APA Studies

ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES
FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY
HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
LGBTQ PHILOSOPHY
NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY
PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
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FROM THE EDITORS

The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi with New Interpretations for Philosophy Today and the Contemporary World

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is significant that a volume of essays on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi appears under the title APA Studies on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies published by the American Philosophical Association. A volume on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi published by the APA immediately raises questions. One easily agrees with the statement that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) has been a very influential spiritual and political figure, with values, principles, perspectives, and action-transformative practices that are significant and often challenging, especially to secular moderns. But is any of this significant or even appropriate for the discipline of philosophy and for a publication in philosophy? Is Gandhi in any way a philosopher? Is his work in any way philosophical? Why should philosophers in the twenty-first century devote their time and attention to Gandhi?

These questions gain force when one considers that Gandhi did not regard himself as a philosopher. An active ignoring and often outright rejection of Gandhi as a philosopher during his lifetime was not simply one of a long list of modern Western colonialist-imperialist assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and conceptualizations dismissing the legitimacy and value of Asian philosophical contributions, but reflects something about Gandhi himself, his writings, and his actions. After all, even his philosophical contemporaries in India usually ignored and sometimes dismissed Gandhi as a philosopher. This included the dominant Vedantists, other skilled practitioners of traditional Indian philosophy, and Indian philosophers who had been influenced by Western philosophies. So why should we, now, think differently?

The fourteen scholars who have contributed thirteen essays, including one jointly written, to this volume on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi express a wide range of approaches and sensibilities, but they all agree that philosophers should consider Gandhi's philosophy because it is philosophically significant. This should not be taken to suggest that the fourteen scholars agree in their formulations, interpretations, applications, or evaluations of Gandhi’s philosophy. To the contrary, they often strongly disagree as to the nature, scope, limits, sources, and value of Gandhi’s philosophy of satya (truth), ahimsa (nonviolence), satyagraha (firmness on truth, truth-force), swaraj (self-rule, freedom, independence), and other key Gandhian concepts and conceptions. To this end, this issue presents and analyzes many reasons for taking Gandhi seriously as contributing to philosophy.

Philosophical work on Gandhi may be divided into three non-exclusive categories. First, many contributors place their primary focus on the need to describe and interpret the life, writings, views, and practices of Gandhi as accurately as possible. What did Gandhi write, say, and do during his lifetime? Are there inconsistencies in his writings, speeches, and actions? Even for those scholars who claim that their Gandhi scholarship is completely descriptive and for a publication in philosophy? Is Gandhi in any way a philosopher? Is his work in any way philosophical? Why should philosophers in the twenty-first century devote their time and attention to Gandhi?

Second, many contributors often go far beyond the focus of describing Gandhi’s writings, speeches, and actions during his lifetime, with Gandhi scholars focusing on the need to reread, reapply, and reassess Gandhi’s philosophy today in new, creative, contextualized ways. How can we reformulate Gandhi and Gandhi-informed philosophy in ways that are contextually significant for contemporary philosophy? How can we reformulate Gandhi’s philosophy in ways that are philosophically significant for addressing issues of violence and nonviolence, war and peace, hatred and love, conflict, unifying harmony, oppression, injustice, inequality, freedom, racism, threats to democracy, and environmental sustainability?

Third, many contributors use diverse non-Gandhian approaches and interpretations in presenting and assessing the philosophical significance of Gandhi and Gandhi-informed philosophy. For instance, we find diverse post-modernist, post-colonialist, deconstructionist, feminist,
Gandhi, on Allen’s reading, but different—analogies for the relation between means and ends as an argument for Gandhi’s position that his contributions as not philosophically significant. What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, and novel rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. This will contribute to our philosophical understanding of issues like violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression, exploitation, sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

In “Gandhi’s Practical Idealism,” Vinit Haksar focuses on the tension between the two concepts contained in the title of his article: practicality and idealism. Gandhi considers himself an idealist, yet he repeatedly acknowledges that his absolute philosophical ideals, especially ahimsa (nonviolence), are unattainable by embodied human beings. This tension leads to Gandhi’s philosophy of “practical idealism,” by which Haksar aims to capture Gandhi’s support for a broad range of compromises intended for Gandhi’s admirers, followers, opponents, and even Gandhi himself. In describing and analyzing necessary compromises, Haksar emphasizes Gandhi’s distinction between nonviolence as a creed (an absolute total way of living, “the nonviolence of the strong”) and nonviolence as a policy (relative contextualized expediency, strategic, “the nonviolence of the weak”). In diverse changing ways, Gandhi not only supported numerous compromises for nonviolence as a policy, intended for most of his followers, but also granted compromises when upholding nonviolence as a creed. When Gandhi allows, albeit reluctantly, necessary departures from absolute principles of nonviolence, the departures are not moral or just, and the departures should remind us of our duty to promote and live up to nonviolent ideals and principles in all contextualized areas of life.

In “Gandhi and Moral Agency: A Study of Political Literature,” Samiksha Goyal focuses on Gandhi's picture of moral agency. Goyal argues that Gandhi’s philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated in the dominant political theoretic literature on his thought. Many contemporary political theorists claim that Gandhi upholds an exclusive focus on nonviolent means and rejects any focus on ends. Such contributions are sometimes necessary but never fully sufficient for understanding Gandhi’s practical thought, Goyal contends, since they lack a proper conception of moral agency in his thought. They thus, at best, present an incomplete picture for understanding how Gandhi’s notion of moral agency forms the basis for his philosophical framework, the underlying moral philosophical basis of his ideas, and the necessary interrelations between nonviolence, truth, sarvodaya, and other key Gandhian concepts like swaraj. Truth, nonviolence, and developed detachment as a virtuous character trait reveal the potential for essential moral agency in Gandhi’s thought.

II. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA (NONVIOLENCE), SATYA (TRUTH), AND ETHICS

The four essays under this heading consider the complex, diverse, interrelated philosophical, ethical, spiritual, political, nonviolent, and truth relations that structure Gandhi’s philosophical approach and reveal its philosophical significance.

In “Is Gandhi’s Approach to Philosophy, Truth, and Nonviolence Really ‘Philosophical’?” Douglas Allen raises many of the general philosophical concerns found throughout this volume. Gandhi, on Allen’s reading, emphasizes the primacy of action-oriented transformative practice and has little interest in abstract philosophical theorizing. Disciplinary philosophers, including admirers and critics of Gandhi, tend to ignore Gandhi, viewing his contributions as not philosophically significant. Allen instead submits that Gandhi offers an approach to philosophy, ethics, truth, violence, and nonviolence that is surprisingly open-ended, complex, nuanced, at times contradictory, and of great philosophical significance. What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, and novel rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. This will contribute to our philosophical understanding of issues like violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression, exploitation, sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.
resistance to oppression must always be nonviolent. Struhl examines the significance and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of these analogies as an argument for nonviolent resistance (satyagraha). Gandhi’s means-ends philosophy, Struhl argues, cannot be divorced from certain political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions, such as the assumption that violence always leads to escalating cycles of retaliation whereas nonviolence and nonviolent resistance are self-limiting and the assumption that the force of love and sacrifice is stronger than physical force. The conclusion is that we may recognize the many strengths of Gandhi’s philosophy and practice of nonviolence while acknowledging their contextualized limits.

III. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SWARAJ (SELF-RULE, INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM)

The three essays in this section examine how Gandhi’s conception of swaraj was taken up by other advocates for freedom and self-determination in India and across the world, and its potential for addressing our contemporary political, economic, and other related problems.

