracia’s own ethnic-philosophy account has significant limitations.

The issue concludes with a book review, written by Amy Reed-Sandoval, about Luis Rubén Díaz Cepeda’s Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy. In the review, Reed-Sandoval recounts how Díaz Cepeda draws his readers into philosophical analysis through a series of moving stories about how Social Movement Organizations in Mexico have fought to oppose grave injustices. Díaz Cepeda proposes that even when it seems that they have failed to bring about the societal transformations for which they have fought, their work contributes to the "permanent state of rebellion” that Díaz Cepeda considers vital to democratic flourishing. Reed-Sandoval questions Díaz Cepeda’s wholesale dismissal of liberalism, worrying that it leads him to miss out on certain advantages of liberal egalitarianism, like minority rights. Still, she concludes that the book is a "major contribution to Latin American philosophy.” She also tells us that the book offers us a healing dose of hope, “helping us to dream of a better future and a better world at a perilous time.”

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

SPECIAL CLUSTER ON RICARDO FLORES MAGÓN
Ricardo Flores Magón (1873–1922) was one of the most important Mexican philosophers of the early twentieth century. Although he is often thought of as more of a political activist than a philosopher, his thought had more impact than that of many of his contemporaries, since it inspired the Mexican Revolution. To mark the one hundredth anniversary of his death, we invite the submission of articles that address the philosophical thought of Flores Magón. Contributions may be submitted in either English or Spanish.

ARTICLES
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 fall issue is May 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

ARTICLES
Is Latina Mestiza Identity a Being-in-Worlds?
Winner, 2021 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought
Ernesto Rosen Velásquez
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Mariana Ortega recently asked an important question in Latinx philosophy. Does the description of marginalized lived experience as explained by Latina feminist phenomenology necessitate a radical break with existential temporality as described in the existential analytic? Her answer to this question seems to be no. As she says, "An account that explains a self's having various pasts because one is a multi-cultural being who consequently cannot claim an unproblematic single history (if anyone can) does not necessitate a radicalization of existential temporality." This is because if it did, in the sense that the multiplicitous
self has multiple temporalities corresponding to multiple histories, we still need answers to questions of agency, self, memory, history, etc. for Ortega. As she says, "My appeal to existential temporality has to do with my concern with being able to answer questions regarding complex notions of agency, self, memory, history, etc." If the self were merely multiplicitous and lacked existential continuity, then the self's experiences would be rendered merely unrelated atomistic moments. Thus, for Ortega, Latina mestiza identity is both multiplicitous and one—not in the sense of a unified self with an undisrupted single history—but as existential continuity in Heidegger's sense of a being that projects itself into the future while being mindful of the present and carrying a past. This entwinement between the past, present, and future is the sense in which Dasein exists. Temporality is a fundamental ontological feature of being human for Ortega and Heidegger. A second basic ontological feature of being is the sense of mineness that arises from the temporality of being. Mineness refers to the immediate attunement as to how one is faring in a particular world. Ortega offers a helpful example to illustrate. "I sit here typing, I am aware of my own being and that it is me who is writing these words. In other words, as existing, making choices and carrying out numerous activities." Mineness is a part of experience that involves being aware of oneself and how I am faring in the particular worlds. This being in time is also thrown in the world in the sense that it is in self-other relations. Thrownness is a third fundamental ontological feature of being that is in part a response to Cartesian dualism where the solitary thinking subject creates a distance between itself and the world. Thrownness takes for granted being is already in the world. Ortega finds the non-linear temporality and relationality of Heidegger's sense of being useful for understanding Latina phenomenology, especially when she mixes Heidegger's notion of being with Lugones's notion of worlds and proposes that a Latina is a being-in-worlds. Ortega's notion of oneness as existential continuity involves these three notions of temporality, mineness, and thrownness. It helps Ortega answer concerns of agency, self, memory, and history that can become complicated in light of a Latina mestiza self that is multiplicitous and experiences ruptures regularly in their lives.

Ortega discusses two distinct though related kinds of ruptures—a thin sense of not-being-at-ease and a thick sense of not-being-at-ease. The former uneasiness has to do with not knowing the norms or sharing a history with those in a particular context. She gives the example of her eating cake with a spoon in the US and receiving odd looks for inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN." When one considers these traits as simultaneously inhering oneself, it gives rise to the following question: What am I really? Am I serious, playful, both, or neither? While I do not go over the different answers Lugones and Ortega offer with respect to this question, it does bear mentioning that for Ortega the thin and thick senses of not-being-at-ease do not entail a radical disruption of existential continuity. The Heideggerian being is still there even while experiencing thin and thick ruptures for Ortega. But does Ortega's notion of a thick sense of not-being-at-ease account for the lived experience of racial dehumanization in which one's lived experience does not involve being confused about what kind of person one is but a deeper dimension that is below the thick sense of not-being-at-ease, about whether one is in fact a person to begin with? Ortega's initial question at the outset returns: Do racialized others lived experiences of dehumanization necessitate a break with Heidegger's notion of being?

An earlier philosopher who answers Ortega's question with a yes is the Afro-Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon. In Black Skin, White Masks Fanon notes in his critique of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, "There is a 'being for the other' as described by Hegel, but any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and civilized society." As this quote indicates, it is the racial colonial situation that partitions people along the distinct yet fluid colonizer/colonized distinction that makes any ontology inadequate. While Fanon offers many reasons as to why ontology needs to be left aside not only in Black Skin, White Masks but A Dying Colonialism, Les Damnés de La Terre and Toward an African Revolution, I focus on the first since there he offers a substantial critical engagement with existential phenomenology, ontology, and other disciplines in that book. Specifically, I note three features of the lived experience of black colonized people Fanon identifies that problematize the Heideggerian notion of being Ortega uses in her hybrid notions of being-in-worlds and being-in-between-worlds that are part of her Latina phenomenology: defuturing, diminishing mineness, and invisibility that positions them below self-other relations in a zone of nonbeing.

In a context of racial colonialism, Fanon identifies at least three kinds of identities that colonized black people adopt in response to navigating this situation: the simply human identity, the lactification identity, and black identity. While the first two identities go wrong in interesting ways, I focus on his affirmation of blackness in the face of a white colonial gaze. This is when the colonized Afro-Caribbean subject decides that if the other does not recognize him as a human, as an Other, even when learning French, marrying white Frenchmen, or having sexual relations with white Parisian women, then the only recourse is "to make myself known." I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN." In a context where racial myths about blacks exist—that they are R eating monsters, rapists, hypersexualized, open vaginas, big dicks, savage, morons, illiterate, and evil—taking up a black identity must involve destroying these and other racial myths and their underlying binaries at all costs. This is because the fact of blackness consists in experiences of invisibility that involve non-reciprocal interactions with white gazes that deny their humanity once their black body
Fanon feels hailed by the Negritude movement. Fanon is making an observation during development, Fanon frenetically rummages through all are not outside history or in an early stage of human misery and oppression? In order to show black people intelligence or philosophy when both have produced inversion of Western binaries. What value is inverts Western binaries when he questions the authority of the top pole of Westernized binaries. Western hierarchies—rhythm/reason, intuitive/rational, irrational/rational, poetic/scientific, cult/religion, etc.—based on a human/nonhuman and/or subhuman binary and concomitant spatial grid of primitive and civilized societies.

First, this tribal, rhythmic black identity represents humanity at its lowest. "Black Magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism, it all floods over me. All of it is typical of peoples that have not kept pace with the evolution of the human race. Or, if one prefers, this is humanity at its lowest." The colonial gaze assumes a linear developmental progression of time in which black ethno-cultural identity is relegated either outside of history as nonhuman or back in primitive history as subhuman. These positionalities on the linear developmental timeline are due to a constellation of Western hierarchies—rhythm/reason, intuitive/rational, irrational/rational, poetic/scientific, cult/religion, etc.—based on a human/nonhuman and/or subhuman binary and concomitant spatial grid of primitive and civilized societies.

fanon initially responds by continuing to affirm blackness and taking some of the derogatory terms employed in the objection and they are made positive. "Yes, we—we Negroes—backward, simple, free in our behavior. That is because for us the body is not something opposed to what you call mind." Black people have an emotional sensitivity. "Emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek." Fanon inverts Western binaries when he questions the authority of the top pole of Westernized binaries. What value is intelligence or philosophy when both have produced misery and oppression? In order to show black people are not outside history or in an early stage of human development, Fanon frenetically rummages through all of antiquity and finds the black. He does so by turning to the white French writer and abolitionist who fought to end slavery in the French Caribbean Victor Schoelcher and others who made it possible for Fanon to find a valid historic place and show the white colonial gaze was wrong. He was not nonhuman or subhuman. He was part of a historical tradition tied to Egyptian civilization, people who worked gold and silver thousands of years ago, had majestic architecture, governed empires, created cities, had agricultural methods, weaved, had religion, customs based on kindness, unity, and respect for age. They had science, art, mythology, monuments, hospitals, a whole lifeworld that shows that European civilization is just one civilization among many other civilizations and not the most merciful. In this moment, Fanon not only provides a grounding for black identity but also situates that identity within African history. Fanon felt in this moment of ontological resistance that he had put the white man back in his place, and he felt a growing sense of boldness. Fanon shouted with laughter at the stars. Fanon saw the white man was resentful—How dare the black subject, after we trained you, now look at what you do, is this how you repay us? That moment of resentment on the white man’s face is white man’s reaction time lagged. In that silence Fanon says, "I had won. I was jubilant." A second objection emerges. “Lay aside your history, your investigations of the past, and try to feel yourself into our rhythm. In a society such as ours, industrialized to the highest degree, dominated by scientism, there is no longer room for your sensitivity.” The historical location of Egyptian civilization is now viewed as a golden age in a past long gone and that has been overtaken and superseded by Western European civilization with its industrialization and science. The fact of the present dominance of science and industrialization and technology is proof that the black values, customs, knowledge, and history Fanon excavated do not matter much now. African history becomes submerged. Science, logic, and math are the engines that move history forward. They do the real work. When white exhaustion occurs from using real reason and not emotional sensitivity, they will turn to black bodies as they do to their children. Blacks represent the childhood of the world from a colonial white gaze. Locked in perpetual childhood, black colonized subjects will provide whites relief, humor, and entertainment. A brief escape from the tough world forged by white men who have to carry the burden of moving history forward. At this point Fanon sees that every affirmation of blackness is a losing hand for him and in the midst of this awareness, he notes a third objection.

Fanon’s affirmation of negritude is merely a minor term in a dialectic. In other words, the thesis of whiteness is in struggle with the antithesis of blackness. If blackness is the antithesis, then it is in a passive relation to the thesis in the sense blackness defines, constructs and affirms itself in reaction to whiteness. If whiteness values reason, then blackness values emotion. If whiteness prioritizes logic, blackness prioritizes poetry. Can blackness define, construct, and affirm its identity independently of whiteness, in an actional and not reactionary fashion? For every Western hierarchical binary of mind/body, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, blackness merely valorizes the
These are some reasons why descriptions Because the racist colonial subontological features of colonized people in the zone of being, but as Nelson Maldonado-Torres has identified, of being. De-futuring, diminished mineness, and invisibility break with the existential temporality in Heidegger's notion of the lived experience of colonized people necessitate a with their local cultural originality dead and buried through context works to kill them with impunity, they are defutured. notes, rapeable and killable. black bodies disposable and, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres near at hand because the racist colonial environment makes authenticity when we remain resolute when confronting blues, and the rhythmic core of the universe. Even though Fanon is attempting to break the backbone of the racial/sexual colonial structure by adopting a black identity for Sartre, he is engaging in a form of anti-racist racism because he construes blackness according to a racist logic that homogenizes races. Thus, Fanon's affirmation of negritude ends up reproducing logics of the binaries—imitating Western essentialist logics in the process of identifying himself as distinct from whiteness—and merely inverts Western Binaries. Fanon notes, "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned."1 Because the black past, present, and future belong to Western Europeans in the sense that their standards of evaluation place black phenomena in various positions along a linear developmental upward track, the damned is not only defutured, their history is submerged and the present skews. At this point Fanon begins to cry. This kind of cry is a political expression that draws attention to the radical injustice of the situation he is in, and it draws attention to the suffering body produced by the racial colonial environment.

When the damned of the earth are taken as a point of departure for philosophizing a fundamental phenomenological feature of the lived experience of black colonized people, they are not a being or simply a nothingness but in a zone of nonbeing. This is a position which "in most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell."23 Folks in the zone of nonbeing lack the opportunity to descend into hell because as Lewis Gordon points out, blacks already live in hell on earth.24 Death is not as an event in the future that we evade when the human being is à la Heidegger inauthentic and then moves towards authenticity when we remain resolute when confronting our unique death. Death in the zone of nonbeing is always near at hand because the racist colonial environment makes black bodies disposable and, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres notes, rapeable and killable.25 Because the racist colonial context works to kill them with impunity, they are defutured. With their local cultural originality dead and buried through colonization, access to their past is also complicated. With an unclear, distorted, denigrated, covered over past and no bright flourishing future in sight, they do not exist in Heidegger’s sense of being. This is partly why Fanon says, “Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black.”26 These are some reasons why descriptions of the lived experience of colonized people necessitate a break with the existential temporality in Heidegger’s notion of being. De-futuring, diminished mineness, and invisibility below self-other relations are not ontological features of being, but as Nelson Maldonado-Torres has identified, substantial ontological features of colonized people in the zone of nonbeing. Even so, Ortega could still follow up by asking how the zone of nonbeing answers complex questions pertaining to agency, memory, history, etc. I address these questions at another time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Mariana Ortega for allowing me to attend, present, and learn from her and the many bright folks at the Roundtable on Latina feminism over the years. Were it not for that welcoming and engaging space, this piece would not have been possible. I also appreciate her thoughtful comments on this paper. I also wish to thank the APA Committee on Hispanic/Latins for considering this work as valuable. I also thank my advisor, colleague, and amigo who recently passed away, Jorge J. E. Gracia. Thank you, Jorge, for being the founding member of the APA Committee on Hispanic/Latinxs in 1991 and for helping create the APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought. I note that in the prevous award recipients would not have enjoyed the honor of receiving this award. This one is for you! We all thank you from down here.

NOTES


5. Ortega identifies other fundamental features of Latina mestiza identity: it is situated, experiences in-betweenness or what Anzaldua calls nepantla and tolerates ambiguity and contradiction. I do not analyze these and other features of her Latina phenomenology in this paper but in a manuscript. Here I note how Ortega uses some of Heidegger’s notions to make sense of the lived experience of Latinas.

6. Ortega, In-Between, 82.


9. Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 95.

10. Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 87.

11. This becomes a gargantuan task given the varieties of racism—anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, etc.—and given that the problem is not merely about stereotypes but that these representations have become reality.

12. Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 93.
26. Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 82.

**Reconsidering the Epistemological Problematic of Nahua Philosophy**

*Honorable Mention, 2021 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought*

Gabriel Zamosc

**UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER**

My aim in this paper is to raise some concerns about efforts by scholars like León-Portilla and, especially, Maffie to recover and reconstruct important aspects of the philosophical outlook of Aztec thought and culture. More specifically, I will criticize their attempt to read off, from the extant Nahuatl poetry, an epistemological problematic that they think had its roots in the metaphysical outlook of the Nahua.

The discussion on this topic revolves around the Nahuatl definition of *neltiliztli*, a term that is standardly translated as “truth.” Although the views of these interpreters do not align completely, they both share the conviction that *neltiliztli* should not be understood through the dominant Western framework that—influenced by the Cartesian problematic of securing a genuine connection between mental representations and the way the world really is—tends to interpret the notion of truth in terms of correspondence theory. According to such theory, some X—usually some mental item like a belief or a proposition—is true if and only if the descriptive content of X succeeds in corresponding to or matching the way the world really is.

Given the metaphysical outlook of the Nahua, which conceives of the world as being in perpetual flux, understanding *neltiliztli* as “truth” in this standard (Western) way, runs the risk of erasing the unique epistemological meanings that the term had for them; meanings that are more properly associated with the idea of something being “firmly or well-rooted.” After all, as León-Portilla explains, “the word ‘truth’ in Nahuatl, *neltiliztli*, is derived from the same radical as ‘root’, *tla-nél-huatl*, from which, in turn, comes *nel*huátotl, ‘base’ or ‘foundation’. The stem syllable *nel* has the original connotation of solid firmness or deeply rooted. With this etymology ‘truth’, for the Nahua, was to be identified with well-grounded stability.”

Set against the background of a processive metaphysics that allegedly impresses some kind of “illusory” quality on empirical existence in general, this etymology suggests to these writers that *neltiliztli* must preclude notions of correspondence and should be instead understood to consist in apprehending reality in a more stable, more genuine, and well-grounded way.

While León-Portilla does not develop an epistemological theory out of these considerations, his analysis does seem to suggest that a kind of epistemological problematic can be attributed to the Nahua, but one that should be interpreted principally along an ontological axis: for the Nahua the philosophical problem of truth consisted in finding a stable basic principle for both man and the universe in some other, more real metaphysical realm that is not subject to instability and change. The mantle of articulating a problematic that is more clearly epistemological is picked up by Maffie, who argues that—pace León-Portilla—for the Nahua the problem was not really to access a different and truer ontologically realm, but rather to perceive this reality more genuinely given that we systematically misperceive it in everyday life because of the deceptive quality of *teotl*, the animating principle that the Nahua believed continuously transforms itself in a self-generating and self-regenerating process that is responsible for creating and sustaining all of reality.

In what follows I will problematize these readings, focusing mostly on Maffie’s account, but doing so in a way that carries over to León-Portilla’s arguments and, in general, to those defended by commentators who wish to extract epistemological lessons from the concept of *neltiliztli* to advance non-Western theories that can rival the supposedly dominant model furnished by correspondence theory.

Before I raise my worries, however, let me briefly say something about the nature of the evidence from which we interpret Mesoamerican thought. This evidence consists mainly of some fifteen extant Mesoamerican codices on which were drawn paintings and glyphs that the Nahua sages and poets would interpret by a process of following with their eyes—usually during ritual—the sequence of characters and paintings depicted, while they recited or said their meanings out loud. During the colonial era these pictographic texts or song-poems became committed into linear alphabetic writing with the help of indigenous translators and informants under the supervision of Spanish friars. Many questions can be raised about the legitimacy and reliability of the testimony these texts provide to those who wish to draw lessons from them concerning the content and form of Mesoamerican cultures.

But this is not really the source of my contention with interpreters of Nahua epistemology. Accordingly, I will assume that the translated texts in question are reliable enough for us to productively use them in our reconstructions of Nahua philosophy. My criticism will focus instead on the interpretations that have been made of some of these texts and the assumptions...
that underlie them. So that we can have a referent for the
discussion that follows, allow me to cite some of the song-
poems that both León-Portilla and Maffie rely on to advance
their interpretations of Nahua philosophy.  

**e.g.1:**

Do we speak the truth here, oh Giver of Life?
We merely dream, we only rise from a dream.
All is like a dream . . .
No one speaks here of truth . . .

**e.g.2:**

Is there perchance any truth to our words here?
All seems so like a dream, only do we rise from sleep,
only on earth do our words remain.

**e.g.3:**

So has it been said by Tochihuitzin,
so has it been said by Coyolchiuhqui:
It is not true, it is not true
that we come to this earth to live.
We come only to sleep, only to dream.
Our body is a flower.
As grass becomes green in the springtime,
so our hearts will open, and give forth buds,
and then they wither.
So did Tochihuitzin say.