In “Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change,” Christopher Key Chapple emphasizes how Gandhi advocated self-governance, which, for him, is informed by swaraj and anchored in Yoga philosophy. Gandhi’s vision for India’s self-governance and independence is seen in his favorite passage in the Bhagavad Gītā, chapter 2, verses 54-72, expressing his view of how to put into practice the training of freedom fighters in practicing this yogic technique. As Chapple outlines, Gandhi inspired Howard Thurman, who met Gandhi in India in the 1930s, brought this technique to the African American community, and deeply influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1950s, James Lawson learned about self-governance and techniques for change from Gandhians in India. These experiences led him to train nonviolent resisters during the Civil Rights Movement and Lawson continues to train others in the Gandhian method and message even today. Freedom constitutes the core of Gandhi’s message and is not possible without primary focus on Gandhi’s (and the Gītā’s) notion of a “person of steady wisdom,” self-governing, with disciplined renunciation of attachment to desires, realizing steady informed peace and equanimity, and resisting and transforming all forms of tyranny.

In “Gandhian Swaraj and Its Incompatibility with Present-Day Populism: Some Philosophical Considerations,” Sanjay Lal examines how the rise of populist tendencies in constitutional democracies—as seen in the emergence of Donald Trump in the United States and Narendra Modi in India, among others—poses a threat to the realization of democratic ideals. Lal presents a Gandhian philosophical framework with its emphasis on true freedom (swaraj) as providing a way for synthesizing the ideals of democracy with legitimate concerns driving emerging anti-democratic populist tendencies. On both descriptive and normative levels of analysis, the Gandhian self, Gandhi’s true nonhierarchical and nonviolent self, is presented as essential for the realization of the dominant liberal democratic ideals and values and for the assessment of angry, violent, and anti-democratic forms of populism.

In “Gandhi’s Philosophy of Economics and Nonviolent Strategy for Civil Rights: A Requiem in Two Movements,” Purushottama Bilimoria rejects certain limited interpretations of Gandhi’s philosophy, which emphasize the obvious centrality of ethics and spirituality but ignore the centrality of economics in his philosophy. In the first major part or “movement,” Bilimoria presents Gandhi’s emphasis on economics, integrally interrelated with ethics, swaraj, and swadeshi, and the contributions of J. C. Kumarappa, Gandhi’s economic mentor, who coined the term “Gandhian economics.” Gandhian economics rejects dominant modern economic approaches that universalize avarice, top-down power-driven inequality, commodity fetishism, consumerism, and capitalist corporatism. Gandhi’s philosophy offers a radical paradigm shift in approaching economics, with emphasis on inclusive egalitarianism, decentralized self-empowerment and freedom, and ethically grounded ways of realizing the true nature of wealth and the well-being and meaningful existence of all.

In the second “movement,” on Black Satyagraha and the Civil Rights Movement, Gandhi’s philosophical messages and practices are presented as deeply influencing King, Thurman, and other African American leaders and their movements. Bilimoria’s essay thus usefully leads us to the next set of essays that focus on satyagraha.

IV. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA (FIRMNESS ON TRUTH, NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE)

The three essays in this section provide different readings of the key Gandhian concept and practice of satyagraha.

In “Satyagraha and Swaraj: Equality Before Freedom,” Bindu Puri upholds a strong thesis, namely, that Gandhi emphasizes equality before freedom. Unlike many modern Indian and Western philosophers, Gandhi certainly critiques and rejects dominant modern liberal views of freedom. How is Gandhi’s approach to the foundation of a deeper form of equality related to his view of freedom? Satyagraha is Gandhi’s method for securing rights as based on absolute equality. In Gandhi’s philosophy, satyagraha is a firmness (agraha) on truth (satya) that rejects the imposition of “force,” as the term is typically used. Gandhi maintains the inseparability of truth and nonviolence (ahimsa), in which nonviolence is love and is transformational as necessary to dissolve hate and anger, overcome judgmental and separational ego, and realize truth. Satyagraha is Gandhi’s method for securing rights through the necessary experience of tapas (self-suffering), as grounded in Gandhi’s interpretation of the Bhagavad Gītā and other Indian scriptures and as based on the priority of absolute equality over liberty and other modern values and concepts.

In “Making Sense of Gandhi’s Satyagraha,” Sanjeev Kumar observes that we are living in a contemporary world of alarming and growing violence, intolerance, and hatred, with the demise of humanism and the lack of morality. Gandhi’s satyagraha (firmness to truth, truth-force, soul-force), as a central component of his moral philosophy of satya (what exists, is true, is real) and ahimsa (nonviolence, love), offers us an attractive normative alternative that might aid us in responding to these trends. Much more
than a significant political weapon to challenge British rule, satyagraha expresses the message that Gandhi intends to rid Indian society of social and economic prejudices and hierarchical violent and untruthful structures of domination and oppression. In satyagraha, voluntary disciplined self-suffering can move the heart, leading to greater understanding and change. Gandhi’s philosophical worldview, deeply grounded in his moral philosophy of satyagraha, can serve as an effective countervailing tool and method that helps us understand, transform, and overcome the dominant culture of violence today.

In “Gandhi, the Last Fast, and the Call of the Conscience,” Vinay Lal focuses on Gandhi’s last fast (January 1948) and uses knowledge of the historical and contextual framework in order to understand Gandhi’s philosophical approach. Lal presents and analyzes Gandhi’s view of fasting as a last resort of the principled nonviolent resister (the purified and disciplined satyagrahi), with a “fast unto death” as the extreme means to overcome violent conflicts and as informed by the purified “conscience” or “inner voice.” Gandhi’s fasts, often falsely presented as hunger strikes, are motivated by his view of “the inner voice,” “conscience,” the voice of truth, the voice of God, the higher power imposed on him. Readers may be challenged by Gandhi’s very diverse, perhaps inconsistent, and certainly controversial writings and actions to examine the nature of Gandhi’s many fasts and his last fast and his bold and controversial claims about the absolutely “true inner voice” that is “conscience.” These claims, for him, can be distinguished from false claims about inner voices and anti-Gandhian views of conscience, God, and higher voices of ultimate truth.

V. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA (WELL-BEING AND UPLIFT OF ALL), POLITICS, COSMOPOlITANISM, AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

The three essays in this last set consider Gandhi’s vision and its significance today: his positive constructive alternatives for society, integrating the philosophical and the political, and the strength of Gandhian cosmopolitanism. They connect many themes explored in earlier essays and point toward some other directions for philosophical inquiry.

In “Gandhi’s Constructive Program: Toward a Vision of a Just and Decolonized Democratic Indian Society,” Veena R. Howard examines the eighteen elements of Gandhi’s Constructive Program that are key to realizing his philosophy of sarvodaya (the uplift of all). Gandhi critiques much of traditional India, modern India, and the modern West for not promoting or attaining the well-being or uplift of all. Gandhi’s Constructive Program offers action-transformative ways of expressing his moral philosophy with its nonviolent social, economic, educational, and other structures. Howard groups the elements of the Constructive Program under four headings: human dignity, economic equality, native knowledge systems, and education and health care. In his formulations of religious communal unity, removal of untouchability, economic equality, and other elements, Howard argues, Gandhi offers an approach for pursuing the moral path that will ensure the freedom and uplift of all in a just, decolonized, democratic India.

In “Gandhi: An Imperfect Philosopher,” Nishikant Kolge examines a key question: How did Gandhi integrate the philosophical and the political aspects of life? In providing a holistic interpretation of the interconnectedness of the integrated philosophical (moral, spiritual) and the political, Kolge argues that we cannot understand Gandhi’s philosophy without seeing it as a reflection of Gandhi, the complex and total person. While acknowledging the contributions of many philosophers and other scholars, Kolge focuses on his claim that all of the noted scholars accept diverse interpretations of the two separate Gandhis: Gandhi the philosopher and Gandhi the politician. Kolge challenges this dichotomization. He contends that we can only understand the two Gandhis as integrally interconnected aspects of one conceptual framework in which we integrate both the imperfect philosophical and the imperfect political while remaining true to both aspects of life.

In “Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations,” Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield challenge typical interpretations of Gandhi and his philosophical approach as expressing reactionary parochial Indian nationalism, romantic nostalgia for a return to superior idealized premodern India, and rejection of the primacy of reason that characterizes modern Western Enlightenment and modern cosmopolitanism, especially as exemplified in a figure like Immanuel Kant. Such a Gandhi misleadingly appears to reject everything embodied in that modern Western tradition. In addition, the philosophy and practice that such a Gandhi champions are radically different from Rabindranath Tagore’s seemingly more enlightened embrace of reason and cosmopolitanism. Instead, using selectively appropriated and reformulated passages in Gandhi’s writings and acknowledging legitimate differences, Bhusan and Garfield creatively argue that Gandhi shares many of modern Kantian Enlightenment features and offer an insightful reading of a Gandhian cosmopolitanism. This reformulated Gandhi emphasizes public space for individuals as citizens to reflect and debate matters of public concern and to engage in the collaborative project of soul-making. Indeed, on Bhusan and Garfield’s reading, Gandhi is a cosmopolitan thinker and action-oriented practitioner who is, in many ways, more creative and radical than Kant and other modern proponents of cosmopolitanism.

We live in times of alarming local, national, and global conflicts, hierarchical domination, exploitation, oppression, violence, war, hatred, divisiveness, injustice, lack of freedom, and destruction of human and other life on the planet. Gandhi’s life, writings, speeches, and actions challenge us and offer us open-ended, contextualized, creative ways for responding to these existential, moral, social, economic, political, cultural, spiritual, environmental, and other contemporary crises. Even when we disagree with Gandhi’s specific proposals or with specific features of his philosophical approach, the essays in this volume challenge us in significant meaningful ways. They provide us with Gandhi-informed ways for broadening our philosophical horizons and for rethinking our philosophical and other understandings, commitments, and practices.
I. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA (NONVIOLENCE), SATYA (TRUTH), AND ETHICS

Is Gandhi’s Approach to Philosophy, Truth, and Nonviolence Really “Philosophical”?  

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ABSTRACT

Gandhi does not regard himself as a disciplinary philosopher. He emphasizes the primacy of action-oriented transformative practice and has little interest in abstract philosophical theorizing. Disciplinary philosophers also tend to ignore Gandhi as offering contributions that are philosophically significant. I submit that Gandhi offers an approach to philosophy, ethics, truth, violence, and nonviolence that is surprisingly open-ended, complex, nuanced, at times contradictory, and of great philosophical significance. For example, he greatly broadens and deepens our usual understandings in the philosophy of violence and nonviolence by focusing on violent and nonviolent multidimensional and structural relations. What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, new rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. We need to integrate critically selective Gandhi-informed approaches, perspectives, philosophies, and practices with selectively reinterpreted and reapplied complementary non-Gandhian philosophical approaches. This will contribute to our philosophical understanding of violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression and exploitation and injustice, class, caste, race, gender, religious and ethnic conflict, science and technology, egalitarian democratic empowerment, economic and environmental sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

During his lifetime, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) is aware of many distinguished Indian philosophers. He has the closest relationship with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975). Gandhi admires Radhakrishnan as a distinguished scholar of Indian philosophy, who serves as the President of India when I first come to India, and Radhakrishnan admires Gandhi as a remarkable moral, political, and spiritual leader. In recognizing distinguished Indian philosophers, Gandhi confesses that he is not a philosopher and that he has limited ability and little interest in abstract, rational, critical, disciplinary, and scholarly philosophy. Why not take Gandhi at his word and accept that he is lacking in “philosophy” and is not “philosophical”? 

On the one hand, critics of Gandhi interested in philosophy not surprisingly agree with Gandhi that he is not a philosopher. Gandhi’s “philosophy” is uncritical, irrational, superstitious, muddle-headed, and full of contradictions. On the other hand, most admirers of Gandhi interested in philosophy usually agree with Gandhi that he is not a philosopher. They do not include Gandhi in their approaches to philosophy while often admiring Gandhi for nonphilosophical reasons. This rejection of Gandhi as philosopher is repeatedly confirmed during my youthful formative yearlong immersion in Indian philosophy.

GANDHI IS NOT A PHILOSOPHER: EARLY CONFIRMATIONS

From many possible examples confirming that Mahatma Gandhi is not a philosopher, I’ll cite two confirmations: my immersion in post-graduate (PhD) courses in Indian philosophy at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) during 1963–1964 and my exposure to Contemporary Indian Philosophy, the best source I had conveying the state of Indian philosophy during Gandhi’s lifetime. 

First, I was fortunate to receive a special student-teacher Fulbright, to be assigned to the sacred Hindu Banaras (Varanasi, Kashi) on the Ganges, and to be based at BHU. Required to teach one advanced course in the Department of English, I decided to immerse myself in post-graduate (PhD) courses in BHU’s renowned Department of Philosophy. Arguably the outstanding philosophy department in India at that time, the BHU department was dominated by proponents of traditional Advaita (nondualism) Vedanta, as were all of the leading Indian philosophy departments at that time. My primary mentor was T. R. V. Murti, Head of the Department of Philosophy, who served that year as President of the Indian Philosophical Congress. Professor Murti was an orthodox South Indian Brahmin, a follower of Shankaracharya (founder of Adwaita Vedanta), and the author of the influential The Central Philosophy of Buddhism. From Murti, I studied the traditional philosophies of India and was instructed as to why Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta formulates the highest level of Indian or Western philosophical understanding. To mention only one other professor, the orthodox Advaitin R. K. Tripathi not only taught me Advaita Vedanta at BHU, but he also kindly opened doors for me to remarkable Indian philosophical and spiritual contacts. These included the renowned yogi Yogiswar Sri Kalipada Guha Ray (with whom I met regularly) and the renowned scholar of Sanskrit, Tantra, and Kashmiri Shaivism Gopinath Kaviraj.
Later, he reluctantly agrees to respond to questions that would have been sent to “philosophers” of philosophy. When Radhakrishnan invites Gandhi to contribute to *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, we know that Gandhi at first declines, pleading incompetence. Later, he reluctantly agrees to respond to three questions posed by Radhakrishnan by submitting his untitled one-page “essay” featured as the first contribution in the volume.

Very revealing are the three questions Radhakrishnan sends to Gandhi: What is your religion? How are you led to it? What is its bearing on your social life? These questions strike one as rather “nonphilosophical” and certainly not the kinds of questions that would have been sent to “philosophers” of Indian philosophy in the collection. Even more revealing are Gandhi’s three brief responses: His religion is Hinduism that includes the best of all religions; he is led to his religion through Truth and Nonviolence and in which Truth is God and other expressions of the truth in all of us; his religion bears on his daily social life, dedication to social service, losing himself in service to all life, and recognizing that all is one.

That is Gandhi’s contribution to *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. One can easily conclude that Mahatma Gandhi is not a philosopher, and his contributions are not philosophical.

**GANDHI’S APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY**

We may delineate two major characteristics defining and structuring Gandhi’s approach to philosophy. First, Gandhi emphasizes the primacy of practice. We noted Gandhi’s lack of interest in abstract decontextualized philosophical theorizing. This has often led to the misconception that Gandhi is a “practical” person with no philosophy. Gandhi’s philosophical approach does indeed emphasize the primacy of practice with philosophy understood as action-oriented, transformative, lived philosophy. Philosophy, with its concepts and theories and relational values, is necessary and significant. Integrally interrelated moral, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of existence are constitutive of human development and flourishing. But this is only true and real when philosophy is experienced as arising from contextualized practice, informing action-oriented transformative nonviolent and truthful practice, and being experimentally tested, verified, and falsified in terms of new practice. For Gandhi, philosophy is essential morally, epistemologically, and ontologically when it is grounded in practice and provides the direction for new transformative practice.