**e.g.4:**

We only rise from sleep,
we come only to dream,
it is not true, it is not true,
that we come on earth to live.
As an herb in springtime,
so is our nature.
Our hearts give birth, make sprout,
the flowers of our flesh.
Some open their corollas,
then they become dry.

**e.g.5:**

We say nothing true here, Giver of Life,
But speak only as from dreams,
from which we shall soon awaken;
we tell the truth to no one here.
....
We tell the truth to no one here.
The Giver of Life mocks us.
We express only a dream, oh friend;
Our heart knows—
In truth, He, God, mocks us.

Both Maffie and León-Portilla interpret dream-talk in these
texts as indicating that, for the Nahua, everyday life was
deceptive or illusory. As mentioned above, León-Portilla
takes this to signal that concern with neltiliztli (truth)
revolved around the need to gain access to a different, more
real metaphysical realm from which an enduring truth could
be secured. Maffie rejects this kind of reading principally
for foisting onto Nahua philosophy a dualist ontology that,
he believes, a careful consideration of the evidence belies.
For Maffie the metaphysical commitments of the Nahua
are more properly understood to have been monistic and
pantheistic: all reality is composed of a single, dynamic,
eternally self-generating and perpetually changing sacred
power or force that the Nahua called teotl.  

However, since he acknowledges that the song-poems
appear to relegate everyday life to the status of being
dreamlike and illusory, Maffie is forced to find a way to
account for the ostensive dualism that employment
of the dream metaphor apparently invokes. Because
ontological monism does not admit the existence of a
plurality of things, it cannot relegate illusion to an inferior
grade of reality. Accordingly, the solution is to give these
concepts an epistemological significance. As Maffie puts
it, “Nahua neltiliztli—[sages] employed the concepts of
dreamlikeness and illusion as epistemological categories
in order to make the epistemological claim that the natural
condition of humans is to be deceived by teotl’s disguise
and misunderstand teotl.” In this way, the dreamlike
quality of everyday life becomes a function of how humans
perceive the single, undifferentiated reality around them:
this illusory quality springs from our perceptual judgments
and interpretations, from our de dicto perceptions of
the world; i.e., from our perceiving the world under a
description—as seeing a tree, or a house, or a person, and
so on. Strictly speaking, none of those de dicto perceptions
are correct—hence their illusory, dreamlike status—since,
in each of those instances, we are always perceiving only
one and the same thing, namely, teotl. Because we cannot
help but perceive teotl under some description, we seem
decondemned to constantly misapprehend teotl in ordinary
experience. As Maffie succinctly puts it, “[human beings]
perceive and conceive teotl’s nahual (self-disguise) and
consequently perceive and conceive teotl in a manner that
is ahnelli—i.e. untrue, unrooted, inauthentic, unconcealing,
and nondisclosing. It is humans’ misperceiving and
misunderstanding teotl as its disguise (nahual) which
prevents them from seeing teotl (reality) as it really is.”

For Maffie, then, the epistemological problematic of the
Nahuas consisted in trying to secure a firmly rooted
disclosure of the undifferentiated, processive nature
of reality. Neltiliztli—the opposite of dreamlikeness or
illusion—is about genuinely disclosing teotl by coming to
experience it directly and not under a description: “Nahua
epistemology claims the only way for humans to experience
teotl knowingly is to experience teotl sans description.
Humans know teotl by means of a mystical-style union
between their hearts and teotl that enables them to know
teotl directly and immediately (i.e., without recourse to
or mediation by language, concepts, or categories).” Ritual,
which included practices of self-sacrifice and the
performance of song-poems, allowed the Nahua
philosophers to obtain true cognition by facilitating
the kind of mystical union in which they became well-rooted
in teotl and enabled teotl to disclose itself directly to them.
Against this account of Nahua epistemology, it can be said, first, that it is not obvious that attempting to interpret *neltiliztli* as firmly rooted disclosure completely eschews the kind of considerations animating correspondence accounts of truth. After all, if the fundamental problem of Nahua epistemology is to perceive *teoltl* as it really is, and not as it disguises itself as being, then it is hard to see how that concern does not translate itself into the desire to match the mind’s experience or perception of the world with the way the world truly is—in this case, processive. Part of Maffie’s reasoning for arguing that *neltiliztli* is better translated as well-rooted disclosure and not correspondence is that reality, for the Nahua, is an undifferentiated processive totality that lacks the kind of “worldly things” that could serve as the requisite truth-makers in a correspondence relation. For the Nahua, *teoltl* does not really consist of discrete facts, state-of-affairs, structures, or the like, and to the extent that we are perceiving such objects we are in fact misperceiving *teoltl*. Consequently, Maffie thinks that, metaphysically speaking, there seems to be nothing that our beliefs or sentences could correspond to or indeed represent.” 17 But, pace Maffie, there still is something in this worldview that can serve as truth-maker and to which our mental experience can correspond: namely, *teoltl* itself, in all its undifferentiated, processive splendor. The mere fact that our direct experience of *teoltl* cannot be captured semantically or that it must not be mediated by words and categories (since doing so would amount to perceiving *teoltl* under some description and, hence, misperceiving it), does not belie the need to ensure that the mental states in which it is to be encoded or experienced must match the way the world truly is, which just amounts to the need to secure a correspondence between the perceiving mind and reality. To obtain true cognition by enabling *teoltl* to disclose itself directly and authentically is to match my experience of *teoltl*’s well-rooted disclosure with the way the world truly is.

However, in truth, my qualm with these interpreters is not really about whether they succeed in articulating a noncorrespondence notion of *neltiliztli*. My real worry reaches a bit deeper and has to do with whether we are even entitled in the first place to read off any kind of epistemological concerns from the song-poems in question. For even if we are successful in cashing out a noncorrespondence epistemological problematic associated with *neltiliztli*, the reality is that this whole view rests on an interpretation of “dream-talk” in Nahua poetry that might have been foreign to the way the Nahua felt about dreams or the associations that “dream-talk” naturally conjured up for them.

In our modern imagination employment of the dream metaphor to suggest a resemblance between our waking life and the imaginings of the mind during sleep is usually meant to convey the idea that there is an “illusory” quality to our everyday experience; that what we take to be real might in fact more closely resemble the unrealities and fancies of the imagination that are the stuff of dreams. This was certainly the impetus behind Descartes’s use of the dream metaphor in his *Meditations* to suggest that perhaps all our experience is nothing but the elaborate dream an evil demon has dreamt up for us; or as Calderón de la Barca put it more poetically in his famous play, “La Vida es Sueño” (Life is a Dream): “that all life is a dream, and dreams themselves are a dream.” But while this association is well-cemented in our modern imagination, we are not entitled to project it into the mind of the ancient Nahua. When the Nahuas compare waking life to a dream in their song-poems they need not have intended to convey the notion that our everyday experience is in any way deceptive or illusory: not in the ontological way León-Portilla has in mind, nor in the more properly epistemological way that Maffie proposes. And, consequently, *neltiliztli* might not be about true cognition or the proper disclosure of reality, well-grounded or otherwise. In fact, it might not be about cognizing reality at all.

But if not illusion or deception, what significance could the dream metaphor have had for the Nahua mind, and what difference would that make to the philosophical lessons we might be able to extract from these song-poems? Let me suggest two aspects of dreams that might have been part of the associations that the dream metaphor in these song-poems was meant to elicit. The first is that dreaming is the state in which we are “awakened” to a kind of conscious life during sleep. Falling asleep involves the natural and complete suspension of consciousness, which is why we are not able to remember what happens to us while we are asleep and why sleeping is often associated with death. But in dreams our conscious mind becomes active again in a way that we can, and often do, remember. Thus, when the song-poems suggest that life is like a dream they might have simply intended to convey the idea that coming into existence is like the process in which the mind is aroused into conscious activity from its senseless, unconscious state of sleep. After all, in both cases (dreaming and existing) the person is brought out of a passive nothingness—in the case of existence, the nothingness of nonbeing—into a kind of active somethingness.

The other aspect of dreams that might have been especially salient to the Nahua has to do with the peculiar quality that this state of conscious activity, for the most part, has for those who experience it: namely, that it seems haphazard, random, unorganized, and lacking a clear meaning. Thus, another way in which life is like a dream is that we come into existence without a clear purpose and unable to ascertain why we are going through the motions of living or even in what way we should do so. When the poets claim that we say nothing true here and that we come only to dream, or when they appear to complain that the Giver of Life mocks us because he has given us an existence that expresses only a dream, they might be intending to convey the notion that life is not just fleeting and short, but also lacking any coherence and purpose.

Interpreting the song-poems with these associations in mind suggests that more than setting up an epistemological problematic for the Nahuas, dream-talk seems to have been intended to convey an existential one instead. If all life is like a dream because it consists of conscious activity that lacks organization and meaning, then the problematic surrounding *neltiliztli* was not that of cognizing the world correctly, but that of finding a way to make the world well-grounded and stable by giving life meaning, direction,
coherence, and the like. It seems to me that this reading not only jibes well with the etymology of neltiliztli, but also with other features of this word that commentators like Maffie often highlight to advance their epistemological readings. For instance, noting that neltiliztli applies equally to persons, objects, and utterances, Maffie argues that it is incompatible with correspondence theory, since it makes no sense to speak of a person or an object corresponding to the way things really are.14 I agree, but not because neltiliztli is better understood as epistemic well-rooted disclosure of truth—as Maffie wants us to believe—rather, perhaps it is because neltiliztli is about impressing meaning and significance (also, enduring stability) to the things that lack them. People, objects, utterances, and the like start out being chaotic, senseless, and not at all well-rooted on this earth, but they can acquire coherence and become well-rooted through the sorts of practices—usually sacrificial—recommended by the Nahua sages.15 In these practices, the truth of the objects is not in question; what is in question is how they fit into a system of meanings and purposes that impresses said objects with significance.

In conclusion, interpreters should tread more carefully when trying to imagine what epistemological concerns might have animated the thought of Nahua poets in order not to import their own unwarranted associations into the metaphorical analysis that engagement with these sources necessarily requires. In our efforts to recover and legitimize forgotten and marginalized philosophies such as that of the Nahua—efforts that I judge to be appropriate—we must guard against getting too carried away with our speculations. While Nahua culture is clearly animated by philosophical concerns, it is by no means necessary to imagine that they must encompass all the traditional, paradigmatic branches of philosophical inquiry. In the end, the Nahua might have been less concerned with the epistemological problem of how to cognize the world correctly than they were with the existential one of how to give their fleeting and senseless lives some stability and meaning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ideas for this paper were first presented at the Fifth Latinx Philosophy Conference in 2020. I wish to thank the audience for their questions and feedback.

NOTES


2. The Aztecs were one of the many Nahua-speaking groups of people that inhabited the great Valley of Mexico and its environs. Prior to colonial times they had managed to build an empire that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, and were, thus, the most dominant Nahua group at the time of the Spanish conquest. Since the reflections that follow have to do with Nahua culture broadly construed, I will be referring principally to the Nahua and to Nahua philosophy.


4. León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 8.

5. Here is León-Portilla: “convinced of the transitory nature of all things existing on earth and of the dreamlike quality of life, the tlamatini’s [the Nahua philosopher’s] approach to the truth couldn’t have been the Aristotelian identification of the mind who knows with existing reality”(Aztec Thought and Culture, 75-76).

6. León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 8, and 71–79.


10. In “Have We Really Translated the Mesoamerican ‘Ancient World’?” León-Portilla discusses some of these worries and defends the view that we can be confident that the texts in question have reliably translated at least part of the worldview of ancient Mesoamerica.

11. Of the following, the first three samples of song-poems can be found in León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 7, 71, and 72, respectively; I have complemented these with a couple more examples taken from Miguel León-Portilla and Earl Shorris, In the Language of the Kings: an Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature—Pre-Columbian to the Present, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 78 and 93-94, respectively.

12. Maffie appears to have tempered somewhat his position, arguing that we are not entitled to interpret dream-talk in these song-poems as implying that the Aztecs regarded dreams as by definition unreal, illusory, false, or untrustworthy (Maffie, Aztec Philosophy and Culture, 59–62). For Maffie this reading betrays a Western prejudice which, under the influence of our scientific understanding, sees the content of dreams as unreal. Such understanding of dreams need not have been part of the Nahua mind. Thus, Maffie prefers in the end to see the function of dreams in these song-poems as “a trope for that which is obscure and mysterious—not for that which is unreal” (Aztec Philosophy and Culture, 62). Still, since in this work he continues to uphold the view that the epistemological problem of the Nahua was that human beings systematically misperceive reality or teotl (Aztec Philosophy and Culture, 40–42) and, thus—as he has argued elsewhere—that this epistemological challenge consisted in attempting to perceive teotl more genuinely through ritual, it seems as if Maffie would be probably still inclined to see the mysterious or obscure quality being reference by dream-talk in these song-poems as indicating that everyday life has the character of being, in some sense, misleading or deceptive and, to that extent, still illusory. In any case, this is certainly the interpretation Maffie gives to Nahua dream-talk in the other works I will be referencing below.

13. Maffie, “Why Care about Nezahualcóyotl?” and “Aztec Philosophy.” For his more detailed defense of this view, see Maffie, Aztec Philosophy.


Lélia Gonzalez, Philosopher of Intersectionality

Honorable Mention, 2021 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

Teófilo Reis
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY AND UNIVERSITY OF CAMPINAS, BRAZIL

Since Kimberlé Crenshaw’s coining of the phrase “intersectionality,” the concept became a fundamental one in many strands of feminist thinking and other areas of knowledge. As it frequently happens, the idea long predates the concept. Indeed, the academic literature is rife with examples of early appearances of reasonings inviting intersectional interpretations. In this paper, I discuss the work of Brazilian philosopher Lélia Gonzalez and show how she anticipated intersectionality when elaborating the concept of Amefricanidade and the idea of Afrolatinamerican feminism in the 1980s. I argue that Gonzalez’s intersectionality sparks prolific dialogue with recent works in the field. Finally, I outline a relational model for intersectionality inspired by Gonzalez’s ideas.

Lélia Gonzalez (1935–1994) was a black Brazilian philosopher, intellectual, and activist who acted on many fronts. According to Raquel Barreto, we can identify two moments in Gonzalez’s work.1 The first moment (1960s–1970s) is characterized by an economic debate influenced by Marxism and theories of dependent and marginal development. Gonzalez wanted to understand slavery and racism’s economic impacts in a society where monopolist and competitive forms of capitalism coexisted and where both race and gender shaped the workforce.2 In the second moment (1980s), Gonzalez changes her view of racism, relegating the economic debate to the second position and complementing it with psychoanalytic,3 historical, sociological, and anthropological debates about race.

The elements borrowed from the social sciences appear in Gonzalez’s concept of Amefricanidade, which characterizes the African diaspora in the Americas.4 Aware of the differences in the meaning of blackness across societies, Gonzalez seeks to understand the common ground of the black experience in the “new world,” marked by slavery and post-emancipation exploitation. She criticizes shallow forms of identification and favors a nuanced view acknowledging that blackness was significantly changed in the Americas. This reconstruction of people of African descent’s identities in a new and hostile continent that they transformed into a home is what Gonzalez calls Amefricanidade. It “incorporates an entire historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation and crafting of new forms) that is Afro-centered.”5 Those elements brought from Africa during slavery helped build a new world, Améfrica. I shall return to Amefricanidade after we see Gonzalez’s take on feminism.

AFROLATINAMERICAN FEMINISM

Gonzalez opens her celebrated 1988 paper “Por um feminismo afrolatinamericano” (“For an afrolatinamerican feminism”) stressing the relevance of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Golden Law, which “simply declared the end of slavery, revoking all other dispositions on that matter . . . and nothing else.”6 For black people, the liberation struggle began long before emancipation, as an ongoing commitment towards an egalitarian society, one where racialization would not imply inferiority.

While acknowledging mainstream feminism contributions to understanding patriarchal capitalism, Gonzalez emphasizes its shortcomings regarding race. Those are not a lack of knowledge but oblivion or “racism by omission,” caused by a “Eurocentric and neocolonialist cosmovision of reality.”7 To explain the relationship between those elements, Gonzalez uses two Lacanian categories: the infant and the subject-supposed-to-know. The former designates the subject who cannot express themselves, thus being hostage to others’ definitions. She links this to the situation of black women: “we, women and non-whites, have been spoken about, defined and classified by an ideological system that infantilizes us.”8

The subject-supposed-to-know refers to the unwarranted attribution of credibility to figures such as parents, teachers, professors, among others. Expanding the concept with ideas by Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi, Gonzalez changes the focus from childhood to colonization. She argues that the colonized attribute epistemic superiority to the colonizer, thus reinforcing eurocentrism and neocolonialism. Gonzalez combines her versions of the Lacanian concepts to qualify her critique of traditional feminism in Latin America. By ignoring the multiracial and plurcultural aspect of Latin American societies, feminism becomes unable to provide a reasonable account of phenomena such as the sexual division of work, which has a prominent racial dimension.

Gonzalez explains racism in Latin America by going back to the Moor domain of the Iberian Peninsula. For her, the Reconquista had religious and racial motivations since the Moors were black. Another crucial element was the hierarchical structure that pervaded Iberian societies, where social positions were determined by strict rules. Latin American societies inherited and combined these features, creating segregation-free racialized forms of social stratification. This, combined with the ideology of whitening, reinforced “one of the most efficient myths of ideological domination: that of racial democracy.”9

Racism is further complicated by sexism and class issues. As Gonzalez explains it,

It is important to insist on the fact that, in the context of deep existing racial inequalities in the continent,
sexual inequality appears very well articulated. This is a double discrimination against the non-white women of the region, African and Amerindian women. The double character of their biological condition—or racial and sexual—makes them the most oppressed and exploited women in a region dependent on patriarchal-racist capitalism. Precisely because this system transforms differences in inequalities, the discrimination they suffer assumes a triple character, given their class position.\(^1\)

In the last section of the paper, Gonzalez presents her defense of Afrolatinamerican feminism. Focusing on black groups, she emphasizes that black women face difficulties among black male activists and white feminists. If this is so, why do black women usually organize themselves primarily in race-based rather than gender-based organizations? Gonzalez answers this way:

> [F]or us, Americans from Brazil and other countries of the region—and for Amerindians as well—the consciousness of oppression comes, before anything else, through race. Class exploitation and racial discrimination constitute the basic elements of the struggle common to men and women who belong to subalter groups. The experience of black slavery, for example, was terribly lived by men and women, be they children, adults, or elderly. And it was inside the enslaved community that developed political-cultural forms of resistance that today allow us to carry on a centuries-long struggle for liberation.\(^14\)

Since black women are discriminated against in both black activism and mainstream feminist movements, Gonzalez proposes the construction of a race-conscious feminism. In Latin America, this new feminism must incorporate and learn from the African and/or Indigenous origins of most women in the region. Therefore, feminism must become Afrolatinamerican feminism. This affords non-white women a way out of the sexist violence in black and ethnic movements and the invisibility/deracialization in women’s movement. Gonzalez ends on a positive note, hopeful that the plurality of feminisms is only temporary, Afrolatinamerican feminism being a stage that will help feminism achieve its full potential.

**INTERSECTIONS AND DIALOGUES**

The role race, gender, and class play in Gonzalez’s work is enough to characterize her as an intersectional thinker. I do not mean that anyone grappling with those elements is intersectional. What is crucial in Gonzalez is the way in which race, gender, and class interact. Departing from a class theory that acknowledged race and gender as collateral elements, Gonzalez came up with an understanding of her own, one in which race and gender constitute/are constituted by class. Therefore, race and gender deserve a place of honor in any structural analysis of capitalism, on pain of incompleteness and the inability to formulate accurate diagnostics.

Let us assume, for argument’s sake, a two-tiered classification of approaches to intersectionality, focusing either on identity elements or material conditions. I claim that an identity-only approach to Gonzalez’s ideas would weaken her ideas. If devoid of material elements, Amerfricanidade becomes a shallow notion reducible to memory and feelings. Despite their relevance, such elements are insufficient to make sense of the experience of black folks in the Americas. Once one considers materiality, blackness ceases to be an emotional affiliation and becomes something that can be tracked in history and mobilized in politics. A case in point is Gonzalez’s characterization of the *mulata*. Gonzalez claims that the old figure of the *mucama*, a slave concubine, bifurcated into two: the domestic servant, an exploited worker, and the *mulata*,\(^13\) who is the focus of all attention during the Carnival. Nonetheless, they are frequently the same person. This shift in identity cannot be explained by identity elements alone. To make sense of the situation, one must consider the gendered and racialized forms of exploitation that relegates black women to low-paying positions, only giving them attention when extracting sexual benefits from their bodies.

An exclusively materialist account does not fare any better. The previously analyzed examples show the relevance of identity. For Amerfricanidade to be meaningful, identity cannot be ignored. Otherwise, if identities were erased and only classes were left, the organization of people in workers’ movements would have to be enough to address racial and gender problems.

Gonzalez’s intersectionality blurs the materiality/identity divide, combining features from both. Afrolatinamerican identities make sense because they are rooted in material constraints and serve liberatory purposes. In Gonzalez’s view, the adoption of an Afrolatinamerican feminism is one step in a journey that includes future insertion of Afrolatinamerican feminist values in the antiracist movement. She is not dealing with the question of whether one should racialize feminism or feminize antiracism. Both are necessary, and the order in which each must be enacted comes from the material conditions. It is the interaction of those elements that informs the struggle. In that regard, I think that Gonzalez would agree with Susan Ferguson’s remarks about the inexistence of abstract capitalism.\(^16\)

Gonzalez’s thoughts can be put in dialogue with Patricia Hill Collins’s view of intersectionality as a critical social theory in the making.\(^17\) Collins identifies three uses of intersectionality: metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic shift. I shall focus on the third one with relation to Gonzalez’s work. Both the ideas of Amerfricanidade and Afrolatinamerican feminism aim at a shift of the prevalent paradigm. Amerfricanidade creates bonds among people who used to see themselves as separate groups. Such bonding is politically relevant, since it helps fight the mechanisms that keep working the machinery of economic, gender, and racial exploitation.

Collins’s characterization is also comprised of core constructs and guiding premises,\(^18\) the latter being formulated as follows:

1) Race, class, and gender as systems of power are interdependent;
2) Intersecting power relations produce complex social inequalities;
3) Intersecting power relations shape individual and group experiences;
4) Solving social problems requires intersectional analysis.

It is not difficult to see those premises operating in Gonzalez’s work. For example, Afrolatinamerican feminism exemplifies premise 1, while premise 3 is manifest in the mulata example.

Sara Bernstein’s metaphysical approach is also relevant to the present discussion. The author opens her “The Metaphysics of Intersectionality” with a general understanding of intersectionality as inseparability of identity constituents. She then looks at forms of inseparability and argues that the suitable version for intersectional thinking does not exclude conceptual separability. There are two families of notions of separability: destruction conceptions (eggs are destroyed when baking a cake) and intact conceptions (bricks remain integral inside a wall). The former, Bernstein argues, does not work for intersectionality as it does not preserve identity constituents—after all, a black woman ceases to be neither black nor woman. Bernstein proposes two ways of understanding inseparability as an intact category conception: explanatory unity and interaction among identity categories. The latter does not square well with cross-constitution approaches and downplays the role of inseparability. Therefore, this notion should be discarded. The author concludes that the best understanding of inseparability is as explanatory unity: “intersectional categories are explanatorily prior to their constituents. Rather than the conjuncts explaining the conjunction, the conjunction explains the conjuncts.”

The creation of new categories such as Amefricanidade reflects the necessity of emphasizing the intersectional category’s relevance. Amefricanidade is the result of a complex process involving slavery, settlement, and racialization, among other elements. Gonzalez introduces Amefricanas because characterizing such people as hyphenated Americans or Africans would be lacking. This is not to deny their African or American ancestry, but to signal that those elements underwent such a radical change that a new category is needed. This is precisely the central idea in Bernstein, that intersectionality is explanatory priority of the intersectional category over the components.

Another virtue of Bernstein’s approach present in Gonzalez’s ideas is the avoidance of disputes over priority among oppression. When Gonzalez advocates Afrolatinamerican feminism, she does not prioritize any of the involved dimensions. Historical circumstances may force people to identify primarily with one dimension of their being rather than others. However, that does not imply prioritization. The initial point is relevant, but even more relevant is the intersectional approach, taking subjects beyond their immediate circumstances and crafting solidarity. Gonzalez would also appreciate the end of disputes over priority because, as an activist, she was aware of the endless debates about priority that frequently pull political activists apart.

**THINKING WITH GONZALEZ**

Inspired by Gonzalez’s view, in this section, I sketch an account of intersectionality. As I see it, Gonzalez’s approach has two crucial virtues. First, it avoids the reification of social categories or systems of oppression. Second, it smoothly accommodates social change. Think of the example of the mulata. It would be difficult to sustain that there is something inside the women who are both mulatas and domestic workers to explain their transformation from one to the other. This difficulty disappears if we think about the organization of the social world in terms of relations. I pursue that intuition in the paragraphs below.

To motivate the discussion, consider the following questions: 1) What are the things that intersect? 2) How do they intersect? 3) What is the result of the intersection? To answer the first question, we must be careful not to be fooled by imprecise language. We commonly hear that gender and race intersect, or that sexism and racism intersect. What exactly does that mean? The claim that gender and race intersect aims to capture the idea that the entities gender and race operate at the same time in the same context. This view is difficult to accept because there are only a few genders and races, but the intersection results appear to be far more varied than any combinatorics can cover. The problem with that view is that the intersecting categories are reified, robbing them of the flexibility they need to participate in dynamic processes.

The “sexism and racism intersect” formulation avoids the lack of flexibility since it deals with systems of oppression, which are adaptable to different situations. It is important to notice that, in each particular instance of intersectional oppression, there is no need for the entire systems to intersect, but only the elements involved in the situation at hand. We can particularize the discussion by introducing relations, the ways in which systems of oppression are made manifest. Therefore, sexism is made of sexist relations; racism is comprised of racist relations, and so on. Relations are the bridge between the general system of oppression and concrete instances of oppression. By their particularistic nature, relations carry out all the relevant contextual elements. Relations, in my approach, are the basic elements that intersect.

We can now advance to question 2), namely, how the intersection happens. It happens through two processes: iteration and mutual constitution of relations. Iteration is the repetition of a process. So, an iterative relation is repeated many times. Relations R and S are said to be mutually constituted when R is used as an input for S and S serves as an input for R. As an example, to claim that racist and sexist relations are mutually constituted is to claim that racism informs sexism and sexism informs racism.

Finally, consider the third question about the metaphysical status of whatever results from the intersection. In the relational approach, the answer is simple: when two or more relations undergo the intersection, that is, when mutually constituted relations undergo a process of iteration, the
outcome is an updated version of the relations at hand. No new kind is created, nothing is destroyed, only refreshed versions of the entering relations are produced. The relational approach offers a simple and elegant solution that carries the explanatory burden without positing an unnecessary proliferation of metaphysical entities.

Before I return to Gonzalez, let me briefly defend my mutual-constitution approach from a criticism directed at such approaches by Marta Jorba and Maria Rodó-Zárate. The authors argue that such accounts are problematic because ‘’constitution’ in the general sense of ‘being made of’ is quite difficult to apply to many interactions among social categories and may in fact not be what intersectionality theorists are after.” Although I agree with their diagnostic about the different ways in which “constitution” is used, I diverge when it comes to characterizing it as inherently reifying. The relational account I sketched does not reify social categories, and therefore the criticism does not apply to it.

I think that the relational account just sketched combines with Gonzalez’s intersectional thinking. Depending on the context of interaction, a poor young black woman can be a mulata or a domestic worker. She is still the same person. What changes are the relations she establishes with others. Amefricandade is such a complex intersectional relation that the basic original categories (relations) become less explanatory than the intersectional construct itself. As for feminisms, be that mainstream or Afrolatinamerican, the starting point is not too relevant because, as iterations happen, new points of view are incorporated, resulting in more comprehensive and explanatory categories.

The outline sketched above needs substantial development, which include engagement with fundamental authors such as Maria Lugones and Linda Martín Alcoff, to name just a few. Despite all that, I think the approach outlined here points in an exciting direction as it throws light on how we can critically carry on Lélia González’s legacy.

NOTES
3. The psychoanalytic approach is an attempt to explicate the entire dynamics of the manifold race relations in Brazil, which embrace many fields such as culture, economy, and the dynamics of social relations themselves with psychoanalysis. Raquel Barreto, “Em emergindo o Feminismo ou Feminizando a Raça: Narrativas de Libertação em Angola Davis e Lélia Gonzalez,” MA thesis, (PUC Rio de Janeiro, 2005), 47.
4. America is a continent, not a country. Gonzalez uses America to refer to the continent. When she wants to refer to the United States, she writes “the United States.” I follow González’s use of America and derived terms.
5. All the translations of González’s texts quoted in the essay are mine.
8. Signed in 1888, Lei Áurea (the Golden Law) put an end to slavery in Brazil.
15. Gonzalez also studied the figure of the mãe preta (Mammy). To some extent, this study anticipates Patricia Hill Collins’s concept of controlling images.
16. Susan Ferguson claims that “[c]apitalism” as a simple abstraction does not actually exist. There is only concretely racialized, patriarchal, colonial capitalism, wherein class is conceived as a unity of the diverse relations that produce not simply profit or capital, but capitalism. Susan Ferguson, “Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Femininities,” Historical Materialism 24, no. 2 (2016): 38–60, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-12341471.
18. The core constructs are elements that commonly appear in the works of intersectionality practitioners. Collins enumerates five of such constructs: relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. The guiding premises are assumptions that inform the theorizing and practice of those in the field.

Hispanics, Latinxs, Philosophers

Manuel Vargas
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

How should we think about the nature of the social identity group commonly called Latinos or Hispanics, the nature of Latina/o/x philosophy, and perhaps relatedly, of Latina/o/xs in philosophy? If one wishes to address these questions, an especially instructive place to begin is with Jorge Gracia’s writings. In his Hispanic/Latin Identity: A Philosophical Perspective and Latinos in America: Philosophy and Social Identity, he offers a detailed account of these things. In later works, he extends and applies aspects of those accounts, but the core elements of his picture receive their fullest presentation in those two monographs.

The ambition of this article is to reconsider—and to rehabilitate, in part—some of the main claims from those works, especially given important concerns that have been raised about Gracia’s approach. I focus on three questions: (1) What is the best way to understand Gracia’s characterization of Hispanics?, (2) Should we accept his further characterization of Latinos, a group he regards as distinct from Hispanics, but overlapping?, and (3) Should...
we accept Gracia’s account of the situation of Latino philosophers within the US academy? The approximate answers are, in order, that Gracia’s account of the unity of Hispanics is more capacious than is commonly acknowledged, and indeed, more capacious than Gracia himself acknowledged in print; however, on Gracia-like grounds we should resist his account of Latinos; and lastly, Gracia’s own work on the status of Hispanics in philosophy suggests that we should resist some of his account of the circumstances of Latino philosophers. It is perhaps fair to say that the present account is critical in the details, but optimistic about many of the ideas in Gracia’s work.

1. THINGS, CONCEPTS, AND TERMS

Anyone writing about the social ontology of Hispanics or Latinxs faces immediate difficulties. First, there is a messy but earnest politics concerning terminology, whether to use “Hispanics,” “Latinos,” or some other term. Second, the target of a given account is oftentimes variable: sometimes the stakes are labels, sometimes concepts, and sometimes questions about whether a given person is properly a member of the social identity group in question. Let’s take these issues in reverse order.

Loosely following Cappelen and Plunkett, the present account will make use of a distinction between object-level phenomena (the things, bearers of properties, or bundles of those properties that we mean to refer to in direct discourse about the world), representation-level phenomena (concepts or representational devices), and our terms (the words of labels we use to talk about things). In the context of talk about social identity groups, this is a distinction between: (i) object-level questions, that is, for example, questions of whether some specific thing is a member or instance of the social identity group, whatever that comes to; (ii) representation-level questions, i.e., questions about our concept, or the representational device we have for the group; and (iii) labelling questions about what to call the objects and their concepts (going forward, I won’t keep saying “or the representational device”—feel free to add it if you dislike talk of concepts).

These distinctions can sometimes seem subtle, but they are important. Take, for example, the term “woman.” We might disagree about whether a given person is a woman. This is an object-level disagreement. We might also disagree about the concept. Some insist that the best characterization of existing thought and talk about woman—the capitalization here indicating a concept, or a representation-level phenomenon—involves a category grounded in genes. Others insist that this is a mistake, and that the concept picks out, for example, a variably expressed social identity. There is also the question of terminology: one might hold that we do better to avoid some terms—“dame,” “lady”—and that we should use some labels (“woman”) in specific contexts and ways, saving related terms (“female”) for yet other purposes.

If we are clear about these distinctions, it helps to make salient an important possibility: where there are potentially a variety of candidate specifications of the concept and potentially several terms to pick out the phenomena of interest, one might engage in some linguistic or conceptual negotiation, advocating on behalf of a particular regimentation of thought and talk. That is, whatever our current ordinary concept may be, the theorist might seek to revise it or replace it, perhaps in the service of some instrumental, perhaps ameliorative, end. A given account of “woman” might be understood as a reforming proposal, as in Haslanger, marking a social status distinguished by subordination in view of one’s perceived role in biological reproduction. Similarly, one might understand disputes about the extension of “marriage” and racial “Whiteness” to involve large-scale, collective efforts at conceptual and linguistic negotiation. In the context of theoretical proposals at the representation-level, philosophers have argued for explicitly revisionist accounts of race, propositional attitudes, free will, and moral desert.

In the US, in the context of discussions about the social identity group that has been variously referred to with the terms “Hispanic,” “Latino,” “Latino@,” “Latina/o,” “Latinx,” and “Latine,” among others, there is robust disagreement at the level of labels. Activists, scholars, and members of the social identity group disagree about what term is preferable, and on what basis. Disputants variously cite facts about differential uptake, what a given term signifies, the history associated with it, what is foregrounded (e.g., the Iberian Peninsula, US social identity categories) or excluded (e.g., self-designation, Indigenous social identities), and concerns about pronounceability. Ongoing linguistic innovation seems to be the order of the day. For all that, disagreement about terms is the visible tip of an iceberg that includes disagreements at both the object- and representation-levels. That is, there are disagreements about whether given individuals and groups are in the extension, and ongoing disagreements about how to understand the intension or the concept.

Gracia has made contributions to discussions about all these levels, and as I will argue, he might also be understood to be engaged in some degree of conceptual negotiation on behalf of his proposals. Even so, his central contributions are perhaps best construed as about the category, or at the representation-level. In the interest of clarity, I will default to using his terminology when talking about his views. I will otherwise use “Latinx” as a putatively neutral term, and Latinxs for the concept, although I recognize that this choice has its own infelicities.

2. ETHNIC GROUP TERMS: THE CASE OF “HISPANICS”

The centerpiece of Gracia’s work on ethnicity is his “Familial Historical” conception of ethnic groups. The core proposal is that ethnic groups are to be conceived of as “extended historical families whose members have no identifiable properties, or set of properties, that are shared by all the members throughout the existence of the familial groups, but that the historical connections that tie them give rise to properties which are common to some members of the group and, in context, serve to distinguish them from other groups.” In the case of Hispanics, the relevant historical connections that distinguish them arise from the nexus of historical ties that arises out the events of 1492. This is, then, a representation-level account, focused on the
concept that figures in thought and talk about the group he refers to with the term “Hispanics.”

On the face of it, a striking feature about Gracia’s account is his recurring insistence that there is no common feature or property among members of an ethnic group. As he put it in his earlier work, “There is no need to find properties common to all Hispanics in order to classify them as Hispanics. What ties us is the same kind of thing that ties the members of a family, as Wittgenstein would say.” It is an attempt to characterize a category or concept in a way that avoids appeal to any essential properties. What makes this puzzling, though, is how this could be. In virtue of what would the category be a category? How would a motley of disconnected properties constitute a stable category, rather than a monstrous and unprincipled disjunction?

My suspicion is that the metaphor of family resemblance is being asked to do too much work, accounting for both classification (i.e., determining membership, or establishing what something is) and resemblance (i.e., sharing of first-order properties). Gracia is likely correct about Hispanics and resemblance—they don’t universally share first-order properties. It is unclear why this point about resemblance bears on classification, or the right representation-level accounts of Hispanics.

Consider the Wittgensteinian element invoked in both Hispanic/Latino Identity and Latinos in America, and Gracia’s repeated claims that ethnic groups are families, or like them. On one understanding of Wittgenstein’s point, his idea of family resemblance is intended to show how some properties—for example, the property of resembling others in a family—depends upon a cluster of other properties where there is no single subordinate property that is shared by all members who resemble each other. That is, the property of family resemblance turns out to be the property of sharing any of a diverse set of properties distinctive of a given family. It is a higher-order property because it specifies other properties; it is not essentialist at the first-order, because there is no single property that is had among all in the family who resemble each other.

What Wittgenstein’s example does not show is that membership in a family, or that being appropriately classified in or out of a family, does not depend on a single property. Whether family members resemble one another is a different matter than the question of what makes them all members of the same family. Careful attention to the nature of families suggests that Wittgenstein’s point about family resemblance does not hold in the case of membership in a family. Under ordinary circumstances, we can identify a property that unifies families, and that is held by all members of that family. To do this, though, we need to be precise about the notion of family that is at stake.

For example, if we are interested in a biological notion of family (for example, to make assessments about the likelihood of hereditary diseases), then relations of biological descent from a breeding pair—as biologists inelegantly put it—will allow us to say who is in and out of a family. We can make relatively straightforward assessments about this matter, even allowing for degrees of genetic relation. However, the core notion of family in this sense will be one that tracks biologically significant properties, such as being genetic descendants of a breeding pair.

If, we are interested in a legal notion of family—for example, to decide tax benefits and legal duties of care—we appeal to the governing laws that define what counts as a family. In this case, the property shared by all members is a legal one. Such a notion is not prior to human practices. However, social practices matter for creatures like us. The significance and importance of legal conceptions of the family has been no small part of the motivations for recognizing the legal status of gay and lesbian marriages, for example.

To be sure, there are interesting limit cases. It is conceivable that one can operate with something like an emotional notion of family. For example, one might think of a non-genetically related, non-legally related person as a “sister” or “cousin” in some sense of family that is neither legally nor genetically fixed. Some uses in this spirit may be honorific or metaphorical, but others may reflect an articulable notion of family that we do not yet widely recognize.