Second, Gandhi’s approach to philosophy is holistic and organic, emphasizing the dynamic, open-ended, experiential realization of the interconnectedness and relational unity of existence, truth, nonviolence, nature, the cosmos, and reality. In Gandhi’s philosophical presuppositions, values, and methodological framework for interpreting meaning, what connects and unifies us is more essential than what separates and divides us. But Gandhi’s perspective is unlike some Advaitin and

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, and Rawls than on Ramanuja or Nagarjuna. In these emerging contextual changes, Gandhi continues to be largely ignored as a philosopher worthy of philosophical consideration.

In recent decades, there has been some change in reassessing Gandhi’s philosophy and philosophical value. “The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi” is sometimes included in the course curriculum of departments. Philosophy professors write articles and books on the philosophical significance of Gandhi’s ethics, principles, ontology, and practice. PhD students write dissertations on Gandhi’s philosophy. In my own situation, I am often invited to deliver lectures and publish in India and in the West on Gandhi’s philosophy. Nevertheless, the widespread view persists that Gandhi is not philosophical.

By way of contrast, what follows is a rather brief attempt suggesting why Gandhi, while not a traditional or disciplinary “philosopher,” offers us an approach, theory, and practice of great philosophical significance. A selectively and creatively reformulated interpretation of Gandhi’s approach to philosophy has much to contribute to contemporary philosophy when addressing issues related to ethics, violence and nonviolence, war and peace, exploitation and oppression and injustice, alienation and dehumanization, value-based human flourishing, egalitarian structures and democratic empowerment, and sustainable economic and environmental relations.

**GANDHI AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: CHANGING TIMES**

Over the next fifty years, views about philosophy, Indian philosophy, and Gandhi change radically. With notable exceptions, leading departments of philosophy in India change and are no longer dominated by the traditional absolute idealism of nondualistic Advaita Vedanta. Major Indian philosophers increasingly identify with developments in analytic philosophy while others identify with developments in continental philosophy. Philosophers in India are more likely to be doing advanced work on developments in continental philosophy. Philosophers in India are more likely to be doing advanced work on developments in continental philosophy.
other philosophies, as well as some dominant religious, economic, political, military, scientific, and technological approaches, that uphold doctrines of essential unity and oneness through hegemonic impositions of one’s theory rejecting the truth and reality of diversity and differences.

In Gandhi’s philosophy, one upholds essential unity while recognizing the philosophical significance of contextualized differences. Others have different contextualized experiences, interpretations, and philosophical formulations that we do not have. Indeed, when we engage with these others in moral, nonviolent, truthful dialogue and action-oriented transformative practices, we develop our own philosophical understandings. This engagement with others constitutes the open-ended, complex, dialectical process of transforming our relational selves and our world. In Gandhi’s holistic philosophical approach, this action-oriented engaged philosophy of truth and nonviolence expresses a view of philosophy as a dynamic transformative force, a nonviolent force, a truth-force that brings about the unifying integration of harmonious relations of body, mind, and heart (sometimes identified as soul) in human existence.

GANDHI’S APPROACH TO TRUTH

In Gandhi’s holistic philosophical approach, all of his major concepts are dynamically and relationally interconnected. Nevertheless, in hundreds of passages, he affirms that his two key foundational concepts are satya (truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence).

Satya is the essential concept expressing the presuppositions, relational values, and principles structuring Gandhi’s epistemological, moral, spiritual, and metaphysical/ontological approach to reality. Satya is derived from the Sanskrit sat: what is the true essence; what is enduring and unchangeable; what is true, really existing, being, and real. But for Gandhi, satya is not some abstract, immutable, philosophical essence, as found, say, in various Vedantic, other Hindu, Daoist, and some other Asian metaphysics, as well as in much of Platonic and other Western metaphysics.

Although not always consistent, Gandhi usually expresses satya as the essential dynamic truth-force, the action-oriented transformative truth-force, the most powerful, value-constituting, unifying force possible. For Gandhi, satya is the essential truth-force that motivates us toward moral, nonviolent, spiritual living and that provides us with the deepest moral and philosophical insights. It brings value-based, meaningful, harmonious relations and structured order to what is normally and falsely experienced and constituted in our ego-driven, temporal, impermanent, fragmented, chaotic, illusory existence and is devoid of the deeper truth and reality.

Interpreters of Gandhi’s philosophy often focus exclusively on dramatic passages on satya as Absolute Truth. In such passages, Absolute Truth is often used interchangeably with that which is Real, Being, the Unconditioned, the Infinite, the Eternal, God (Rama, Krishna, Allah, and countless other conceptions), the Soul, the Spiritual Self, and Ahimsa (Nonviolence, Love, Compassion).

What these interpreters disregard is Gandhi’s repeated claim that while he maintains his position with respect to his experience, belief, and faith in absolute truth, he remains a limited imperfect human being who, at most, has temporary imperfect “glimpses” of the absolute. His insightful linguistic conceptualizations of absolute truth and reality are always limited, imperfect, and inadequate human constructions. What interpreters ignore is his primary focus in his life, writings, and practices on contextualized, temporal, historical, economic, political, social, cultural, religious, and other situated experiences and expressions of relative truth and untruth. This distinguishes what is philosophically significant in Gandhi’s philosophy from many traditional Hindu and other metaphysical philosophies and religious positions that claim knowledge of absolute truth and absolute reality and devalue or reject as false our causal, conditioned, spatial, temporal, mutable, historical, economic, social, political, cultural, relative existence.

Gandhi’s philosophy, with bold claims about truth, raises many questions, substantial issues, and complex controversial interactions during his lifetime and for us today. Not addressed in this brief treatment, I examine them at length in my books and longer essays. For now, I’ll simply delineate several key questions and issues regarding a Gandhi-informed approach to truth.

As expressed in the title of his Autobiography, Gandhi views his life in terms of Experiments With Truth. How can Gandhi justify his claims to knowledge of absolute truth when he repeatedly confesses that he, at most, has temporary inadequate “glimpses” of such absolutes, and he repeatedly acknowledges that his experiments with truth have often been failures (even “Himalayan blunders”)? In passages of great philosophical significance, Gandhi claims that we are able to engage in the imaginary construction of absolute ideals of Truth (Nonviolence, Love, Pure Ethics, Perfect Religion, etc.), and these imaginary ideals inform and are integrally related to our limited, experiential, contextualized worlds of relative truths. How can Gandhi justify this philosophical approach to truth when others claim that his imaginary constructed absolute ideals are irrelevant or even illusory escapes from truth and reality?

To provide one other serious issue, how does Gandhi’s philosophical approach to truth respond to non-Gandhians and anti-Gandhians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, modern scientists, skeptics, materialists, relativists, and others who do not share his view of Absolute Truth and its integral relations with relative truth? How does his philosophical approach to truth respond to these others who do not share his inclusivist perspectival view of multiple legitimate truthful paths to the one unifying Truth? And how does a Gandhi-informed philosophy of truth respond to these others who sometimes claim that Gandhi’s philosophical approach Hinduizes, Vedantizes, and violently and untruthfully imposes its philosophy on their philosophical positions?

In my work, I claim that Gandhi did not during his lifetime and does not today have simple answers to such questions and issues. Nevertheless, he continues to challenge us to
engage deeply, reflecting upon and struggling with such philosophical concerns, and he offers extremely valuable philosophical insights and contributions.

**GANDHI’S APPROACH TO NONVIOLENCE: BROADENING AND DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING**

Mahatma Gandhi is most often identified with nonviolence. There is no topic that receives more attention in the 100 volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* than *ahimsa* (nonviolence). Mahatma Gandhi is certainly the best-known and most influential modern proponent of the philosophy and practice of nonviolence. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, writes how Gandhi is the major formative influence in King’s journey toward realizing his moral and spiritual philosophy with the essential characteristics of nonviolence and his engaged practices of nonviolent organizing, noncooperation, and resistance, including civil disobedience. It is most appropriate that October 2, the date of Gandhi’s birth, is recognized as the United Nations International Day of Nonviolence.