We need not take a normative stand on the proper range of folk notions of family and what properly constitutes family. No matter what range of uses we recognize as legitimate, there are bound to be marginal or liminal uses of the term. This fact is mostly orthogonal to the present issue. The point here is that on any useful notion of family, there is some property or cluster of properties that is relevant for settling questions of membership. If we wish to settle questions of membership, we need to know the relevant properties that determine categorization. Regardless of whether those properties are features of the world or our interests, neither evades this basic constraint on classification.

The properties that settle membership in an ethnic category may come in degrees, or otherwise allow some notion of centrality and peripherality as an instance of the kind. Just as remote family members can be marginal or liminal cases of family, so too can individuals be with respect to ethnic group membership. Even so, in the real world we might lack ready characterizations of the properties that fix membership in a group. However, once we have made our interest precise, none of these facts suffice to justify the conclusion that families are not picked out by some essential property or set of properties. Wittgenstein’s point about family resemblance, then, does not deny that we can give an account of family membership, which is the classificatory issue at stake.

There is, though, a reasonable way forward. Even better, it builds on ideas already in Gracia’s work. So long as Gracia is prepared to acknowledge that higher-order properties, such as shared historical properties, can be properties, then there is a unifying membership or classificatory property for Hispanic/Latinos, i.e., the property of sharing some (to-be-identified) overlapping historical tie. Alternately, were Gracia inclined to insist that higher-order properties cannot be properties, it would be good to know why not.
Consider, for example this passage: “Hispanics are the group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian Peninsula after 1492 and what were to become the colonies of those countries after the encounter between Iberia and America took place, and by descendants of these people who live in other countries (e.g., the United States) but preserve some link to those people.”

One way of glossing this passage is the following: Hispanics are the group of people with socially meaningful historical ties to the events of 1492 and the subsequent colonization of the Americas by the Iberian Peninsula. This sort of gloss is suggested by numerous remarks Gracia makes, including the following: “beginning in the year of the encounter, the Iberians and their colonies in America developed a web of historical connections which continues to this day and which separates these people from others” and “What ties them together, and separates them from others, is history and the particular events of that history . . . a unique web of changing historical relations supplies their unity.”

I propose that we read these passages as identifying a minimal condition for someone being Hispanic, that is, that they have some socially meaningful historical tie to the events of 1492. It is minimal, in that one can supplement it in a variety of ways. It is higher order, in that it is a property about other properties, namely, the ones that are socially meaningful historical ties to the events of 1492 and the subsequent colonization of the Americas by the Iberian Peninsula. This account does not identify some specific common, substantive property that is shared by all Hispanics everywhere and when. Rather, it identifies a general and higher-order type of property (again, roughly, social meaningfulness in connection with 1492) that is shared, in different ways, and to different degrees, by anyone who is Hispanic.

To be sure, we might want to say more about what socially meaningful historical ties are, whether there are any ties that cannot count no matter what, whether there is any interesting content that needs to be grasped for users of the concept to distinguish between cases where it applies and doesn’t, and so forth. Even so, we do not need to settle all these questions to appreciate that there is a prima facie theoretical option available to Gracia, one that allows him to deflect concerns about unprincipled disjunctions while delivering a story that makes sense of there being some basis for insisting that there is a group here at all.

If all of this is right, then we can and should acknowledge Gracia’s contention that the first-order properties had by members of an ethnic group might be analogous to resemblance within a biological family, with no one first-order property being possessed by all. It would not follow that there is no property that holds across all members of Hispanics. The claim here is that Gracia himself identifies a plausible enough candidate, i.e., socially meaningful historical ties to the events of 1492. We can therefore address a puzzle about the view as he has stated it, by cautiously amending it in a way consistent with the overall picture.

An important virtue of this recasting of Gracia’s account is that it is compatible with virtually all the main features of his account. First, it is a property that can come in degrees, allowing greater and lesser amounts or degrees of ties to capture the notion of greater and lesser degrees of membership (or centrality) to the ethnic group. Second, it can be complemented with a contextualist story that explains more demanding notions of being Hispanic. For example, we can take the historical ties idea, and couple it to the idea that there are shifting and culturally contingent judgments about which sorts of historical ties are socially meaningful for identity in the group in each time and place. That is, the metaphysician’s minimalist higher-order notion of a socially meaningful historical tie to 1492 might be fleshed out with variable local estimates about which sorts of historical ties matter for membership in the group. In some times and places, fluency in specific languages might matter more and less, in others, specific cultural practices might have different social significance for meaningfulness, and so on. Context and intersubjective concerns will constrain which kinds of ties settle local estimates of membership in the group. Still, a minimal unifying notion exists, and the requirement of some socially meaningful tie to 1492 and thereafter is no less real a property because it has culturally and historically variable elaboration. Given that that social ontology is social, this seems exactly right.

This is a minimalist and higher-order tie (HOT) account of Hispanics. It is a reconstruction of what Gracia could (and perhaps should) have held with respect to the concept Hispanic. It captures his important insight that first-order properties (language, food, cultural practices more generally) can vary and that none are universally had by Hispanics. However, it also addresses what otherwise looks puzzling about his account—the explanation why many (temporally, geographically) clustered bundles of properties that are taken to constitute being Hispanic aren’t an entirely unprincipled sets of disjunctions: they are ways communities have settled on socially meaningful ties to the events of 1492.

Before turning to his account of Latino, it may be useful to address a handful of concerns that can be directed at the present reconstruction. First, one might worry that this is an unsatisfying account of an ethnic group, because it is not obvious that the HOT approach readily extends to other conventionally recognized ethnic groups. Not all groups plausibly have an equivalent of 1492 to provide a nexus for socially meaningful ties. That is, whatever the nature of other ethnic groups, they do not seem to have the particular HOT-ness characteristic of Hispanics.

While it is possible that some conventionally recognized ethnic groups are not genuinely ethnic groups, this seems an undesirable result. It is a better and more plausible reglementation of our categories to hold that commonly recognized ethnic groups may be characterizeable in terms of socially meaningful ties in virtue of standard cultural categories (language, social practices, and so on). Indeed, this is standardly how ethnic groups are understood, that is, as groups centrally constituted by densely overlapping cultural norms and practices. We thus have two options here. First, we might grant that Hispanics are a distinctive
group in the way Gracia has claimed, irrespective of whether they are best thought of as an ethnic group. (I find this view tempting, but it is obviously a departure from Gracia’s explicit ambitions.) Alternately, we might try to rescue his approach to ethnic group categories by holding that a higher-order tie story is available for other groups, even if it is unlikely to be given by socially meaningful connections to a specific historical event. This would require further work, of course, but it would allow Gracia to insist that socially meaningful historical ties are not a requirement for it being a HOT group, even if it is distinctive of Hispanics.

A second concern is that Gracia’s picture seems to entail that, for example, prior to 1492, Queen Isabella and other higher-order ties amongst Latinos. For example, he notes that Latinos are part of the region known as Latin America or originate from it being a HOT group, even if it is distinctive of Hispanics.

Below, I say more about how we might think about Gracia’s methodology, but he is not much concerned to strictly respect whatever ordinary language gives us on this matter. His interest is in the best way to do the ontology of a particular ethnic group, regardless of what label we use for it. Sometimes, that will involve linguistic or conceptual revision of folk notions. So, it seems open to him to say that there is some group—call it whatever you like—that includes socially meaningful connections between the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America, and their descendants. Thus, it might well turn out that we say that there are two notions here, Hispanic in a sense that includes pre-1492 Iberians (and others), and Hispanic in Gracia’s sense. El Cid was Hispanic in the former sense but not in the latter.

A different possibility available to Gracia is to say that a way to have socially meaningful historical ties to the events of 1492 just is to be a member of a nation or a people that subsequently came to conquer or be conquered by the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula after 1492. On this approach, pre-1492 peoples—El Cid, Nezalhualcóyotl, and other pre-1492 members of peoples, nations, or communities—could be Hispanic with the right historical connections, irrespective of whether those labeled as such would have thought of themselves in that way. There is some appeal to this sort of account, given his picture, but it is not what he says about Iberians and Indigenous peoples prior to 1492.¹²

The general upshot to the foregoing is that there is ample reason to think Gracia’s account is more capacious than many of his critics have realized. It contains resources for addressing a variety of familiar worries, and although it perhaps inevitably raises questions of its own, the present reconstruction of his account provides a principled story about how Hispanics might constitute an identity group despite diverse chains of descent, languages, norms, and cultural practices.

3. TWO CONCEPTS OF LATINO

In the previous section, I proposed a friendly amendment to Gracia’s account, one that allows him to say that there is an important property that is had by all Hispanics, i.e., the property of having socially meaningful historical ties to the events of 1492 and the subsequent colonization of the Americas by the Iberian Peninsula. Those ties are not necessarily genetic, although they are in some cases; nor are the ties always the same ones, because the social meaningfulness of a given historical tie varies across time and place. However, someone is Hispanic to the degree to which he or she stands in socially meaningful historical relationships to 1492, where those first-order ties may vary by time and place.

In this section I consider Gracia’s later account of Latinos. As Gracia uses these terms, Hispanics are a larger group, one that includes members of the Iberian Peninsula, Latin Americans, and people descended of either. Latinos are the specifically Latin American-derived subset of Hispanics. Although he is less frequently explicit about it, he appears to hold the same core account of the origin of the historical ties amongst Latinos. For example, he notes that Latinos did not exist prior to 1492¹³ and that in both English and Spanish, “Latino” is used to refer to “people or things that are part of the region known as Latin America or originate there in one way rather than elsewhere.”²⁴ Thus, on Gracia’s conception, the term “Latino” applies to both Latin Americans and their descendants with the relevant socially meaningful historical ties to 1492. The Iberian element that is part of Gracia’s Hispanic is absent in Latino, but Latinos include people of Latin American descent both within and without the United States.

Gracia’s expansive conception of Latinos has struck some as non-standard. For example, Renzo Llorente has objected that it makes the most sense to use Latino for Latin Americans who have emigrated to a non–Latin American country, along with the descendants of these emigrants who are born and/or brought up in these non–Latin American countries of destination. Indeed, I believe that contemporary usage tends to reflect a conception of “Latino” along these lines: Peruvians in Colombia may view themselves as Peruvians or Latin Americans, or perhaps even some hybrid of Peruvian and Colombian, but I doubt that they tend to think of themselves as “Latinos.” Yet these very same Peruvians might be apt to see themselves primarily as Latino when they emigrate to the United States or some other non–Latin American country.²⁵

I share Llorente’s linguistic intuitions that in standard US English usage, the term “Latino” picks out populations of Latin Americans and of Latin American descent in the United States, and that it excludes Latin Americans living in Latin America. That this usage is indeed standard is confirmed by authorities both pedestrian and august, including Wikipedia²⁶ and The Oxford English Dictionary.²⁷
If Llorente and I are right about the standard meaning of the term, Gracia is either mistaken, or instead, he is engaged in linguistic and conceptual negotiation. That is, he might be offering, or be construed as offering, a reforming characterization of the concept. On this reading, he would be tacitly arguing that we should speak in a way that reflects his account of the concept. Why might he want to do this? If Gracia’s reforming account does a better job than current folk usage(s) in carving up practical or theoretically useful kinds, that might be a reason to advocate for it. If he were right, we would have reason to re-anchor our thought and talk in a way that comports with Gracia’s usage, even if it conflicts with aspects of current folk thought and talk.

Entertaining this possibility requires a bit of regimentation. We need a way to distinguish the Gracia reforming proposal from the ordinary folk notion. We can use superscripts to regiment our discussion in the following way:

Let Latino⁰, Latino⁰, and cognate terms employ Gracia’s conception of Latinx.

Let Latino¹, Latino¹, and cognate terms employ the folk conception of Latinx.

Given this convention, we can say that one can be Latino⁰ with no interesting relationship to the United States and its social practices. However, one cannot be Latino¹ without being in the United States or standing in some non-trivial relationship to US social practices.

So, are there any reasons to favor the displacement of Latino¹ by Latino⁰? If so, what might they be? And, even if there are reasons to favor displacement, are there countervailing reasons to resist it, beyond the familiar fact that it is no easy thing to overturn existing ways of thinking and talking? That is what we now turn to consider.

4. HISPANIC PHILOSOPHY, LATINX PHILOSOPHY
Gracia offers a distinctive account of Latinx, one that is plausibly at odds with ordinary thought and talk. I’ve argued that this does not, by itself, mean the account fails, as the account can be recast as a proposal for revising or replacing ordinary usage. Could this succeed? It seems hopeless to try to adjudicate this question in a general, unrestricted way. More promising, perhaps, is to ask whether there are contexts that might favor one notion over the other, and whether there are specific interests that might favor a revisionary proposal along the lines we are here considering.

Recall that one of Gracia’s enduring interests has been in the characterization of ethnic philosophies—especially Hispanic and Latinx philosophies. Part of the distinctive disciplinary appeal of having a category of Hispanic Philosophy, whatever label we use in conjunction with it, is that it picks out a practical useful thing, namely, a body of philosophical work that has a robust shared history.⁹⁷ One cannot adequately understand Francisco de Vitoria without taking account of how contact with the Americas affected his thought; the work of Las Casas and Sor Juana cannot be understood in isolation from scholastic thought in Spain; Spanish-born figures like José Gaos and José Ortega y Gasset are central figures in how philosophy unfolded in parts of Latin America, and so on. These are not just incidental ties, according to Gracia, but the warp and weft of the history of Spanish-language philosophical work. It is that fact that justifies the urgency and necessity of thinking about Hispanic Philosophy, even if there is ample reason to contest labels that give some pride of place to the Iberian Peninsula.

Perhaps there is a parallel account to be made for Latino⁰, that is, Gracia’s conception of Latinx? Gracia seems to think that there is, arguing that Latino⁰ philosophy is ethnic philosophy, in the sense that it is the philosophy produced by members of that ethnus, subject to all the contextual negotiations about its extension that one finds in any ethnic philosophy. Further, he allows that we can divide up philosophical works along ethnic, sub-ethnic, regional, and national bases. So, thinking of someone as a Latino² philosopher need not preclude us from thinking of the same philosopher as Uruguayan or South American. Still, he insists that his Familial-Historical View is the right account of Latinx Philosophy, and that “Latino⁰” is the right label for that conception.

Notice, though, that the concept Hispanic Philosophy earns its keep by usefully carving up the world in explanatorily helpful ways. It is less clear that Latino⁰ Philosophy does the same, and thus, it is less clear that we have reason to supplant the folk notion of Latino for Gracia’s revisionist proposal. Worse, we have reason to make a distinction that cross-cuts Gracia’s notion in a way that is readily captured by the folk notion. That is, we have some reason to want to readily distinguish between Latino⁰ Philosophers in Latin America (conventionally: “Latin American philosophers”) and Latino⁰ Philosophers in the United States (conventionally: “Latinx philosophers”): these groups are subject to importantly different experiences.

María Christina González and Nora Stigol have argued that Gracia’s usage of “Latino,” especially in the context of philosophy, obscures important differences between the situation of Latin Americans and Latinos², and correspondingly, between the situation of Latin American and Latino² philosophers.⁹⁸ Among the differences they highlight is a comparatively higher degree of internal dialogue among Latino² philosophers than Latin American philosophers, as well as distinct histories shaping these populations. Crucial to their case is the idea that Latinos² and Latin Americans are distinct in their socially meaningful statuses because they occupy different social positions with respect to the United States. For example, to be Latino² is to occupy a social status internal to the US, one subject to distinctive norms and forms of treatment. In contrast, Latin Americans living in Latin America do not occupy and cannot occupy the social status of Latinos² inasmuch as they are in Latin America. Put simply, they are not subject to the distinctive norms and social meanings of daily life in the United States—unless they come to the United States.

Gracia is quick to note that some Latino⁰ philosophers in the United States share a similar history to Latin American philosophers, namely, those born and/or raised in Latin America. This is true enough, but it is mostly beside the
point. I take it that González and Stigol are noting that when one is Latino in the United States, quite apart from whether one is born inside or outside of the United States, one is subject to distinctive social statuses, norms, and forms of treatment that do not apply to one who has only been Latino outside the United States. For that matter, as Llorente’s remarks suggest, this is also true as a matter of uptake or self-identification: ordinarily, one does not think of oneself as Latino until one has been in the United States.  

I find these considerations decisive, but Gracia, or someone like him, might resist this diagnosis, insisting that Latinx philosophers are not particularly subject to distinctive statuses, norms, and forms of treatment. For example, Gracia has maintained that “what is discriminated against is not Latino philosophers but, rather, what I call Latino philosophy, and only indirectly Latino philosophers when they do Latino philosophy.” He has also asserted that the then-recent ascension of Latino/a presidents of divisions of the American Philosophical Association (Ernest Sosa, Linda Alcoff) demonstrated that Latinx philosophers can escape discrimination.

It is surely possible that some Latinx philosophers might evade being subject to distinctive norms and statuses that turn on their being perceived as Latinx, and that they might find success even in the face of discrimination. At the same time, there are accounts that predict that, for example, Latino philosophers who can more easily pass as white, whose English comports with stereotypical academic English, and whose names are not suggestive of out-groups, will be more likely to find visible success than Latinos who cannot. Gracia recognizes all of this. Still, it is striking that he thinks that Latinx philosophers suffer from discrimination only in virtue of doing Latino philosophy.

I confess that I find Gracia’s position on this matter surprising, in part because it is a marked departure from his prior views. His Hispanic/Latino Identity is as an eloquent articulation of the way Hispanic/Latinx philosophers, qua Hispanic/Latinxs, suffer from discrimination in philosophy. Perhaps Gracia changed his mind about whether Hispanic/Latino philosophers suffer from discrimination. Or perhaps he thought Hispanics are subject to bias, but not Latinos? It would be puzzling, though, why a general anti-Hispanic bias would not produce an anti-Latino bias. He never explains what changed.

Discrimination is undoubtedly a complicated matter. Still, contra Gracia’s later assertions in “Latinos in America: A Response,” the earlier Gracia suggests in Hispanic/Latino Identity that Latino philosophers do face distinctive forms of discrimination in the United States. So, there is an empirical issue here. It is not obvious to me that the most plausible position on this issue holds that US Latinx and Latin Americans are on a par with respect to their US status, whether understood socially or phenomenologically.

If we accept that socially meaningful historical ties are an important part of the conditions on being a member of an ethnic group, this difference in the experience of social statuses and norms can matter for marking social identity groups. Given that we already have a term with a standard usage that reflects this distinction—“Latino”—we would need an especially good reason to overturn it for a usage that reduces our ability to talk about and identify an already socially meaningful category. Other things equal, we should opt for more rather than less expressive power. Gracia’s reforming proposal for Latinx leaves us with less precision and expressive power. Absent further considerations, it is unpromising as a proposal for semantic and conceptual reform.

5. THE SITUATION OF LATINX PHILOSOPHERS

Even if we reject Gracia’s account of Latinx, and his later picture of the social position of Latinx philosophy, this does not mean there is nothing to be gotten from his account of Latinx.