All of the topics, concepts, questions, and issues formulated in the previous section on truth (satya) can be reformulated as central to Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence (ahimsa). Even more than with my earlier formulations of Gandhi’s philosophy with his primacy of practice, his essential characteristics of philosophy, and his philosophical approach to truth, I cannot do justice in this brief essay to the insights, depth, complexities, and controversies in Gandhi’s philosophical approach to nonviolence. Formulations, interpretations, and issues that follow are largely undocumented, although extensive documentation from Gandhi’s life and writings, my treatments, and the approaches of Gandhian and anti-Gandhian writers on Gandhi’s nonviolence can be found in my longer publications.

In contrast to most stereotypical versions of Gandhi’s nonviolence, including essentialized oversimplified formulations by admirers and critics, Gandhi’s understanding of nonviolence is surprisingly experimental, self-critical, open-ended, dynamic, complex, and nuanced in his contextualized philosophy and engaged practices. The best way to clarify his philosophy of nonviolence is to begin by focusing on the meaning of his foundational concept of *ahimsa*.

*Ahimsa* is Sanskrit meaning no-harm, no-injury, usually translated in English as nonviolence. It is found in many ancient Hindu scriptures and philosophical works, is at the foundation of Jain philosophy, and is featured in Buddhist scriptures and many later philosophical formulations. Gandhi is deeply indebted to these ancient and other traditional philosophies of *ahimsa*, but he is also critical of such philosophical approaches to nonviolence. According to Gandhi, they are usually too passive, overemphasize renunciation of and liberation from the contextualized world, and lack his approach of engaged, action-oriented, creative, nonviolent resistance and transformation of ourselves and our world dominated by so much *himsa* (harm, injury, violence). What is Gandhi’s *ahimsa* philosophical approach to violence with his constructive alternative of nonviolence?

Gandhi claims most who profess ideals of peace, love, compassion, and other nonviolence are violent, either overtly or covertly. We lack understanding of violence and nonviolence, avoid nonviolent struggle, and benefit from or are complicit with the perpetuation of violence. We usually restrict our opposition to violence to explicit overt violence: killings, torture, terrorist bombings, rapes, domestic violence, bullying, etc. These are significant for Gandhi. He opposes violent acts by anti-colonial Indian terrorists, acts of overt class, caste, and gender violence, and horrendous killings and rapes at the time of India’s Partition. He is assassinated on January 30, 1948, in an act of overt violence. Nevertheless, in Gandhi’s philosophical approach, such acts of overt physical violence express a very small part of overall violence.

In my research, I attempt to analyze how Gandhi remarkably broadens and deepens our understanding of violence (and integrally related nonviolence) by means of two key concepts: the multidimensionality of violence and the structural violence of the status quo. First, Gandhi submits that in addition to overt physical violence, we experience and express inner psychological violence (hate is violent), linguistic violence (language used to shame, control, and dominate others is violent), economic violence (equivalent to exploitation and in which poverty and economic relations of inequality and domination are violent), social and political violence, educational and cultural and religious violence, and technological and environmental violence. In Gandhi’s holistic interconnected philosophical approach, all of these multidimensional presuppositions, values, principles, relations, and practices interact and mutually reinforce each other so that we become entrapped in vicious, causal, relational cycles of violence.

Second, Gandhi focuses on the dominant systemic structural violence of the status quo. As constituted by the dominant economic, political, social, cultural, religious, scientific, technological, ideological, and other contextualized forces and relations, this is expressed as what is “normal,” business as usual, human nature, the will of God, the law of karma and rebirth, etc. In his philosophy of nonviolence, Gandhi contends that even when the dominant economic, political, and other systems are functioning efficiently without resistance and disruptions, they are inherently, essentially, and structurally violent. That is why Gandhi’s nonviolent theory and practices focus on disrupting structural violence, raising consciousness, and engaging in the action-oriented transformation toward greater structural nonviolence.

When we dynamically and contextually integrate the multidimensionality of violence with the structural violence of the status quo, we become aware of how Gandhi deepens and broadens our understanding of violence and the need for transformative nonviolence. For example, we will no longer restrict our “normal” limited approach to terrorist violence. We will include corporate, capitalist, and globalized multidimensional and systemic structural violence in which billions of human beings live daily lives characterized by
insecurity, fear, terror, suffering, and death and are violently prevented from living full, developed, moral, nonviolent, truthful lives of human and societal flourishing.

**GANDHI’S APPROACH TO NONVIOLENCE: THE ABSOLUTE AND THE RELATIVE**

Most often known for his philosophy and practice of absolute nonviolence, it is typically claimed that Gandhi unconditionally rejects all thoughts, feelings, language, and acts of violence. He is even willing to die in upholding this absolute. In hundreds of bold dramatic passages, Gandhi expresses his unconditional commitment to absolute, perfect, pure nonviolence. For followers, this expresses the life and teachings of Gandhi as the inspiring, exemplary, uncompromising, sometimes deified Mahatma, who provides us with the perfect philosophical, moral, and spiritual nonviolent blueprint for overcoming all violence. For critics, this expresses the nonviolent absolutist approach of the rigid, uncompromising, dogmatic M. K. Gandhi, who provides us with his nonviolent blueprint that is irrelevant and is even an obstacle when addressing actual multidimensional and structural violence.

Once again and without providing detailed analysis and documentation, Gandhi’s philosophical approach to absolute nonviolence and to relative violence and relative nonviolence is surprisingly experimental, open-ended, complex, and at times contradictory. Expressed briefly, Gandhi upholds the ideal of absolute nonviolence, but he emphasizes that even he, at most, has imperfect temporary glimpses of absolute nonviolence. To claim full perfect knowledge of absolute nonviolence is arrogant, false, exclusivist, intolerant, and dangerously violent.

Gandhi’s major focus is on understanding and transforming our spatial, temporal, conditioned, moral, psychological, economic, political, and civilizational relations of relative violence toward greater imperfect nonviolence. In our existential mode of being in the world and in how we exist as situated contextualized beings, we are necessarily violent. Obtaining food, practicing hygiene, and building roads and houses involve some level of doing injury and harm to other living beings. Even with the best of nonviolent intentions, we sometimes misunderstand, miscalculate, and engage in failed experiments that result in violence. And we sometimes find ourselves in extremely violent situations in which there are no effective nonviolent options, such as being attacked by other humans or nonhuman animals, encountering acts of rape or shootings in schools, facing Nazi genocide or 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York or 26/11 terrorism in Mumbai.

In focusing on typical anti-Gandhian refutations relating to his nonviolent philosophy and practices responding to such examples as ongoing genocide and terrorism, I devote detailed analysis in several publications to creatively reformulating Gandhi’s approach in which some violence may be allowed or even necessary. This more complex Gandhi-informed approach usually surprises devotees, admirers, and critics, who uncritically accept the view of the rigid Gandhi of absolute nonviolence who never allows for any violence. Almost all of the time when we are violent, there are nonviolent alternatives. However, there are extreme cases in which we uphold the ideal of absolute nonviolence while responding with limited violence, because that is the most nonviolent response contextually possible. In such cases, violence is a last resort. Never glorify the violence that is tragic, that is not moral, and that reveals human failure. Limit the intensity and duration of the violence that is necessary to stop the ongoing violence. Then do everything possible to transform the root causes, values, beliefs, fundamental relations, essential structures, and practices that gave rise to the extreme violence. Without such an essential nonviolent philosophical multidimensional and structural transformation, we’ll be trapped in replicating the vicious means-ends cycles that gave rise to the extreme violence.

In Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy of the absolute, the relative, and means-ends relations, all of his ontological/metaphysical claims previously presented under his philosophy of truth apply most dramatically to his ontology of nonviolence. Not only do violent means lead to violent ends, but such violence also contradicts the nature of truth and reality. Ahimsa is that active powerful nonviolent force, truth-force, love-force, soul-force that brings meaningful order out of fragmented chaos. It allows us to realize the basic unity and interconnectedness of existence and reality. It thus allows us to live value-informed, meaningful, compassionate and loving, self-disciplined and egoless lives of service that are the developmental means for realizing the nature of reality.

In addressing all of the above concerns, issues, and questions regarding nonviolence, Gandhi’s primary focus is on how we can address our contextualized existence of so much relative violence, limit our voluntary and other forms of violence, and move toward contextualized lives of greater relative nonviolence, closer to but not fully realizing the perfect ideal of absolute nonviolence. In that regard, the greatest philosophical value of Gandhi’s approach involves preventative nonviolence. He offers invaluable insights regarding short-term preventative ways of defusing and transforming violence. But his most significant philosophical contribution involves his long-term vision of preventative nonviolence in which we uncover and transform the basic root causes and essential structures of economic, social, political, environmental, and other violence and transform them into root causes, basic determinants, essential structures, presuppositions, values, and practices expressing more permanent dimensions and structures of nonviolence.

**GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

As previously indicated, Gandhi’s approach to philosophy and especially his philosophy of nonviolence does not present us with the perfect solution of absolute nonviolence and truth to all of our challenging crises. But his approach is philosophically significant in addressing such violence today and in offering insightful and challenging nonviolent alternatives. Contemporary philosophers present many philosophical works on violence and nonviolence. They often formulate impressive technical, philosophical approaches...
and treatments that may be too limited and restricted, extremely narrow, and lacking depth. As suggested in previous sections, contemporary philosophers may benefit from engaging with a selectively and creatively reformulated Gandhi and with various Gandhi-informed approaches and treatments. Gandhi-informed contributions may greatly broaden and deepen our philosophical understanding.

Gandhi not only offers us philosophical theoretical formulations, but he primarily also offers philosophically significant transformative practices challenging us to broaden and deepen our consciousness, engage in action-oriented moral, nonviolent, truthful resistance, and create Gandhi-informed contemporary alternatives. Unlike some followers, I do not think that Gandhi's primary legacy is to serve as the comforting Mahatma, who gives us freedom from suffering and despair, peace of mind, and faith in some perfect future of world-transcending absolutes. Instead, Gandhi primarily serves as a Socratic gadfly, a revolutionary catalyst, disrupting our normal comfort levels and challenging us not to accept our dominant modern life that is multidimensionally and structurally immoral, violent, and untruthful. We are then philosophically motivated to rethink, reimagine, reconceptualize, and reapply how to live morally, nonviolently, truthfully, spiritually, and sustainably.

What is needed in providing us with the philosophical significance of Gandhi's philosophy today is to engage Gandhi-informed approaches through open-ended, selective, and creative readings, interpretations, and applications and dynamic, contextually relevant, new rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications. In doing this, we need to integrate our critically selective Gandhi-informed approaches, perspectives, philosophies, and practices with some selectively reinterpreted and reapplied complementary non-Gandhian philosophical approaches. These non-Gandhian philosophical approaches, when integrated with Gandhi-informed contributions, contribute to our philosophical understanding of violence and nonviolence, war and militarism and peace, oppression and exploitation and injustice, class and caste, race and gender, religious and ethnic conflict, science and technology, egalitarian democratic empowerment, economic and environmental sustainability, and human and planetary flourishing.

NOTES


2. These two examples are described and analyzed in several of my books, most recently in Gandhi After 9/11, especially 9–20, 35–36, 41–42. See S. Radhakrishnan and J. H. Muirhead, eds., Contemporary Indian Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936; revised and enlarged edition, 1952). Gandhi's letter of January 23, 1935, to Radhakrishnan, which appears as his one-page contribution to Contemporary Indian Philosophy, 21, is published in Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 60, 106–07.


5. In my experiences and interpretations, there has been a radical change in the views of some leading Indian philosophers not unrelated to significant contextualized changes in how Indians regard India, their world, and their own work. In recent decades of an emerging powerful post-colonial India, there has developed greater self-confidence among Indian economic, political, cultural, scientific, technological, medical, and academic elites. A minority of Indian philosophers, who had previously dismissed Indian philosophy and felt the need for Western philosophical validation, now are motivated to return to Indian philosophy, even sometimes expressing chauvinistic views of the exceptional superior Advaitin and other Indian philosophical perspectives. In such a context, there is more openness to considering Gandhi's philosophical significance, even granting how Gandhi is increasingly used (misused) by the power-elite for dangerous anti-Gandhian purposes.

6. For example, see Gandhi After 9/11, 7–10, 27–34, 44–54, 77–81.


9. For example, see Gandhi After 9/11, especially 5–7, 21–34, 63–82, 118–21, 151–73, 240–49.

10. There are hundreds of pages in Gandhi's writings in which he sadly and reluctantly allows for such violence, even granting that killing may count as ahimsa. I formulate Gandhi's nonviolent approach that allows for such violence in several publications, including "Terrorism and Violence: Gandhi After 9/11 in the USA and 26/11 in India," in Gandhi After 9/11, 138–80.

Gandhi's Practical Idealism

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ABSTRACT

Gandhi called himself a practical idealist, yet at least some of his ideals were unattainable. So life for him was, as Radhakrishnan said, "a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible." The need for compromise led him to follow Tolstoy in commending a second best in many areas of life. I examine the role of compromise in Gandhi's practical idealism. In particular, I discuss Gandhi's distinction between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy. I examine some of the compromises that he made. These include supporting certain wars and collaborating with people who did not really accept nonviolence as a creed. He was also a man of principle, but sometimes even principles may have to be compromised. Sometimes necessity compels us to depart from our principles, but we must not justify these departures. At best such departures are excused and they should remind us of our duty to promote our ideals and principles in different walks of life, according to our capacity and our judgment.

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Gandhi feared that his message of nonviolence might be rejected by many people because they view nonviolence as a counsel of perfection which is too demanding, suitable only for saints or rishis; it must be accepted in its entirety or not at all. Gandhi made it clear that this is not so. Nonviolence admits of degrees and complete nonviolence is impossible to attain as long as we are embodied beings. Since, according to Gandhi, it is part of the human condition that ideals, at least unattainable ones, cannot be realized in their entirety in this world, compromise with ideals becomes essential. He described himself as a practical idealist and so his life was, as Radhakrishnan says, a “perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible.”

Compromises were made with his opponents as well as with his followers and even with his own ideals and principles. Of course, satyagraha was very demanding, and one had to meet very strict standards in order to become a satyagrahi. But one could follow ahimsa to a considerable degree without being a satyagrahi. Gandhi also commended in several spheres a second best for those who were not able to reach the highest levels of moral perfection.

Gandhi was born and brought up in the Bania caste, where compromise was encouraged. However, for Gandhi, compromise was not just a modus vivendi but based on principles. One should not violate one’s principles when reaching a compromise. Nor should one impose a compromise on one’s opponent against their principles. This is reflected in the working of the Indian Constitution; if a practice is essential to a religion, but its absence is not essential to another religion, then the latter gives way to the former. Nonviolence, for Gandhi, was an ideal and it is permissible to compromise with ideals. But, for Gandhi, it is also a principle and so there is a problem for Gandhi: How can one justify departures from nonviolence? Gandhi’s answer was that we cannot justify them but, in cases of necessity, we can at best excuse or pardon them.

Central to Gandhi’s philosophy is the distinction between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy or expedience. Gandhi, like Tolstoy, believed in nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. As long as we are embodied creatures, some degree of violence is inevitable. Our duty is to minimize the amount of violence around us. “When violence is unavoidable, it must be spontaneous, must be the lowest minimum, must be rooted in compassion, must have discrimination, restraint, detachment at its back and lead us every moment to the path of ahimsa.” This quote is essential to understanding Gandhi’s practical philosophy and it goes a long way to making his philosophy a viable practical option. This quotation from Gandhi acknowledges the need for physical violence. But he insists that such violence must be administered in a spirit of compassion, maintaining total nonviolence as an unattainable ideal that is there to inspire us to move towards it as much as one’s capacity allows it.