Consider the following remarks from Hispanic/Latino Identity:

The perception of foreignness is a major obstacle to Hispanics in the philosophical community. The American philosophical community is cliquish, xenophobic, and tilted toward Europe. If one is perceived as not being part of one of the established American philosophical families, European in philosophical tradition, or part of the American community, then one is left out: one is thought to belong elsewhere or what one does is thought not to be philosophy. These are the two ways of disenfranchising philosophers: locating them in a non-European or non-American tradition, or classifying what they do as non-philosophical. Hence, Hispanics in general are excluded unless we can prove that we truly belong to one of the accepted groups, think in European terms, or are part of the American community. And we can prove this only by forgetting most of what has to do with our identity as Hispanics, by becoming clones of American philosophers, and by joining one of the established American philosophical families. We must forget who we are; we must forget where we came from; and we must forget our culture and values. Don’t wave your hands; don’t speak enthusiastically; speak slowly and make frequent pauses; adopt the Oxford stuttering technique; look insecure; be cynical and doubtful; buy yourself tweed jackets if you are male, and try to look like Apple Annie if you are female. In short, become what the others want you to become, otherwise there is no place for you.

Hispanics who are fast and articulate in conversation are perceived as glib and arrogant. Hispanics who have a strong sense of humor, and laugh freely, are regarded as not serious. And Hispanics who speak with an accent are thought to be uncouth and unintellectual.

Let’s suppose that Gracia’s remarks resonate for many, although presumably not all, self-identified Hispanic/Latinx philosophers. An important aspect of Gracia’s discussion is that these phenomena get their significance from the structure of disciplinary incentives and ordinary in-group/
out-group dynamics. At risk of oversimplifying his nuanced account, Gracia’s picture in Hispanic/Latino Identity holds that

1) Philosophers are members of groups, and those groups are typically defined genetically, that is, by advisor or institution, and by one’s subfield.

2) Many individual philosophers want attention on their work.

3) Attention typically comes from overlapping or allied groups (i.e., in-groups), but there is a limited quantity of attention available in professionally recognized fora (e.g., journals and conferences).

4) So, there is an incentive to control access to attention. Those efforts to control attention manifest in hostile referee reports on work by those perceived to be out-group members. Similar judgments affect access to journals and conferences.

5) Philosophers marked as out-group members, or as marginal cases of in-group membership, will have more hurdles accessing disciplinary tools of influence, prestige, and visibility.

6) These challenges are endemic for Hispanic/Latinx philosophers, in virtue of their being perceived as foreign, and given their very small numbers in the profession.

7) There is a double estrangement when Hispanic/Latinx philosophers work in fields (such as Latin American philosophy) that lack robust genetic networks in the US, and that are thus perceived as neither part of the analytic world nor part of the Continental world of philosophy.

The first five points are difficult to dispute as a characterization of the profession. Indeed, they plausibly generalize to other academic fields. Importantly, they have a motivationally recognizable basis. No one has time to read everything, and given the fact of finite time and attention, academics rely upon heuristics and other filtering tools to shape and direct their attention. Where matters are more complicated is the degree to which these factors play greater and lesser roles in the outcomes of individual cases, and the contexts in which locally sensible mechanisms have systematically unreasonable effects.

For present purposes, though, Gracia’s remarks on the last two points are especially telling. First, he holds that there are various markers of foreignness that Hispanic/Latinx will disproportionately give evidence of—the ways in which they will be coded as outsiders because of their (variable) distance from the cultural norms that are paradigmatic of the profession. Second, these markers of foreignness will be compounded if one has an interest in philosophical matters outside those things regarded as canonical in the major social groups in Anglophone philosophy. As Gracia puts it, “Hispanics who show any interest in Hispanic issues, or Hispanic thought, are perceived as foreigners because they do not fit into the philosophical groups that dominate [U.S.] American philosophy. . . . The only way Hispanics have of entering the world of Hispanic philosophy is to become [U.S.] American philosophers consider acceptable; Hispanics must prove we belong.”

To my ear, Gracia is substantially anticipating the point made by his interlocutors in response to Gracia’s later work Latinos in America. That is, within philosophy in the United States, Hispanics and Latinos face discrimination qua Hispanics and Latinxs, and especially if they are interested in philosophy produced by Hispanics. If that is right, then being a Latinx in philosophy (and elsewhere, presumably) involves being subject to distinctive social meanings and experiences.

These considerations suggest that we do well not to revise or replace Latinx in the manner he suggests. This conclusion does not vitiate the thought that there are important and contextually salient links between Latinos, Latin Americans, and Hispanics more generally. There are surely some contexts where focusing on Latinxs is not especially explanatory, or where even if it is, we do better to use other categories. He is surely right that recent work Latinx philosophy shares important intellectual ties to the larger Latin American and Hispanic philosophical lineage, and we might reasonably ask what sorts of pictures are ignored, undermined, or obscured when we focus on those connections. It might be true that Latin American philosophy is, to an important degree, Hispanic philosophy; it might also be true that thinking in these ways is not especially useful if we are interested in, for example, the present and history of Indigenous thought in the Americas and its influence in thought and practice in Latin America.

In short, we have reason to accept Gracia’s account of Hispanics, reason to resist his account of Latinxs, and reason to take seriously his insights into the conditions of Latinx, Latin American, and Hispanic philosophers more generally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Lori Gallegos, Dan Speak, and Clinton Tolley for thoughts about the penultimate version of this paper. This paper has had a protracted gestation. I first sketched some these ideas in the wake of a conference on the Latino/a philosopher organized by Eduardo Mendieta in 2013. In 2014, Jorge Gracia and Ernesto Velásquez gave me generous feedback on an early draft, and Jorge and I talked about some of these issues again in 2017. Owing to entirely pedestrian academic distractions, I somehow never finished the paper until now. Although I’m happy to have the chance to draw more attention to Gracia’s pathbreaking work, it is with considerable sadness that this paper is offered as a memorial to a mentor, friend, and co-author.

NOTES

10. Gracia, Hispanic/Latino Identity, 50.
11. Gracia, Latinos in America, 139.
12. The argument I am making here is compatible with there being natural language terms that pick out unprincipled disjunctions of properties that resist demands for orderly classification. For all I have said, it could still turn out that there is no unifying story to be told about Hispanics or families or games, which, on the present approach, would give us reason to regard these ordinary language terms as somewhat disorganized ways of carving up the world. My point is that this possibility does not, by itself, give us a reason for thinking there is never some unifying story to be told about kinds with diverse first-order substantive properties.
13. If one is comfortable with talk of properties, as Gracia is, then it seems one should countenance the existence of higher-order properties. See Chris Swoyer and Francesco Orilia, "Properties," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2011), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/properties/. And again, quite apart from one's favorite views about the metaphysics of properties, it is useful for ordinary discourse to be able to say there is something (however abstract) that is shared by all members of the category, albeit in varying degrees.
15. Gracia, Hispanic/Latino Identity, 48-49.
17. The minimalism of this ethnic group account is different than the minimalism of Michael Hardimon’s notion of the minimalist concept of race. See Hardimon, Rethinking Race: The Case for Deflationary Realism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 27–64. On that account, minimal race involves common geographic origin, common ancestry, and patterns of visible physical features.
20. Gracia, Hispanic/Latino Identity, 3.
21. Thanks to Dan Speak for pressing the question about what Gracia wants to say about pre-1492 Iberians.
29. Gracia, Latinos in America, 129, 139–43.
32. Llorente, "Gracia on Hispanic and Latino Identity," 73.
33. Lori Gallegos has observed that there is an interesting demographic pattern that may be worth noting in this context: in the last quarter century, a remarkably high number of prominent senior Hispanic and Latinx philosophers in the United States were born outside of the US (for example, Gracia, Lugones, Schutte, Alcoff, Medina, Mendiesta, Ortega, Soa, Rayo, Sartorio, Comesaña, Morton). My sense is that the demographic distribution on this is changing, but even allowing for the fact of small numbers, it is notable how few visible senior US-born Hispanic/Latinxs there are in philosophy. I don’t know whether Gracia had things to say about this, and for my own part I am not sure what to say about this pattern. Nevertheless, we can imagine that someone might speculate that this demographic pattern partly explains the appeal to Gracia of construing Latinx in a way that counts Latin Americans not in the US as Latinx: for Latin American-born Latinxs, ongoing ties to Latin America remain especially salient in their identity conception as Latinxs.
38. Gracia, Hispanic/Latino Identity, 182-83.
40. Gracia, Hispanic/Latino Identity, 186.
41. Gracia, Latinos in America.
42. Vargas, "Latinx Philosophy."

Gracia’s Latest View on Latin American Philosophy

Susana Nuccetelli
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY

Although Jorge Gracia often gave evidence of his kin interest in the history of Latin American philosophy, he did not neglect to consider some hard metaphilosophical questions about this discipline which have been at the center of a heated debate since at least the mid-twentieth century. In a number of works, Gracia characterized them as concerning matters of Latin American philosophy’s disciplinary existence, identity, characteristics, originality, and authenticity. He also attempted to throw some clarity in that debate by noting that its major participants tend to defend perspectives that fall within what he labeled “universalism,” “culturalism,” and a “critical view.” On his own view, neither of these competitors captures the nature of Latin American philosophy. As I noted elsewhere his 2003 objection to skepticism about the discipline based on its lack of originality was particularly insightful, given that...
this property hardly qualifies as a necessary condition for the existence of any area of philosophy. After all, when construed as the requirement that, to be of value, the works in a philosophical area must be absolutely novel, originality sets the standard too high: only a few works in any area can possibly meet it.

In Latinos in America of 2008 Gracia offers his own positive account of the nature of Latin American philosophy, the so-called ethnic-philosophy, which he takes to be the best alternative to universalism, culturalism, and the critical view. In this book he also refers to the discipline as “Latino philosophy,” a practice that I’ll adopt hereafter in order to focus on whether Gracia’s alternative can capture the nature of Latino philosophy. I’ll argue that it cannot because it engenders either extreme skepticism about the field or an anything-goes type of relativism. Either way, the ethnic-philosophy account has demonstrably bad practical consequences not only for Latino philosophy but also for any other field that might come out as an ethnic philosophy on Gracia’s account.

II.

In Latinos in America Gracia offers some insightful discussions of the rich experiences of Latin Americans and their descendants in the United States. Of special interest to us here is this book’s novel view that Latino philosophy is a form of “ethnic philosophy.” According to Gracia, this way of understanding the nature of this discipline might resolve a number of questions concerning its adequate name and identity that have been at the center of the abovementioned debate. For, unlike the traditional branches of philosophy, an ethnic philosophy has an open subject matter. What to include in it is determined entirely by the relevant ethnos or group of people, whether this be a Latino ethnos, an African ethnos, etc. Thus if the Latino ethnos decides to include in its philosophy the major philosophical traditions of the West, then those traditions too would be part of the discipline—together with whichever traditions peculiar to Latin America they also decide to include. Unlike other views on the nature of Latino philosophy—argues Gracia—the ethnic-philosophy account avoids regarding any single property (e.g., language, geographical location, place of birth, etc.) as necessary and sufficient for inclusion in Latino philosophy. But in other works, I have shown, first, that he is wrong about this advantage of the ethnic-philosophy conception since given his account the property of being accepted for inclusion by the Latino people turns out to be necessary and sufficient for counting as Latino philosophy any philosophical tradition or theory. Second, this conception of Latino philosophy is too broad because it has the implausible consequence that, say, David Sosa’s work in philosophy of language or mind might counts as Latino philosophy provided the Latino people were to decide to include it.

In addition, the ethnic-philosophy conception faces a dilemma that I take up next, which runs as follows: if Latino philosophy is a form of ethnic philosophy as defined by Gracia, either skepticism (and even nihilism) or relativism about this discipline is true. Either way, the ethnic-philosophy conception fuels some existing biases about Latino philosophy and may therefore contribute to its insularity in the profession—a bad state of affairs that Gracia himself tried to remedy. That the ethnic-philosophy account entails skepticism and even nihilism follows from its relying on the implausible assumption that, eventually, the Latino people will eventually agree on what to include in their philosophy. That they could ever reach such a consensus seems highly unlikely. After all, take a subgroup of the Latino people, the professional Latino philosophers, who are of many different philosophical persuasions and have engaged in countless philosophical disputes never reaching even a minimal consensus. It is highly unlikely that Latino philosophers will eventually converge on what to include in the discipline. As a result, if the ethnic-philosophy account is true, at present there is no justification for any claim about what falls within Latino philosophy. And it seems implausible that at the end of the day they will converge on what works, traditions, etc. count as Latino philosophy. With no consensus in sight, skepticism and even nihilism would follow.

Now suppose that the above skepticism could be brushed aside on the basis that no such consensus is necessary for determining the scope of Latino philosophy. Thus construed, Gracia’s account entails an anything-goes form of relativism about Latino philosophy since whether a work, tradition, etc. falls within its scope would be simply a matter of opinion. To illustrate, let’s briefly consider some recent claims that Latino philosophy should devote itself exclusively to certain issues of social and political theory. For example, after embracing Gracia’s ethnic-philosophy account, José Antonio Orosco maintains that Latino philosophers should focus on developing the philosophical perspectives of their own ethnic groups on “questions about [Latino] identity, power, and citizenship in the United States.” If the aim here is limiting the scope of Latino philosophy to those topics, Gracia himself would be committed to rejecting Orosco’s proposal since he consistently defended an expansive view of the areas of philosophical interest amenable to Latino philosophy’s inquiry. He would also be committed to rejecting Grant Silva’s proposal according to which Latino philosophy, conceive as an ethnic philosophy, should concern itself solely with the Latino people’s struggle against coloniality.

Arguably, the topics of these proposals are best amenable to the inquiries of historians and the social scientists. If Latino philosophers were to embrace such proposals, that could only have some bad consequences for the standing of their discipline in the profession—a consequence that Gracia himself would regret in light of his attempts to improve its standing. Although matters of applied social and political philosophy have traditionally attracted considerable interest within the discipline, philosophical inquiry should be understood as an inherently open-minded enterprise guided by intellectual curiosity and the need to get us closer to the truth on a great variety of domains. If Latino philosophy is conceived as having only instrumental value as a means for, say, social and economic change, the quest for improving its status in the profession would be undermined. After all, philosophers commonly lack the knowledge necessary to develop scientifically acceptable theories of social and economic change, and are thus susceptible to making unsupported empirical claims that
can only contribute to the present insularity of Latino philosophy. As often noted, when made by philosophers, such claims are suspect of merely amounting to armchair sociology or political science.\textsuperscript{12}

To sum up, I have argued that the ethnic-philosophy theorists can avoid an extreme skepticism about Latino philosophy only at the price of dropping the need for convergence among the Latino people about what counts as part of this field of philosophical inquiry. But if they do so, it becomes unclear how they might avoid an anything-goes type of metaphilosophical relativism because an acceptance by the relevant ethnus would be the only standard of inclusion within Latin philosophy. As shown above, this move opens the door to some reductionist proposals about the nature of Latino philosophy. Either extreme metaphilosophical position would undermine the perception of Latino philosophy in the United States—an outcome that Gracia would have regretted since, as is well known, he went the extra mile to raise this discipline’s standing in the profession.

NOTES

2. Gracia takes universalism to be represented by the philosophy-as-such position of Risieri Frondizi, culturalism by the perspectivism of Leopoldo Zea, and the critical view by the Marxist critique of Latin American philosophy of Augusto Salazar Bondy.


11. Gracia objects to biases against Latino philosophy in the United States most notably in the final chapter of Hispanic-Latino Identity. He particularly laments the indifference toward this discipline of the academic philosophical establishment and even of Hispanic philosophers themselves. On his account, this regrettable situation is due to the fact that Hispanics in the United States are seen as outsiders, as foreigners, even if native-born. As a result, Hispanic who work in Latino philosophy face an undeserved marginalization that needs to end.

12. On my view, eliminating the marginalization problem facing Latino philosophers requires them to focus on philosophical questions, avoiding questions that are better treated with the tools of other humanities or the social sciences. For more on this, see Susana Nuccetelli, “Latino Philosophy,” in Oxford Handbook of Latino Studies, ed. I. Slavans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 199–218, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199691220.001.0001; and Susanna Siegel, “Reflections on the Use of English and Spanish in Analytic Philosophy,” in Informes del Observatorio / Observatorio Reports (Cambridge, MA: Instituto Cervantes, Harvard University, 2014).

BOOK REVIEW
Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy
Reviewed by Amy Reed-Sandoval
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

Luis Rubén Díaz Cepeda’s Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy: From Ciudad Juárez to Ayotzinapa is ambitious, well-researched, and extremely informative. It is also almost medical in these trying times, helping us to dream of a better future and a better world at a perilous time.

Throughout this book, Díaz Cepeda expertly draws his readers into his philosophical analyses through a series of real, wrenching stories about how multilayered and ever-evolving Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) in Mexico have fought to oppose grave injustices. He shows that even when it seems that they have failed to bring about the societal transformations for which they fought (and continue to fight), their work remains extraordinarily valuable—not only inasmuch as it brings about “smaller successes” on a political scale, but also because their work contributes to the “permanent state of rebellion” that Díaz Cepeda considers vital to democratic flourishing. Without explicitly saying so, Luis presents Mexico, his país de origen y país de residencia, as emblematic of an emerging state of rebellion from which the rest of world—and perhaps the United States and other English-dominant countries in particular, given his decision to publish this work in English—can and should learn.

In what follows I offer a brief summary of the chapters of Luis’s book. Then, I will discuss what I consider to be some of the book’s most important virtues. Finally, I will raise a series of questions in response to this wonderful work, all of which are offered in the spirit of learning, collaboration, and friendship.

First, a brief overview. Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy is, once again, grounded in detailed,
well-researched discussion of several social movements that came to prominence in Mexico’s recent history. Díaz Cepeda first explores the activism opposing the Felipe Calderón-led militarization of Ciudad Juárez in 2008, which ostensibly occurred in the name of combatting narco-violence actually was a means of brutal population control. Part of this activism, he notes, entailed educating skeptical residents of Juárez about the real “point” of the military violence, for a vital task of SMOs is to bring about a change of political consciousness.

Later on in the book, Díaz Cepeda tells the related story of the Movement for Peace and Justice with Dignity (MPJD), which effectively nationalized the ideals of the Juárez-based activism against Calderón’s deadly agenda, once again changing Mexico’s political consciousness. Third, he gives a remarkably detailed account of the disappearance of forty-three student-activists of the Raúl Isidro Burgos Normal School in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero who were violently attacked in the Mexican state of Guerrero while engaged in protest against governmental corruption. Díaz Cepeda shows how parents of the disappeared joined forces with variety of national and international Social Movement Organizations to demand that the missing forty-three be returned alive. In many cases, they also demanded a radical social transformation in Mexico and beyond. This activism, occurring as it frequently did on an international stage, served to shift political consciousness beyond Mexico’s borders.

A great deal of Díaz Cepeda’s philosophical analysis of these stories focuses on the fact that the SMOs in question often had divergent aims and political orientations. He explores how this can sometimes weaken their protests of the unjust events that compelled them to join forces to begin with. He provides some conceptual resources for mediating such conflicts, but chooses to spend more time exploring the benefits of collaboration of divergent organizations. Given that Díaz Cepeda ultimately advocates a permanent “state of rebellion” in response to the endless “state of exception” in which we live, the conflicts that arise between different SMOs attempting to collaborate can actually help us to think critically about the kinds of social transformation we want to bring about. In other words, debates among SMOs can actually serve to bring about. In other words, debates among SMOs can

While Díaz Cepeda ultimately embraces Enrique Dussel’s vision of the transmodern state that is both anti-capitalist and premised upon the efforts of political representatives to obey the commands of society’s victims, he carves out a vital space, within this political vision, for SMOs that may directly oppose the very legitimacy of the state in question. In his words, “social movement organizations should not be perceived as a failure of democracy, but as a triumph and essential component as they allow for sudden and necessary transitions between formal political institutions, the state being the higher level, and civil society” (111).