So even the person who believes in nonviolence as a creed cannot avoid some degree of violence. The difference between nonviolence as a creed and nonviolence as a policy or expedience is that, according to the former, nonviolence is a way of life, to be followed in all walks of life (at least all walks of human life), and every time one is compelled to commit a violent act, it is a reminder that we have a duty to bring society nearer to the ideal of nonviolence. This is implied by Gandhi’s view that violence is never justified though sometimes it may be excused. The person who believes in nonviolence must show his commitment to nonviolence even when it is necessary and thereby excusable to commit a violent act.

According to Gandhi, those who believe in nonviolence as a policy, but practice nonviolence in a certain sphere only, like non-cooperation with the British, have no commitment to nonviolence in general. For instance, they may continue to mistreat the weaker members of their society or family. And even their non-cooperation against the British was expedient in the sense that they were too weak to offer violent resistance. Nonviolence as a creed is the true nonviolence, according to Gandhi. But Gandhi was aware that there are degrees of commitment to nonviolence, even when one believes in it as a creed. Not all those who believed in it as a creed had Gandhi’s commitment and Gandhi admitted even he himself did not practice perfect ahimsa.

Gandhi did not expect all sections of the Indian National Congress to be committed to nonviolence in all spheres of life, such as one’s dealing with non-human life. For he could not reasonably expect the Muslim members of the Congress Party to be committed to vegetarianism, and he added, “even amongst Hindus only Vaishnavas and Jains would be left to participate in it.” But he did expect them all to be committed to nonviolence as a creed with regard to our dealings with all human beings. He was aware that while the Congress professed nonviolence as a creed, what it practiced was nonviolence as a policy or expedience, which he said is not true nonviolence.

Gandhi repeatedly said that nonviolence practiced by the Indians against the British Raj was largely “nonviolence of the weak.” The weak have neither the ability to be violent in the relevant sphere nor the will. The truly nonviolent person has the ability to be violent but not the will. Gandhi sometimes used “nonviolence of the weak” interchangeably with “nonviolence of the coward.” But this was unfair. Admittedly, most Congressmen, including most of their leaders, believed in nonviolence as a policy. They may well have abandoned nonviolent resistance if they felt that violent resistance was more effective. But this does not necessarily make them cowards. Many of them got beaten up by the police, went to jail, and showed considerable bravery, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice. A coward would have stayed at home and not joined the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British.

In his more generous moments, Gandhi granted that nonviolence as a policy achieved quite a lot but very little compared to what it would have if nonviolence had been their creed. So it was different from cowardice, which Gandhi repeatedly put below the bravery of those who resort to violence in order to defend their honor. The bravery required by those who believed in nonviolence as a creed, according to Gandhi, was the greatest. No wonder there were not many volunteers for the nonviolent army!
Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement against the British certainly captured the imagination of the people of India. Many (though by no means all) of those who did not join the movement wished it success. Getting rid of imperial rule, restoring self-respect, and making India self-reliant had a popular appeal. But there was fear amongst the minorities (e.g., many Muslims and Dalits) of being more vulnerable in independent India. Even amongst the majority communities, there was a lack of confidence in the nonviolent creed as a method of dealing with India's defense, economic and social problems (such as communalism, class exploitation, violent caste, and gender oppression). For example, most Indians would have much preferred to rely on the proper army than on the nonviolent army as a method of defense. Of course, Gandhi worked wonders during the partition riots. About the partition riots, Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, famously said, "In the Punjab I have 55,000 troops and riots on my hands. In Calcutta I have one man [Gandhi] and peace. May I pay my tribute to my one-man boundary force?" But there was only one Gandhi and he could not be everywhere.

Gandhi faced a dilemma. Either he includes in his Non-Cooperation Movement only those who believe in nonviolence as a creed. But this will restrict the movement to a "handful"; sometimes, he would say, he would be left with a nonviolent army of one! Or he could include those who believed in nonviolence as an expedience or policy in the hope that they will gradually come to practice nonviolence as a creed. He chose this second option. The volunteers of the Congress Party, which was at the forefront of the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British Raj, repeatedly pledged themselves to nonviolence in thought, word, and deed. Gandhi rightly dismissed these pledges as only existing "on paper." He was very disappointed when, under the Congress Ministry in the United Provinces in 1938, police and military were called to stop a communal riot, instead of what he had hoped would be a nonviolent army of satyagrahis.

It is true that nonviolence as an expedience or policy achieved quite a lot, as even Gandhi granted. It is remarkable how little violence there was against the British people during the independence struggle. But, of course, there was enormous communal violence, especially during the partition of India. This fact can be explained on the Gandhian view by the fact that nonviolence as a creed was never practiced except by a very small minority. Gandhi took personal responsibility for this, for he had encouraged people to join his movement in the hope that many of those who joined his nonviolence as a policy would eventually begin to practice nonviolence as a creed, and the power of their example would spread to others, and eventually the whole of India would be a shining example of nonviolence to the rest of the world.

This was the hope, but he had to face the bitter truth that there were not really enough volunteers for the nonviolent army and in any case the majority of the population would be reluctant to leave their defense to a nonviolent army. As Gandhi stressed, nonviolence is not something that can be imposed by compulsion; he even conceded that he can conceive of occasions where he would be duty-bound to vote for the military training of volunteers. And even when the people needed and wanted a nonviolent army to defend themselves, the volunteers of the nonviolent army should arise locally. For instance, during the Quit India Movement, he felt the volunteers for the defense of Assam, in the event of Japanese invasion, should primarily come from Assam, not from other parts of India. This was one reason he gave for not being able to raise the nonviolent army.

In general, he favored a bottom-up approach and was against the nonviolent army being raised by a centralized authority. The members would be chosen locally as the local people would know best who the suitable persons would be for their needs. The volunteers would need to be impartial, especially between different religions, have impeccable character, and be capable of self-sacrifice. The members chosen would not only have to deal with cases of violence but also prevent such cases from arising in the locality. So they should have knowledge of the locality and be known and respected in the locality. Such people must have a living faith in nonviolence as a creed and be prepared to lay down their lives if necessary.

Gandhi was aware that the Congress only paid lip service to such suggestions, for he knew all along that the Congress did not believe in ahimsa as a creed. Towards the end of his life, he suggested that, having gotten rid of the British Raj, the Congress should cease to be a political party and devote itself to social service, but the Congress ignored his advice. He had broken formal ties with the Congress in 1934 when he resigned from membership of the Congress to devote himself to constructive work, but his informal association with the Congress, especially its leaders, continued. He himself confessed to practicing imperfect ahimsa. In placing civil disobedience above constructive work, he showed that he had not profited from his Himalayan blunder at Chauri Chaura in 1922. In 1940, he even attributed his inability to profit from his Himalayan blunder to his fear of alienating his co-workers! But why was he afraid of alienating the co-workers when he knew they were not truly interested in such pursuits? He says there was always the hope that a significant proportion of them might eventually see the light.