Once again, if you need a dose of hope right now—and don’t mind it doled out to you in the form of academic philosophy—then you ought to read this book as soon as you can. This is especially true if you find yourself engaged in activism that has regularly failed to bring about your desired result. Apart from its inspirational nature—it genuinely makes you want to jump out of your arm chair and get to work—Díaz Cepeda’s book is also a terrific source of information about Mexico’s recent, turbulent politics.

Beyond all this, Social Movements and Latin American Political Philosophy is also, in my view, a major contribution to Latin American philosophy. In highlighting Mexico’s own state of rebellion, it shows, even more than it explicitly tells, that Latin America (and particularly, in this case, Mexico), is a world center of political thought and transformation, despite being located on the periphery of global power. Furthermore, the book is not only political, but also epistemological, for it demonstrates that Mexican activists possess an epistemic standpoint oriented toward political and politicized rebellion that functioning democracies sorely need. It is also a careful, serious, critical engagement of Dusselian political philosophy. Finally, political philosophers of all orientations would benefit from familiarizing themselves with Díaz Cepeda’s detailed account of a permanent state of rebellion.

I now want to turn to a few critical questions that the book brought up for me—offered, once again, in the spirit of camaraderie and friendship. Some of these comments are connected to “hard conversations” that are currently happening in Mexican politics, particularly in relation to Mexico’s current president, Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, and his relationship to feminists. Before doing so, I want to make clear that some of the political debates I will refer to happened after Díaz Cepeda wrote this book. All of these comments are meant to generate philosophical conversation about what I consider to be an important philosophical topic with important connections to Mexican politics and Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy.

My first question pertains to Díaz Cepeda’s rejection of political liberalism. As is the case of a great deal of Latin American political philosophy, when Luis refers to “liberalism” he is referring, in the main, to free market liberalism—neoliberalism—that endorses the so-called “free market” as the solution to all social problems, and fails to see human “individuals” as fundamentally interconnected, relational, community-embedded beings. I wonder, however, why Díaz Cepeda doesn’t engage more radical strands of liberalism, such as Black radical liberalism and feminist relational egalitarianism, which directly critique both unchecked free markets and the erroneous metaphysical conception of human individuals as atomistic in nature.

I do believe that a great deal of Latin American political philosophy presents “liberalism” exclusively in terms of neoliberalism, despite the fact that this is a political ideology that liberal egalitarians explicitly reject. Usually, I don’t question this. For why should those working in Latin American philosophy spend precious time reading about radical strands of liberalism, particularly those developed in the US, when they can turn instead to Latin American philosophy to address pressing social problems? (In other
words, why should a Latin American philosopher bend over backwards to use Rawls when they can use Dussel for their desire aims?)

In the case of Social Movements and Latin American Philosophy, however, I believe that liberal egalitarianism does have an important resource to offer—namely, a tradition of defending minority rights against a so-called tyranny of the majority. The idea behind liberal minority rights is that human beings have a moral worth that ought to be protected in the form of inalienable rights, and that these rights ought to be defended even if the majority would like to do otherwise (usually for self-serving purposes).

Why do I regard this as particularly relevant to Social Movements? As Díaz Cepeda himself acknowledges, SMOs, including the most progressive among them, can serve to further marginalize the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. A recent example of this can be found in the well-documented tensions between Mexico’s current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (whom Díaz Cepeda rather quietly celebrates in the book as a leftist and progressive outcome of progressive mobilization in Mexico, and with whose government Dussel himself self-identifies in his forward to the book), and Mexican feminists. Lopez Obrador has accused feminists who object to his agenda as having been manipulated by his conservative enemies. He notoriously claimed that battered women making emergency calls during a wave of domestic violence occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic were actually making “fake calls.” Lopez Obrador has failed to support abortion rights (abortion remains illegal in almost all instances in most of Mexico) and he has publicly supported, against the objections of feminists, a major political candidate who was credibly accused of rape.

When Lopez Obrador gets challenged in these ways, particularly by his feminist critics, he often says he wants to put the matter up for “popular consultation,” to let “the people decide.” In this sense, he presents himself as the sort of politician that Díaz Cepeda’s political vision supports. However, in the case of legalizing abortion in Mexico, many Mexican feminists have made the argument that sexism on the part of “the people” will make legalizing abortion through consulta popular impossible. Instead, they argue that as human beings with dignity, they have a right to abortion care—they have individual, inalienable rights to make decisions about their own bodies. This is the sort of insight that one finds in careful accounts of liberal minority rights.

This, then, is my worry: that a system of political philosophy that eschews certain advantages of liberal egalitarianism (like minority rights) and depends upon the “voice of the people” and “the oppressed” as prevailing over unjust forces will, in the end, fail to protect some of the most vulnerable members of society. Of course, Díaz Cepeda strongly advocates for SMOs to be self-critical, and to listen to their most vulnerable members. But how long should women and other vulnerable members of society wait for that to truly happen?

I also wonder about Díaz Cepeda’s characterization of SMOs. What role, if any, should conservative SMOs have in the ideal society that Luis visualizes? Would their presence constitute evidence of a “healthy democracy” that is tolerant of diverse views? Or, on the contrary, should conservative SMOs be banned?

Finally, returning to the spirit of hope with which the pages of Social Movements are brimming, despite the incredibly sad content engaged: the book left me wanting to read more about the “state of rebellion” advocated by Díaz Cepeda. Beyond involvement in SMOs, how can we cultivate this epistemic orientation? What educational practices and art forms serve to promote it? And, on the flipside, what institutions and practices put it in danger? This is perhaps too much to ask of a single monograph. I raise this questions because it is a virtue of the book that it inspires them.

AUTHOR BIOS

Susana Nuccetelli is professor of philosophy at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. She has published many articles in Latin American philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of language and mind. She is the author of three monographs (Westview Press 2002, Cambridge University Press 2020, Routledge 2022), and has also edited a volume of new essays and co-edited several reference books and anthologies.

Amy Reed-Sandoval is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is the author of Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice (Oxford University Press, 2020), and co-editor of Latin American Immigration Ethics (University of Arizona Press, 2021). She is also the founding director of the Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands program at the Mexico-US border.

Teófilo Reis is a PhD candidate in philosophy at The Graduate Center, CUNY, and a PhD student in sociology at the University of Campinas, Brazil. His research interests include philosophy of race, Latin American philosophy, black Brazilian political thinking, Brazilian social thinking, sociology of the intellectuals, social epistemology, and political philosophy.

Ernesto Rosen Velásquez is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Dayton. He specializes in decolonial thought, Latinx and Latin American philosophy, critical philosophy of race and political philosophy. He is also author of Decolonizing the Westernized University which he co-edited with Ramón Grosfoguel and Roberto D. Hernández (Lexington Press, 2016).

Manuel Vargas is professor of philosophy at the University of California, San Diego. His research and teaching concerns the history Latin American philosophy, contemporary Latinx philosophy, free will, moral responsibility, and moral psychology more generally. He sometimes publishes books and articles about these things.
Gabriel Zamosc is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado Denver. His research interests include Nietzsche, action theory, and moral and political philosophy. He has mostly published articles that investigate Nietzsche's positive moral ideals, such as those of freedom, sovereignty, wholeness, and the like.
FROM THE EDITOR

Dwayne Tunstall
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

There is no “Footnotes to History” section for this issue. It will return in the next issue.

This issue of the newsletter features J. L. A. Garcia’s polemic essay, “Professor Tommy Curry and ‘African American Philosophy’: What is it? What should it be? Why care?” Garcia challenges Curry’s call in his 2011 *Journal of Black Studies* article, “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy,” for African American philosophy to be historically and culturally grounded in African American culture and intellectual thought. Garcia rejects the view he attributes to Curry that there is a distinctively “African American” philosophy held only by Black people in the United States. Garcia prefers that philosophers who care about questions and topics associated with race and ethnicity (e.g., racial discrimination and racial identity) investigate them using philosophical tools such as conceptual analysis. In addition, he thinks that the study of questions and topics related to Black people (e.g., Black solidarity, Black nationalism, anti-Black discrimination, and anti-Black racism) would be improved if scholars of race and ethnicity in Black Studies and other fields adopted the standards of conceptual clarity and rigor associated with philosophical inquiry.

What makes this essay worth publishing is not Garcia’s criticism of Curry’s 2011 *Journal of Black Studies* article. It is worth publishing because it could start a metaphilosophical discussion on what African American philosophy is and ought to be. Then again, it could convince some readers that any discussion of the nature of African American philosophy should not be pursued by up-and-coming Black philosophers, or anyone else for that matter. That is an acceptable risk.

I also hope that this essay could motivate some younger scholars in African American philosophy and philosophy of race to explore the merits and demerits of Garcia’s largely a priori and personalist approach to philosophical inquiry about issues involving race and ethnicity and of Curry’s more empirically and culturally informed philosophical approach to studying race and ethnicity. The Curry that should be explored, though, is not primarily the Curry of “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy.” It would be more fruitful to explore the disagreements between Garcia’s approach to philosophical inquiry and the Curry of *The Man-Not* (Temple University Press, 2017) and “Must There Be an Empirical Basis for the Theorization of Racialized Subjects in Race-Gender Theory?” which was published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 121 (2021): 21–44.


The next issue will be a tribute to Charles W. Mills’s contributions to African American philosophy. Stephen C. Ferguson II will be the guest editor for that issue. Even though he has solicited a few articles to be included in it, we welcome any articles or short notes honoring Mills’s work in African American philosophy.

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 ten and twenty pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between five and seven 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

EDITOR
Dwayne Tunstall, tunstald@gvsu.edu

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:


ARTICLE

Professor Tommy Curry and “African American Philosophy”: What is it? What should it be? Why care?

J. L. A. Garcia
BOSTON COLLEGE

Professor Tommy Curry has written work on what he calls “African American philosophy” that has, I’m told, strongly influenced some younger philosophers of color. Here, I wish to engage just one of his articles on this topic, “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy,” in order to expose some of his presuppositions, challenge some of his claims, interrogate some of his reasoning (both explicit and implied), and offer some alternative ideas. It would be a pity and a loss if young people who are developing philosophical skills and with something to offer on issues where philosophy and Black Studies intersect were deterred by navel-gazing worries whether what they are doing is really Africana philosophy. What matters for them and for us is that more of them turn their abilities to the topics that have shaped much of Black people’s experience or promise to reshape it: anti-Black discrimination, racism, injustice, and the like, on one side, and Black solidarity, nationhood, pride, identity, and more, on another. It’s urgent they join the fruitful recent projects using philosophy to deepen and improve our comprehension of all these and related phenomena. My hope here is to deepen and elevate the discussion and give pause for reflection to those tempted to follow Prof. Curry’s lead.

First, Prof. Curry’s underlying concern and question seems to be, roughly, whether African American philosophy is African enough. It’s hard for me to see why this question is interesting, important, or even clear. (The question, “Is Black philosophy Black enough?” seems to me even more confused.) This differs, of course, from concern over whether what’s been called African American philosophy is philosophical enough. That may well be important because it engages what we in philosophy have to contribute to the discussion that’s distinctively ours. Prof. Curry talks as if the only thing that African American philosophy does or should provide is a certain “history of ideas,” and maybe he thinks this about all philosophy. This gets things wrong in at least two ways. One is that philosophers’ work, alongside that of natural and social scientists and of others in the humanities, develops and systematizes the ideas that intellectual historians study. Philosophy offers theories and speculations, analyses and visions, justifications and critiques, conjectures and proofs, arguments and counter-arguments, proposals, creations, and more. Philosophy, then, is not history. Prof. Curry’s other error here is to neglect a crucial fact: philosophy investigates ideas chiefly in order to penetrate beyond them, seeking to comprehend the realities to which ideas merely point us, the realm of things that our ideas are about. Philosophy, then, is not mainly about ideas. Marx was no fan of our discipline, but even his famous “11th Thesis” recognizes that philosophy strives to “understand the world.” Why should African American philosophy seek so much less?

I think we should be unashamed about using distinctively philosophical methods, especially ones that are conceptual, that take morality seriously by treating moral features as genuine and discovered, that probe into reality’s kinds and structures, and that are unabashedly a priori in method (or, at least, that aim at necessary conclusions). We should be bolder, I think, more audacious, in challenging historians, literary critics, sociologists, psychologists, and others, to meet our discipline’s standards of clarity, imagination, and rigor. For my part, I’ve sometimes allowed hints of exasperation, and even a little gentle ribbing, into my discussions of work by such historians and social scientists as Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Manning Marable, and even George Frederickson, on racism. Their studies are helpful in several ways, but they often also need correction. Less deference to empirical disciplines, and more challenge, and even leadership, from philosophers, is in order.

What philosophical inquiry can contribute to Black Studies, etc., are treatments that are more critical (including self-critical), foundational, creative/imaginative (e.g., taking recourse to counterfactuals), carefully reasoned, normative, conceptual, and ontological. (I return to this below.) Related to this, I find it more helpful to describe at least one of the subfields here as “philosophy and race,” or “the intersection of philosophy and race-studies.” That terminology, to my mind, better accommodates writing
on the nature and reality of race, on the nature and (im) morality of racism, on the concept of racial discrimination, etc., as well as on racial solidarity, Black Nationalism, racial identity, and the like. Personally, I also dislike having my work grouped within “critical philosophy of race” because I don’t see my own thought as at all continuous with, or as developing out of, the law professors’ late twentieth-century movements, critical legal studies and critical race theory, and still less connected to the so-called “critical theory” originated interbella in the Frankfurt School and later developed in New York, California, and elsewhere. However, I won’t further pursue that issue here.2

Second, I can claim little knowledge of recent historiography and even less of current empirical psychology, but I wonder whether Prof. Curry is correct to think that either “Black history” or “Black psychology” is really so different in its methodologies from older, more mainstream, subfields in those disciplines.3 Don’t Black specialists in Black history do the same things as their colleagues, only with different sources: consulting archives, reading diaries and letters, scrutinizing newsletters and journalism, gathering statistical data, and so on? Why then expect—let alone, recommend—that African American philosophy employ (or think it needs) a different method from that in academic philosophy’s other subfields?

Third, Prof. Curry leaves much beneath the surface, but his criticism seems to presuppose a view of philosophy (and thence, of African American philosophy) as a kind of study of people (e.g., DuBois, Douglass, Delany, Martin Luther King, Jr., moreover, he seems to assume that we study them as members of their community and even as representatives of their (our) culture. Thus, he continually speaks of Black (or, a little differently, of Africana) philosophy in relation to “the culturally particular perspectives African descended people develop,”10 of “the centrality of culture . . . [in] Black thought” and “advancing the self-understanding of African peoples,”11 of “distinct Black intellectual traditions that have formed the basis of African-descended people’s relation to the world.”12 He insists on “the basic need in the field for organic and visceral connections to the people it seeks to study and theorize about,”13 and so on. Prof. Curry quotes, without demurrer on the important point, West’s claim that “Afro-American philosophy is the interpretation of Afro-American history,”14 and calls for “an independent cultural system of philosophical inquiry.”15 But why think African American philosophy is, or should be, a study of Black people, any more than German philosophy is a study of German people, or French philosophy of French people? Should British philosophy be more “Britain-centered,” as Africana philosophy should supposedly be more “African-centered theory”?16 Why think so? More deeply, what would any of that mean or consist in? This is all bizarre, deeply implausible, and, worse, it’s all asserted (or, more often, implied) as if obvious and incontrovertible. African American philosophy, insofar as it exists, is largely just philosophical inquiry performed by (some) African American people, not into them, just as European philosophy is philosophy done by European people, not about them. Aristotle wrote no treatise titled “On the Greek Soul,” nor Descartes a “Discourse on French People’s Method,” nor Kant any “Critique of the Germans’ Pure (or Practical) Reason.” Why think Africana philosophy should be so different in its interests? No philosophy is simply ethno-

I suppose Prof. Curry would decry my Eurocentrism on this, suggesting that there are “European elements of [Prof. Curry’s own] thinking,” a charge he levels against Outlaw.17 Yet his implicit view sounds to me Hegelian, recalling the famous “Owl of Minerva” passage and all that: Philosophy is viewed simply as articulating and revealing a society’s cultural “meanings,” or values, or self-understanding, or something like that. It’s never about the world as it is. His remarks about any concepts we study being “culturallogically reformulated” as “element[s] of African-descended peoples’ historical consciousness”18 and his invoking both a “genealogy of the ideas that actually define Africana philosophy’s Diasporic identity” and (social) “construction and cultural manipulation of the raw materials that constitute . . . ‘objective’ reality”19 sound to me as if they’ve been lifted from Hegel, Nietzsche, and various postmodernist epigones on the European mainland.

I don’t see anything I’ve written as fitting Prof. Curry’s (perhaps Hegelian) bill, nor anything by those I judge to be the better practitioner into philosophy-and-race. Nor do I see that or why that’s a bad thing. We chiefly study questions and topics of certain types (e.g., the nature and morality of such phenomena as race, racism, discrimination, racial solidarity, and identity), not various groups of people or their cultures, and, at what I think is our best, we study those questions and topics through close attention to the discourses in which we employ, express, and delineate those concepts. Prof. Curry’s worries seem orthogonal and irrelevant to those projects, and thus, I worry, to any genuine and recognizably philosophical inquiry.20

Fourth, it would behoove us at this point to get some clarity about what might make something to be Africana philosophy. It’s best to work by analogy from more familiar and uncontroversial concepts. As I indicated above, French philosophy and German philosophy are best thought of as the philosophy thinking and writing that’s been done by French and German people, respectively. We needn’t and shouldn’t assume that, to use these ethnic designations meaningfully, there must exist a French and a German Volksgeist from which Descartes and Sartre, Kant and Nietzsche, and the rest, emanate and to which their writings give voice. There’s no reason to think there is, let alone that we can find and articulate such a common spirit across these diverse minds. Just the same holds for Africana philosophy. It need not be confusing and confused even to use the term, but in doing so, we must take care to avoid unnecessary and unjustified presuppositions of a common culture or mind that must, ought to, or does, underlie the subfield. If it exists, it’s just the philosophical work done by various individuals whose forebears were among the African people dispersed throughout the world. The same holds, mutatis mutandis, for African American philosophy. We don’t all agree, nor should we, except insofar as it would be better if everyone knew what’s true about the important questions about the world that philosophers investigate.

Though Prof. Curry criticizes positions taken by Lucius Outlaw, Cornel West, and others, I hasten to make clear that
my intent here is not at all to defend their thought against his critique. West claims that “philosophical techniques requisite for an Afro-American philosophy must be derived from a lucid and credible conception of philosophy . . . that expresses displeasure with the ahistorical character of modern philosophy,” but I see greater danger in a historicism that relativizes our concepts, reality, and truth itself to particular times, places, and cultures. Rather than take West’s or Outlaw’s side, then, my hope is to expose and challenge some dubious assumptions that Outlaw, West, and company, seem to share with Prof. Curry about African American philosophy.

But suppose we forget about Hegel and his followers. Let’s allow that Profs. Curry’s, West’s, and Outlaw’s way of conceiving philosophy is more African than mine, in that it is, say, more commonly, or firmly, held there. How could that be a reason to agree with them? What sort of reason would it be? It doesn’t seem to be either an epistemic or moral reason, since it doesn’t show the belief more likely to be true or virtuous. Is it a political reason? A cultural reason? What are those? Why think they exist, unless they reduce to epistemic or moral ones? Insofar as a reason to do, or feel, or think something makes doing it, or feeling it, or thinking it better in some way, how does its being African or more African improve holding their conception of philosophy? I’m at a loss.

Fifth, Prof. Curry ties the recent work he dislikes to “a cosmopolitan liberal ethic,” “liberalism,” “care ethics,” “the dominance of normative judgments,” “humanism,” and other bugaboos. He needs to explain where he finds these supposed connections, what types of connections they are (logical presuppositions of recent work, e.g., mere associations, or something in between), and, more important, what’s wrong with each of them such that it should be avoided. To be sufficiently African, does Africana philosophy have to be parochial; illiberal; uncaring; antirealist about our virtues, obligations, and rights; and antihuman? If not, what is he saying? If so, why bother with Africana philosophy at all?

Sixth, whatever beef Prof. Curry may have with Shannon Sullivan, whose pragmatism and attention to Josiah Royce don’t interest me, his wider complaint against non-Black philosophers working in “African American philosophy”—at least, at the intersection of philosophy and race studies—is wrong-headed, as well as bigoted. It’s pretty clear that their exploration of these topics has sometimes greatly enhanced the discussions. Surely, Joshua Glasgow and Lawrence Blum, for example, have authored some of the best pieces in recent philosophy’s racism literature and some of the more thoughtful work on what race is. One could also mention insightful contributions from Sally Haslanger, Linda Alcoff, John Arthur, and other non-Black authors that have advanced our discussions and comprehension. The goal is not to achieve an Africana understanding of, say, racial discrimination, but one that’s correct, reasonable, and justifiably held.

Seventh, Prof. Curry is on to something worthwhile when he inquires how “African American philosophy” should relate, and ought to contribute, to Black Studies and, differently, to efforts to ameliorate things for Black people. Here are my suggestions. “African American philosophy” (better, work in philosophy-and-race) should (a) clarify phenomena, concepts, and topics, therein (b) deepening our grasp of them. (c) It should correct errors of interpretation and overstated, or overlooked, implications. (d) It should add richness and profundity by grounding claims in robust realism about morality. (e) It should elaborate, and sometimes moderate, positions by pointing out needed qualifications, limits, and conditions. (f) It should add new topics (especially, moral inquiries) and methods (especially, ontological, conceptual, normative, a priori). (g) It should also contextualize and analyze talk of racial (and of social) justice within some broader normative ethical theory that underlies political judgments. I’m sure this list is far from exhaustive.

Let me briefly illustrate my proposal. As Ibram Kendi lays it out in How to Be Antiracist, for example, antiracism requires holding all cultures to be equal (morally?), both before and after we know their contents. (So much for learning by empirical observation, I guess.) Similarly, Ta-Nehisi Coates goes on about wrongs done to “Black bodies” but, of course, mistreating Black people’s bodies matters chiefly because someone therein mistreats Black persons, possessed of their dignity, derivative equality, implied individual rights, moral inviolability, etc., etc., none of which is rooted in their materiality. Why haven’t Black philosophers been more vocal and consistent in calling out this sort of sloppy reasoning, doctrinaire foolishness, and clumsy rhetoric?

Eighth, besides thus aiding the Black academy, work in philosophy-and-race may also assist Black, African diasporic, people in their daily lives. (That’s not to say it owes that as a responsibility.) One way could be by helping disaggregate “Black Culture” so as to enable us better to evaluate its different cultural works, movements, elements, and so on. After all, not all of them are valuable. That’s likely not a way of being “culturally relevant to the actual lives of Africana people” that Prof. Curry has in mind, but it could help and would be more beneficial than the cultural cheerleading may offer.

I’ve sometimes presupposed here certain substantive conceptions of philosophical method and good philosophical doctrine. I should be open about my beliefs. My own view is that the best philosophy proceeds, largely a priori, by teasing out the content and implications of our world as it presents itself to us in everyday experience and as expressed in our conceptual understandings. We should do this in writing that strives for lucidity and reasoning marked by cogency. Further, I think good philosophical reflection on ethics supports a kind of naturalistic realist metaethics, and a normative ethics that centers on individual persons with capacities for virtue rooted in our nature and relationships, with rights rooted in our dignity as rational creatures, and with capacities for genuine fellowship rooted in our sociality. All social groups, on this view, are as such ontologically, explanatorily, teleologically, and normatively derivative from, and subordinate to, the individual persons whose welfare they serve. A valuable general term for this sort of approach is “Personalism,” a
long-neglected school of thought, theorized by some in Germany and eastern Europe and by others in the USA, that strongly influenced Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s thinking, and has recently found new admirers and adherents. People interested in such matters should observe that some thinkers find commonalities between these Western approaches and approaches found in Africa and Asia.

Of course, other thinkers within our discipline have ideas radically different from mine. They eschew a priori for experimental methods, are distrustful of the very idea of concepts and conceptual inquiry, seek only truths relative to particular histories and cultures, and advocate constructivist or otherwise antirealist about moral (including normative political) features. Moreover, that only describes disputes within current analytic philosophy. Many of those engaged chiefly with nineteenth-century and twentieth-century (as well as some twenty-first-century) schools of thought on the European continent—phenomenological, genealogical, poststructuralist, deconstructive, and the rest—will see all that still differently. Moreover, scholars who work largely in non-Western philosophy—African, East Asian, indigenous American, postcolonial, and so on—may have still other views about what philosophy properly is and how most fruitfully to conduct its inquiries. I won’t here make my case against their views and for my own on those topics. My dispute with Prof. Curry is thus largely a metaphilosophical one, and anyone interested in carrying it forward should proceed on that basis, as a dispute about how to conduct philosophy. What’s a bad idea is to drone on about how to be Black (people). The latter question seems to rely on a dubious notion of Black authenticity, where we can grade Black people for how Black they are. Yet there’s nothing to this, though there may be a real question of how typical this or that person is of a certain group of Black people in some respect, say, in her mode of being. Being typical is not itself a justified desideratum, of course. That’s one reason why I suspect the discourse of racial authenticity is but empty sound, signifying nothing.

Black is something that we are, not something we do (or, in fashionable lingo, “perform”), and it follows that there are no ways, methods, means, style, fashions, or manners to be Black, let alone, different ways, etc., for different people. Ways, methods, and the rest characterize how we do things. Much the same goes for being African or part of the African diaspora. There may be a meaningful, and perhaps even serious, question of how someone should respond to the facts that she is Black, if there is such a fact, and is descended from Africans. Without delving into it here, let me say I think that the deepest and most general answer is that we should respond the way we should do anything else—virtuously. As I see it, that’s best understood as indicating a response that befits our humanity and helps each of us to live so as to realize and bring toward fruition her development as a human being. Yes, many of us have (close or distant) African ancestors. We are Black persons. Within sober ethical theory, however, it is what corresponds to the noun in this phrase, not to its modifying adjectival phrase, that must do the lion’s share of normative moral work here.

Who knows? Maybe in the end Prof. Curry will somehow be proven right about what African American philosophy is or should be. It wouldn’t much matter. Those of us interested in applying such modest philosophical gifts as (we hope) we have to, among others, things that have, for better or worse, specially impacted the lives and experiences of Black people can proceed as before, under some different rubric such as race-and-philosophy or philosophy of race. Or, better yet, we can just do our philosophical work and leave its labeling to those who have nothing better to do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for Mr. Alexander Tolbert for prompting me to confront Prof. Curry’s positions and for very helpful bibliographic suggestions I appreciate Ms. Michaila Peters’s research assistance.

NOTES

1. Tommy J. Curry, “The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophers Failed to Contribute to the Study of African-Descended People,” Journal of Black Studies 42 (2011): 314–33. His term “derelictical” derives from his view that Africana philosophers have been “derelict” because their work is supposedly “culturally [i]relevant to the actual lives of African people” (Curry, “Derelictical Crisis,” 314). Readers should be aware that this is not simply a general journal in that area of study, but was established by Molefi Asante and tied to the “Afrocentric” school of thought that has informed Temple University’s African American Studies program under his long leadership.

2. Curry has treated this topic in a number of pieces, but I leave a deeper dive to someone more interested in this topic, and more interested in Prof. Curry’s ideas on it, than I am.

3. Or maybe his objection is that it’s not Africana enough. He complains that work by Black philosophers has failed to “separate from American and continental [European] philosophical traditions,” on one hand, and, on the other, that it offers no “history of ideas (a philosophical genealogy)” to establish “the limits, aims, and scope of African-descended thought” (Curry, “Derelictical Crisis,” 314, 316). Put together, I take these claims to mean the work he criticizes is too close to that of Europe and America insufficiently engaged with African or Africana thinking.


5. I’ve starkly contrasted history of ideas with (genuine) philosophy. We should note the literature offers more complicated positions. Tommie Shelby distinguishes history of ideas from “history of philosophy,” where the latter can extend beyond analyzing a thinker’s positions and reasoning to improving the former through reformulation and the later through replacement with more rigorous or compelling arguments. I’ve heard J. J. E. Gracia contrast approaching history of philosophy historically with approaching it philosophically, where the latter might include much of what Shelby considers “doing” history of philosophy tout court. I recall Robert Gooding-Williams, in a Harvard lecture late in the 2010s, allow for an unusual way of incorporating historical texts and figures in a philosophical argument. If I understood his oral remarks right, he envisioned someone sketching out a position today and then selectively drawing on various historical texts to suggest ways it might be articulated or supported, adding that the historical figures so conscripted may not have meant the selected passages in the way now intended and, considering their whole corpus, might not have endorsed the position now advanced.

Whatever distinctively philosophical work, then, may be done in what Shelby calls history of philosophy (as opposed to history of ideas), or in Gracia’s history of philosophy philosophically pursued (in contrast to historically pursued), or when Gooding-Williams’s theorist dragoons historical authors and texts into her projects, none of these more complicated views justifies Prof. Curry’s program of reducing Africana philosophy (and perhaps all philosophy) to—better, to replace it with—history of ideas.

7. Still, since I’m of African descent myself and some of my philosophical work engages that of many others who are similarly descended—Kwame Anthony Appiah, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Lewis Gordon, Manning Marable, Charles Mills, Tommie Shelby, and a number of others—then shouldn’t it also count as Africana philosophy? Isn’t a German philosopher writing on contemporary German philosophers’ thought therein contributing to German philosophy? Or must someone treat thinkers from a century or more ago, e.g., DuBois or Schopenhauer, respectively, to count? Why think it must? To my mind, someone analyzing and critiquing Moore’s and Russell’s early thinking is doing work that is part of British philosophy, probably whether or not she is herself British. In the same way, there’s a good case to be made that some of my own writings on racism are part of African American, and therefore Africana, philosophy. I can’t see, however, that, how, or why these classificatory questions are important. So, as I said, I’m content to call it work in philosophy and race, and leave the term “African American philosophy” and the wider “Africana philosophy,” if they want it, to those (both Black and non-Black) philosophically treating Blyden, Delany, Douglass, DuBois, and others.


20. “The study of philosophy aims not at knowing what men feel, but at what is the truth of things” (Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s “Of the heavens and the cosmos,” bk. I, lect. xxi, para. 228, translated by Vincent Lynch and Pierre Conway, accessed at [https://isidore.co/aquinas/DeCoelo.htm#1-22](https://isidore.co/aquinas/DeCoelo.htm#1-22)). To this wisdom, I should add only that philosophy similarly transcends what groups of people happen (or incline) to think, want, value, choose, perform, make, and the various other elements of different societies’ cultures.


22. Alastair MacIntyre appears to hold that someone must do her reasoning within an intellectual tradition because it (alone?) can provide her the standards she needs to determine whether, for instance, the considerations in support of a thesis provide adequate grounds to justify accepting it (Whose Justice? Which Rationality? [University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]). Yet even if MacIntyre is correct, does Prof. Curry offer the same defense? What makes it the case that an African-descended person’s intellectual tradition is some African one (which one?), rather than that of the place where she was reared or resides? If I understand him, MacIntyre thinks anyone can, and sometimes should, achieve sufficient detachment from her own tradition to allow her to accept revisions to it, blend some of its elements with some from another one, or even to repudiate and replace it. Even if something like MacIntyre’s view is correct, does it really entail that a certain belief’s being (more) African in some sense is a genuine reason to accept it? Does Prof. Curry agree with the qualifications I’ve proposed to his traditionalism or, if not, why not? If so, then what shows an African-descended person isn’t well placed and well advised to detach from and critically evaluate what’s widely believed, not only in the West, but also in Africa?


27. “Here’s what I would like for you to know: in America, it is traditional to destroy the Black body—it is heritage” (Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to My Son,” *The Atlantic*, July 4, 2015, pp. 82–91).


LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Tziporah Kasachkoff
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Eugene Kelly
NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Welcome to the spring 2022 edition of the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy. We offer in this edition two articles, one book review, and a poem.

Our first article, “Professors as Teachers,” by Steven M. Cahn, argues that college/university professors, though employed by their institutions as teachers of their subject, almost always prioritize research over teaching, an attitude that is reflected in and even encouraged by the institutions in which they teach. Cahn makes some suggestions as to why college administrators prioritize research, indicates the various ways in which this prioritization finds expression, and shares his reasons for regarding as lamentable the fact that, as he puts it, “research, not teaching, rules in academia.” Cahn goes on to suggest several ways in which this situation may be ameliorated.

Our second article, “Preparing Graduate Students to Teach: One Model,” is authored by George Rainbolt and Sandra Dwyer. Rainbolt and Dwyer describe the program they introduced at Georgia State University to prepare students who are studying for their master's degree in philosophy for the teaching career in philosophy that most of them will eventually go on to pursue. The authors indicate the benefits of the program in some detail, and note the challenges—workload and financial—faced by the graduate students who are in the program. The authors detail for our readers the various parts of the training that each of the graduate students in the program undergoes; the courses that each must take and the topics covered in each of these courses; the undergraduate classes that all students-in-training must teach as part of the program and how these classes are mentored. The authors conclude with their reflections on the program.

We are very pleased to also include “The Logician,” a poem by Felicia Nimue Ackerman.

We also encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other materials (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use. Though we normally list books and other materials that we have received from publishers for possible review in our BOOKS RECEIVED section, reviewers are welcome to suggest material for review that they themselves have used in the classroom and have 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 it.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

If and when you submit writing to our publication, please adhere to the following guidelines:

All papers should be sent to the editors electronically. The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself. However, the author’s name and full mailing address should appear on a separate page. Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear within the body of the paper or in the endnotes of the paper.

Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA. For example, please do not use your word processor’s footnote or endnote function; all notes must be added manually at the end of the paper. This rule is important for it facilitates the formatting, by the APA, of your publication online.

Contributions should be sent to:
Tziporah Kasachkoff, Philosophy Department, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York City, NY 10016: tkasachkof@yahoo.com
and/or
Eugene Kelly, at ekelly@nyit.edu

All articles submitted to our publication undergo anonymous review by the members of the editorial committee (and occasionally other reviewers, if one of our reviewers happens to identify the author of a submitted paper).
Indeed, in academic jargon instructional hours are known as a “load.” Research, however, is referred to as an “opportunity.” Imagine what faculty members would think of any colleague who announced, “Good news. My research load has been reduced, and I’ll have more opportunity to teach.”

A feature of the APA Blog is a series of interviews with current graduate students, and the questions asked are revelatory. Here are a few samples: What excites you about philosophy? “What are you working on right now?” “What is the favorite thing you have written?” The following questions are never asked: “What excites you about teaching philosophy?” “What are you teaching right now?” “What would be your favorite course to teach?”

This lack of concern toward teaching was also apparent when each September my program offered an orientation session for new doctoral students, who were asked their specialty. Those who replied with uncertainty received patronizing smiles, while the response that invariably caused derisive laughter was “I plan to teach.”

In all candor, that answer would have been the one I myself would have offered. I wanted to be a teacher, preferably but not necessarily at the college level. As an undergraduate I had found more success in my philosophy classes than in my other major areas of interest, including mathematics, history, political science, and musicology. Hence, I chose to enter graduate school in philosophy.

As to my planned specialty, I didn’t have one. Indeed, my earliest writing focused on the issue of fatalism, a subject about which I knew nothing when I began my graduate education. Further, my later work on philosophy of religion, the concept of happiness, and academic ethics were interests I developed after having earned my doctoral degree.

Decades later, when two of my former students, Professors Robert B. Talisse and Maureen Eckert, expressed an interest in presenting me with a Festschrift to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of my association with The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, they asked me for an appropriate title for the book. I replied almost immediately, “A Teacher’s Life.”

To this day, when I am asked what I did for a living, I answer, “I was a teacher.” I may not be asked any subsequent questions as to what, who, or where I taught, but I take pleasure in identifying students as the primary focus of my life’s work.

I recognize, however, that while some colleagues share my emphasis on teaching, many do not. And university policies are structured to reward excellence in research, not teaching. A top-notch researcher who is barely adequate in the classroom is far more likely to be promoted than a superb teacher whose scholarly record is thin.

I should explain that while my degree of success in the classroom does not match that achieved by some others
I have known, I take second place to no one in my admiration for the performance of those I consider great teachers. Yet to other members in the department of a celebrated teacher, the situation can be perturbing. How many are comfortable admitting that their colleague’s class size is larger due to that individual’s superior teaching skills? In such a situation, the inclination is to chalk up their colleague’s success to mere personal popularity. Indeed, in an effort to prevent too many students from registering for a course with an acclaimed instructor, a department may place an arbitrary limit on class size and hope thereby to maintain the absurd fiction that all its members are equally skilled in the classroom.

Administrators, too, strongly favor the renowned researcher over the best of instructors. After all, having as a member of the faculty a national or international authority brings prestige to the entire school and in the sciences as well as the social sciences attracts outside funding that contributes significantly to the school’s coffers. The superb instructor, though, is only a local celebrity, legendary perhaps on campus but unknown outside its gates. For those reasons, leading researchers have leverage with the administration in a way leading teachers do not.

In sum, while almost all administrators claim to value teaching, their actions tell otherwise. When considering candidates for faculty positions, they typically view as more attractive the promising researcher rather than the promising teacher. When salary increases are distributed, the larger ones go to the successful researcher rather than the successful teacher. When a faculty member is recruited by another institution, more effort is made to retain an outstanding researcher than an outstanding teacher. Granted, an institution may give teaching prizes to a select few while rewarding research for the many, but what is virtually unheard of is giving research prizes to a select few while rewarding teaching for the many. In short, research, not teaching, rules in academia, and candidates for tenure who hope this principle does not apply to them may receive a rude shock.

Can anything be done to change how teaching is viewed? The key is found at the departmental level. Here are a few changes I would suggest. First, doctoral programs should require that all graduate students who seek a faculty position participate in a departmental colloquium that prepares them for offering effective instruction to undergraduates. For many years I offered such a credit-bearing course in the PhD Program in Philosophy at the City University of New York Graduate Center, and results of the extensive teaching practice in class were so dramatic that they were remarked on by the departments where our students taught. Sad to say, however, once I retired, the course was never offered again, and complaints about the performance of our students began to be received from the same schools that had previously offered praise.

Second, departments making appointments should take seriously candidates’ quality of instruction. Those invited for campus interviews should be expected to offer both a research paper and a talk on an elementary topic, organized and presented as if for introductory students. Only those candidates whose classroom performance is proficient should be considered seriously. As anyone who has attended such a talk realizes, a candidate’s pedagogical ability quickly becomes apparent. Some individuals display requisite skills, whereas others mumble and fumble. While those who cannot ably defend their research are invariably passed over, the same fate should befall those who cannot ably teach.

Third, just as new faculty members should be given permission to observe classes of senior members of the department, so new faculty members should occasionally be observed, not to be formally evaluated but to be offered suggestions where appropriate. Outstanding scholars provide junior colleagues with support in their scholarly endeavors; outstanding instructors should likewise aid junior colleagues in dealing with their pedagogic challenges.

Fourth, as to decisions for promotion and tenure, departments currently care enough about research to undertake an elaborate review of each candidate’s scholarship. Similarly, departments ought to be concerned enough about teaching to undertake an equally elaborate review of a professor’s work in the classroom. Such a review should involve input from departmental colleagues who visit the professor’s classes and examine syllabi, examinations, and term papers to assess teaching performance.

Some suppose that an adequate system of teacher evaluation can rely heavily on student ratings. Students, however, have not mastered the subject in question; hence they are in poor position to judge how well it is being taught. To be sure, they can provide useful information, such as whether faculty members come to class on time, encourage student participation, appear for office hours, and so on. But numerous studies have confirmed that student evaluations need to be considered in the context of peer evaluations.

Fifth, just as an outstanding researcher may be awarded tenure even with a weak performance in the classroom, so tenure should also be available to an outstanding teacher with a thin record of research. Granted, the ideal candidate excels both as researcher and teacher, but if an occasional exception is made so as not to lose a researcher of national stature, an occasional exception should also be made so as not to lose a teacher of extraordinary accomplishment. Admittedly, few teachers can attain such a level of excellence; even taking the lead in developing a new interdisciplinary program, teaching a course that invariably has a high enrollment, offering extra help to struggling students, or attracting crowds to office hours should not by itself overcome a thin record of research. Nevertheless, a faculty member with a superlative record of teaching, unlikely to be matched by any possible replacement, should be considered a strong candidate for a tenured appointment.

Departments that value teaching highly put pressure on administrators to do likewise. For example, if a candidate for a faculty position offers a pedagogical talk that is unsuccessful, that individual’s name should not even be
forwarded for the administration to consider. Similarly, if a
professor has proven to be a weak teacher, the department
should be prepared to turn down that person for tenure,
leaving the administration unlikely to try to overturn that
der. Even an administrator not oriented to
the importance of teaching will realize the wisdom of
supporting the decisions of a department known for its
commitment to maintaining pedagogic excellence.

In sum, teaching should matter, and that message can
be sent to doctoral students, faculty members, and
administrators. Doing so requires enacting policies that
emphasize quality of teaching, thus helping to ensure that
students receive the high quality of instruction to which
they are entitled.

*This article is an expanded version of the author’s post on the APA

Preparing Graduate Students to Teach:
One Model

George W, Rainbolt*
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

Sandra L. Dwyer**
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

We believe that a significant portion of philosophy
graduate programs should be devoted to helping graduate
students become better teachers. For those graduate
students who will go on to become faculty, teaching will
be a significant part of their lives. In addition, the quality
of graduate-student teaching has a significant impact on
undergraduates. How to help graduate students become
better philosophy teachers can and should vary widely
from institution to institution. This article describes one
model of a philosophy teacher preparation program, the
program at Georgia State University (GSU). We have found
that our program has many benefits. (1) It increases
the quality of graduate student instruction. (2) It prepares
graduate students to teach their subject once they assume
their own teaching positions. (3) It reduces the percentage
of undergraduates who earn a grade of D, W, or F in general
education courses. (4) It allows our Department to offer
funding to all our graduate students. (5) It helps graduate
students discover whether or not they enjoy teaching.
(6) It encourages graduate students to learn from one
another. (7) Finally, it improves the social atmosphere of
the Department. The main problems with the program are
that the workload on graduate students is too heavy and
their funding is too low.

Work on the program started in 2001. The program
developed and changed dramatically over time. It will no
doubt continue to evolve in the future. This article describes
the program as it existed in 2018-2019, the last full year
before the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not describe the
long and winding road that got the program to that year.
Nor does it address the drastic changes that have been
and continue to be made as the Department responds
to the profound, rapid, and unforeseeable effects of the
pandemic. Nevertheless, the year before the onset of the
pandemic is a good time to take a snapshot. In addition,
we will lay out the program in a somewhat simplified
manner and as if there were no exceptions. There are
many complex details and exceptions to almost every
rule. However, it would be tedious to describe all of them.
(Interested readers are welcome to contact the authors,
the current department chair, or the Coordinator to discuss
these details.)

The primary goals of GSU’s teacher preparation program
are (a) to improve the quality of the instruction offered by
graduate students and thereby to increase student learning
of GSU undergraduates, and (b) to prepare graduate
students to teach well after they graduate. In 2000, we
faced four interlocking problems. (1) The introductory-
level courses, primarily Critical Thinking (taken by about
3,000 students per year) and Introduction to Philosophy
(taken by about 1,000 students per year), were taught
mostly by adjuncts. (2) The courses were not standardized.
Both content and grading standards differed widely from
instructor to instructor. This lack of uniformity meant that
the grade of an undergraduate student depended more often
on which instructor happened to be teaching than on the
student’s performance. (3) We were able to offer funding to
only a few of our MA students. (4) The teaching preparation
provided to our graduate students was minimal. It consisted
of a one-or-two-day College-run teaching workshop before
fall classes started and hit-or-miss mentoring by faculty
dependent on the graduate students asking for help. (This
workshop has since been discontinued by the College.)

On the budget side, the program’s founding idea
was simple: use the funds previously allocated to pay
adjuncts to support graduate students. On the program
side, the basic thrust is twofold. First, graduate students
take a three-course sequence of teaching preparation
courses (described below). Second, we standardized the
introductory-level courses (sometimes called “packaged
course” or “a course in a box”) to reduce the workload
on graduate students while decreasing unfairness to the
undergraduates. The program is run by the Coordinator
of Graduate Teaching (Coordinator), a permanent non-tenure-
track faculty member who teaches the three courses and
supervises teacher preparation.

THE THREE-COURSE SEQUENCE

The first course, Teaching Philosophy, is taken by all first-
year graduate students. (All first-year philosophy graduate
students are funded by the Department.) This course is
letter-graded and earning at least a B grade is necessary to
continue to receive financial support from the Department.
This course focuses on three main areas of preparation: (a)
the content of the course in Critical Thinking, which most
graduate students will teach the following year, (b) an
overview of topics fundamental to teaching undergraduates
(such as construction and grading of tests, and how to
handle student discussions in class), and (c) questions and
concerns that the graduate students have about teaching
generally or the profession of teaching philosophy in
particular.
To address these three areas of preparation, the graduate students attend a section of the Critical Thinking course taught by the Coordinator and meet weekly with the Coordinator to discuss the course material as well as pedagogical concerns. For some of the weekly meetings, department faculty members are invited to talk with the graduate students about relevant topics such as time management and how to minimize plagiarism. University staff also are invited to discuss available resources such as the counseling center and issues such as the implementation of the Title IX program. To address particular concerns for each cohort, every graduate student sends two questions to the Coordinator a few days before each weekly meeting. These questions are used to jump start the weekly discussions. The questions may address any point of content in the Critical Thinking course, any question about pedagogical techniques or teaching in general, or any other question the graduate students have about the profession of college teaching.

The questions of the students naturally differ within each cohort. After all, graduate students are unique individuals with their own interests or worries. However, the questions also raise issues that are relevant to the interests of most other graduate students interested in having a career as a teacher. Questions run the gamut from “How should I dress when teaching?” to “How do I balance my teaching duties with finishing up my coursework and thesis defense?” to “What do you do if a student starts a fight in class?” to “What should I do if I don’t know the answer to a student’s question?”

In addition, once during the semester, the graduate students each present a short paper on an article from a pedagogy journal such as Teaching Philosophy or a chapter from a pedagogy book (such as bell hooks’s Teaching to Transgress or Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed). In this way, the graduate students quickly become aware of at least twenty articles on pedagogy, while only having to read one. We attempt to introduce this kind of efficiency throughout the teacher-preparation program to reduce the workload of our graduate students.

Once during the semester, every graduate student gives a mini lecture to the undergraduate critical thinking class that the student is attending. This is often the graduate student’s first experience teaching. Once they are in front of the class and hear questions from undergraduates, the graduate students almost universally want to engage with them. That experience causes a shift in their perception of themselves from being students to being instructors. The experience our graduate students have of simultaneously being both students and instructors is one of the valuable elements of the program.

Along with the first pedagogy class, first-year graduate students lead Supplemental Instruction sections. They receive training (a workshop before classes start) from GSU’s supplemental instruction team. Supplemental Instruction is a form of group tutoring used across the United States and in several other countries. In addition to helping undergraduates with the material of the specific course for which they come for Supplemental Instruction, the tutoring sessions cover such general topics as note taking, time management, and study strategies. Because the Department of Philosophy participates in the GSU’s Supplemental Instruction program, the University provides additional funds to support the graduate students. Initially, the Department had five or six graduate students participate in Supplemental Instruction. We quickly noticed that those graduate students were some of the best instructors in the following year. We then assigned all graduate students to lead Supplemental Instruction sections during one semester of their first year.

The second course, Teaching Philosophy Practicum, is taken in the semester in which the graduate students teach their own course for the first time (usually in the summer semester after their first year or the fall semester of their second year). This course is letter graded, and a B is required to continue to receive financial support. In order to teach their own courses, graduate students must have completed the first course of the three-course sequence and earned a minimum of eighteen credit hours of graduate coursework in philosophy. The second pedagogy course meets once a week and covers topics dealing with some of the administrative aspects of teaching (such as the requirement that final grades must be submitted to the registrar by Friday before 5 p.m.), preparing classes, developing syllabi, preparing lecture notes to use when presenting in classes, grading assignments, etc. As part of this course, the Coordinator observes one class session taught by each graduate student. The Coordinator then provides extensive written and oral feedback on the observed teaching session.

The third course, Advanced Teaching Practicum, is taken by all graduate students who are in their second or subsequent semester of teaching their own course. Because our MA program is designed as a two-year program, most students take this course only once (in the spring semester of their second year). This course is pass/fail, not letter graded, and is largely a one-on-one tutorial between the Coordinator and the graduate student to help the student develop teaching documents. These documents typically include three items. (1) A teaching philosophy statement that notes the skills emphasized when teaching, the methods utilized, and the strategies used to capture student interest. This one-to-three-page statement can be attached to the graduate student’s CV when applying for PhD programs or teaching jobs. (2) A teaching summation that can also be added to the student’s CV. This document is generally no longer than one page and lists the particulars of teaching experience (course title, number of sections or students, and date when taught) along with student evaluation scores from the College. (3) A teaching portfolio, which includes the syllabi of courses that were either taught or that the graduate student is prepared to teach, samples of feedback that the graduate student gave on students’ work, and other such things that might demonstrate teaching effectiveness. Since the teaching portfolio is a more comprehensive document than the other two documents and may not be completed by the time a student graduates, former graduate students often correspond with the Coordinator after they have graduated and when they are ready to apply for teaching jobs. They then complete the Teaching Portfolio at that time.
COURSE STANDARDIZATION

We have extensively standardized the Critical Thinking course. The same syllabus is used across all sections of the course. The same midterm and same final exam are used in all sections. All sections use the same textbook, *Critical Thinking: The Art of Argument* (Cengage 2014), which was written by the authors of this article. (Written with the help of scholars from the social sciences, the natural sciences, the humanities, and the fine arts, the book focuses on critical thinking in college core/gen ed courses and so assists GSU’s efforts to improve student learning, retention, and graduation rates.) This standardization (a) increases student learning, (b) reduces the unfairness caused by graduate student instructors with widely different grading standards, and (c) reduces the workload of the graduate students teaching the course. This is all the more important given that, typically, graduate students are in our MA program for only two years and so teach the course in Critical Thinking for only two or three semesters.

Our Critical Thinking course is a flipped course. Students watch prerecorded eight-to-ten-minute video lectures outside of class. These videos were produced by the authors and several graduate students. (There are approximately seventy lectures, available, for free, to instructors at other institutions.) When they come to class, the students focus on doing homework-style exercises. For the first half of class, they typically work on their exercises in small groups, after which they go over the exercises with the instructor. When we converted from a traditional lecture course to a flipped course, we saw an increase of about fifteen percentage points in the percentage of students earning an A or a B and a corresponding drop in the percentage of students earning a C, a D, or an F. In addition, reports from the graduate students indicate that the flipped format reduced their workload.

Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Ethics, and some applied ethics courses are less standardized. Many sections of these courses are taught by permanent faculty who teach the course as they think best. The Department has developed a webpage for graduate student instructors that includes syllabi, tests, and assignments from faculty-taught courses and from some courses taught by exceptional graduate student instructors. The Department has also set up folders of uncopyrighted and fair use readings from which graduate student instructors must choose the readings that they assign. They are encouraged to nominate additional readings and, if approved by the Department, those readings are added to the list of reading materials. Because the readings are not under copyright or are available to students under fair use, they are free to the undergraduates in the class. A minimum of 20 percent of the readings assigned in any class must be by women authors, and the Department actively encourages its graduate students to include readings written by members of other underrepresented groups. There are no common exams or assignments. The syllabi of graduate student instructors are reviewed by the Coordinator to ensure that they meet university/department requirements and to make sure that the structure of the course does not overload the graduate student-teacher.

REFLECTIONS

Overall, we are pleased with the results of our efforts to prepare our philosophy graduate students to be teachers. Post-graduation surveys of our graduate students indicate that they are happy to have been part of the program, and those who have gone on to PhD programs report that it has served them well. The quality, consistency, and fairness of instruction in our courses in Critical Thinking and Introduction to Philosophy have increased, the percentage of undergraduates who earn a grade of D, W, or F has decreased, and we have been able to offer funding to all our graduate students. This led to a more supportive atmosphere among the graduate students who previously saw themselves as competing for the few supported graduate lines.

Most graduate students come to our MA program without ever having considered whether they have a desire to teach. One of the highlights of our work has been witnessing our graduate students discover whether they have such a desire, seeing that many young people who love philosophy research also love teaching philosophy, and seeing that they are almost always good at it. The mini lecture discussed above is often a key moment. While most of our graduate students find that they love teaching, some discover that teaching is not for them. The program allows students to make this discovery when it is relatively easy for them to revise their career goals.

One might worry that some prospective graduate students see GSU as a less attractive master’s program because we require participation in our teacher preparation program. We have found the opposite to be the case. While we cannot be sure that there are not a few prospective graduate students who decide not to apply to our program due to the unusual emphasis on preparing graduate students to teach, interest in our master’s program has increased since we developed the teacher preparation program. Anecdotal reports indicate that prospective graduate students see our teacher preparation as a strength. In addition, many students are drawn to our program because the teacher preparation system allows us to fund all our graduate students. As just noted, universal funding has led to a more supportive atmosphere, and this attracts prospective graduate students.

Additionally, the program has encouraged habits of learning as a group. The graduate students learn by talking to one another that all teachers have problems with disruptive students and plagiarism cases. The sharing engendered by the program exponentially hastens the development of the graduate students’ expertise in handling many facets of teaching including how to help each other cover classes when one of them is ill, how to read a paper at a conference, how to make Cartesian doubt interesting to first-generation college students, and how to give feedback on essays to students who come to class with widely diverse academic preparation. All of this helps our graduate students through the difficult process of entering the world of teaching.

The social atmosphere of the students in our Department has improved because the graduate students come together as a cohort. In a large graduate program such as ours, with
over fifty students, it can be difficult for graduate students to get to know each other. This is especially true for those whose research interests differ. Because students of all research interests participate in the teaching preparation program, bonds are formed across this potential divide.

There have been some relatively minor but expected challenges. Some graduate students resist teacher preparation. They want to focus on their research. Other graduate students resist the standardization of the courses because they would like to design their own courses. Still other graduate students want to use inappropriate videos or reading materials in their courses. We see these challenges as relatively minor because the vast majority are resolved by talking with the graduate students about why it is important to learn to teach, why the courses are standardized, and why some videos/readings are inappropriate. Another anticipated challenge is that, because we offer only an MA program, most students teach for only one year. We are always working with a large group of brand-new instructors. For this reason and many others, the Coordinator plays a key role in the success of the program.

However, there are two significant problems. The workload on graduate students is too heavy and their stipends are too low. At base, this is caused by the fact that the largest part of the funds for graduate support came from the funds previously allocated for adjuncts. Stipends are typically $10,000–$12,000. (This includes a tuition waiver, but no health insurance, and no waiver of the University’s fees of approximately $1,000/semester.) Matters are made worse by the large size of our undergraduate classes. Critical Thinking sections are limited to forty-five students and Introduction to Philosophy is limited to sixty students. Almost all sections are full. Thus, many graduate students are teaching one hundred students in the fall, as well as one hundred students in the spring while taking their own graduate level courses, writing their master’s thesis, and applying to PhD programs!

The Department would like to decrease the size of its graduate program (in part to reflect the change in the market for philosophy professors). If funding were held constant, this would allow the Department to spread its graduate funding dollars among fewer students, and thereby increase the stipend that each receives. Some progress has been made in this direction. However, for reasons having to do with the formulas that the State of Georgia uses to allocate funding to universities, there is pressure at both the College and University level to increase the size of graduate programs. The Department would also like to decrease the teaching load of its graduate students. The current load is generally six sections of Critical Thinking per calendar year (summer, fall, and spring semesters) or four sections of the other courses per calendar year. (Critical Thinking is a two-credit course and the other courses carry three credits.) In a perfect world, we would cut this load in half with no reduction in stipend, though any reduction in load with no reduction in stipend would be welcome. Of course, any reduction in teaching load would require additional resources from the College or University, which is not likely, as our program is not exempt from the challenges caused by the lack of support for higher education that impacts everyone in higher education in so many ways.

Overall, the Department is proud of its teacher preparation program. We believe that it is one of the things that makes our graduate program stand out. More importantly, we believe that it has made a real difference for undergraduates at GSU and at those schools where our graduate students teach after they leave us.

*Before becoming Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Florida, George Rainbolt was chair of the Department of Philosophy at Georgia State University.

**Before retiring in 2021, Sandra Dwyer was the Coordinator of Graduate Teaching.

Appendix: Further Readings

This article and the list of further readings below draw on information in an unpublished manuscript, “A Report on Philosophy Teacher Training at Georgia State University,” by Sandra L. Dwyer, Robert Bingle, and Emily Cahill. The manuscript (copies available by contacting the authors) provides details about the GSU program and a survey of its former graduate students.

FURTHER READINGS


POEM

The Logician*

Felicia Nimue Ackerman
BROWN UNIVERSITY

A different version of this poem first appeared in The Providence Journal, 10/20/11. The present version appeared in Daily Nous, 1/12/18.

Jerome finds logic thrilling.
He loves to help it grow.
The more results that he can prove,
The more he wants to know.

Jerome craves every honor
His logic work can net.
The more awards that he receives
The more he wants to get.

The Bible may deny it,
And yet it’s surely true:
A man can serve two masters, and
That’s just what many do.

BOOKS RECEIVED

HACKETT PUBLISHING
Aristotle, De Caelo, Translated with Introduction and Notes by C.D.C. Reeve (The APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy will be carrying a review of the new C.D.C. Reeve translation of De Caelo in our forthcoming fall 2022 issue.)