He chose Jawahar Lal Nehru as his "political heir" even though he knew that Nehru did not believe in nonviolence as a creed or a way of life. There were deep disagreements between Nehru and Gandhi, but the two greatly respected each other and influenced each other. There was also deep emotional bonding between them and Gandhi had great faith in Nehru. In a speech to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in January 1942, he claimed that "ever since he fell into my net Nehru has been resisting me. He says what is uppermost in his mind but always does what I want. When I am gone he will do what I am doing now…. he will speak my language." Gandhi's prophecy about Nehru was not borne out by the facts. They both needed each other in the nationalistic struggle against imperial rule. But once this struggle was over, things would be different. In fact, Nehru had predicted this some years earlier. As Leela Gandhi says:
By the end of his life, as a result of the Nehruvian intervention in the shaping of independent India, Gandhi is transformed from the symbol of the hope of Indian independence into a perceived threat to the aspirations of the nation state. His assertions are frequently characterized as the impossible ramblings of a mad idealist who must be held in check. In another statement he (Nehru) declares “... often we discussed his fads and peculiarities and said, half-humorously, that when Swaraj came these fads must not be encouraged” (An Autobiography, 72–73).11

Actually, Nehru, earlier in the same paragraph, had praised Gandhi as a “glorious leader, and ... we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least.”12

Nehru is right that, in practice, Gandhi often adopted extreme positions, such as expecting complete transparency and total integrity from politicians. For Gandhi, commitment to truth implies living a life of integrity. But Gandhi’s practical idealism has, as we have seen, some flexibility built into it. Truth and nonviolence are two sides of the same coin. He used nonviolence in a wide sense to include lying, and so when the politician is not transparent, he commits violence. We have seen that violence can never be justified, but it can, under certain conditions, be excused, according to Gandhi.

One of the things Nehru did share with Gandhi was his passion for secularism and communal harmony. But the marginalization of Gandhian principles and ideals in mainstream independent India started in Nehruvian India and has continued to grow. For instance, when Nehru became India’s first Prime Minister, Gandhi suggested that Nehru and his team should live simply, but Nehru moved into the former commander-in-chief’s bungalow and lived in some style. It is not for nothing that he was known as the last viceroy of India! Gandhi had warned about the hollowness of independence where the brown sahibs replace the white ones. Again, his advice that the new India should consist of self-regulating villages was ignored. Instead, Nehruvian India went for centralized economic planning, heavy industries, grand dams, a strong army, and other such trappings of the modern nation state.

Gandhi wanted to spiritualize politics not in the sense of spreading any one religion in India; he believed in spirituality in the sense that was at the basis of all (great) religions and, he might have added, all morality. Gandhi believed that political power is inherently corrupting and his ideal was to move towards a minimum state and eventually to “enlightened anarchy.”

I have argued in this paper that compromises were essential to Gandhian philosophy. The trouble with Nehru, from a Gandhian standpoint, was that some of his compromises were Machiavellian and un-Gandhian in the sense that they were not “rooted in compassion.” Take, for example, his connivance in the imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah, the popular leader of Kashmir, and his refusal to condemn the Soviet Union for the invasion of Hungary soon after loudly and rightly condemning the British and French invasion of Egypt in 1956. Such actions may be defended on Machiavellian grounds and all countries do such things, but Gandhi’s hope was that India would set exemplary standards for state conduct rather than emulate other countries in such respects.

In spite of being marginalized, Gandhi would continue until the end fighting for the various causes dear to him, such as Hindu-Muslim unity and the emancipation of Dalits. He took personal responsibility for the failures of schemes he had encouraged. He distinguished his failures from failures of ahimsa. He never lost faith in true ahimsa which never fails. He asked people not to become Gandhites but ahimsaites. He tried to purify himself and others close to him. He tried to get as near to the ideal person described in the Bhagavad Gita, a Stithprajna, a person of total self-mastery, with a steady wisdom who has all passions and desires under control and never lets his passions sway his steadiness; he is also a true satyagrahi. Such a state, according to Gandhi, not only is good in itself but also has its wonderful effects through the power of example. Gandhi repeatedly talked of the great powers of the person who has attained such heights: “It is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire.”19 Again, “[i]f a single individual holds out to the end victory is certain.”20

Gandhi confesses that he is far from that state of the Stithprajna. But he ceaselessly strives for it. His striving took many forms, including fasting and Brahmacharya and his controversial experiments with women. He has been much criticized for these experiments and they may have been misguided, but I think his motives were pure. It is not as if he had coerced the women; many of them were competing with one another for the privilege of sleeping with him. It was broadly in the Tantric tradition but characteristically he gave his own twist to it. As Nicholas Gier argues in his illuminating paper “Was Gandhi a Tantric?”21 Gandhi was neither in the left-handed tradition of Tantrism, which encourages sex, nor in the right-handed tradition of Tantrism, which asks people to avoid intimacy. He chose his own method.

Bernard Shaw said somewhere that the best way of conquering temptation is to give in to it. Gandhi thought the best way is not to run away from it or to give in to it (à la Shaw) but to face it head-on. Hence, the women he slept with (without any “lust” as he would say) were naked. But was it not unfair to the women to use them for his experiments? Gandhi was a paternalist and he genuinely thought that these experiments were also good for the purification and self-mastery of the women he slept with; and with purification and self-mastery, which involves conquering the brute within us, comes enormous power to do good. Gier says Gandhi’s experiments were self-indulgent. But there is no evidence that Gandhi consciously was self-indulgent here. The idea was to promote purity and self-mastery, which, as Gandhi conceived it, is far from self-indulgence. He believed that his practical idealism would be furthered by such self-mastery, by increasing the realm of the possible.

Like Tolstoy, Gandhi believed that unattainable ideals had an awe-inspiring quality that inspire us much more than ordinary attainable ideals. In fact, Gandhi achieved a lot
during his lifetime, even though it may be far from the unattainable ideals he believed in. But the extreme claims for the possibility of individual heroics that are made by him are sometimes not borne out by events. Gandhi would explain this too modestly by saying that what looks like the failure of ahimsa only reflects his failure, he being a poor practitioner of ahimsa. At other times he implied that such statements of the power of individuals should not be taken literally; he often said that the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

Actually, he has the resources to show that such statements of the power of individuals can be literally true if the statements are taken as hypothetical statements. If an individual were to practice ahimsa in its entirety, he would have great powers, but if one cannot show any such individual in this world, it is because no one has practiced ahimsa in its fullness. This is consistent with the view that if someone does practice ahimsa in its fullness, they will be a force greater than all the forces of violence. Gandhi said this to Sue Bailey Thurman, the first African American woman to have interviewed him. But Gandhi also, in this interview, claimed something more. To Thurman’s question—“Is such an individual possible in this world?”—he replied, “Certainly.” If taken literally, this last claim is false. And Gandhi’s practical idealism is based on the assumption that some degree of violence is inevitable as long as one is a human being and that perfect ahimsa is not realizable in this world. Gandhi often admits that “nobody can practice perfect nonviolence.”

Perhaps some of Gandhi’s extreme statements are like unattainable ideals; their function is to inspire us. Sometimes they frightened his associates but, in general, he remained a compromiser. Gandhi’s tendency to compromise with his ideals can be seen clearly in the case of war. Gandhi supported the British government’s war effort during the Boer War, the Zulu Rebellion, and the First World War but not during the Second World War. Instead, he launched what came to be known as the Quit India Movement. He justified his support of the earlier wars on the grounds that, at that time, he was not convinced that the British rule was on balance evil; he thought it would help India achieve swaraj (self-rule). So he did not non-cooperate with the government, but instead enjoyed its benefits. Therefore, he felt an obligation to support the war effort.

Soon after the First World War, he was convinced that the British rule was on balance evil and he launched his famous Non-Cooperation Movement. Before that, his civil disobedience was directed against specific evils, but the Non-Cooperation Movement was directed at the total removal of the British Raj. In 1942, he launched the Quit India Movement when the British government needed Indian co-operation in the war effort. Gandhi felt that India should be given freedom or at least be allowed to move towards freedom if it is to participate in the war effort.

After India gained independence, during the Kashmir War, he went on a fast unto death. He protested over the fact that India would not be fighting the war honorably as long as Pakistan was not given its share of the assets. Once India agreed to give the assets, he reluctantly agreed to the Kashmir War even though violence was against his dharma. This was because, again, there was no nonviolent army or peace brigade in existence and, in any case, the people of Kashmir would not have accepted a peace brigade instead of the army. After his death, some peace brigades were formed, but they did not have the grandeur of the ones Gandhi had envisaged. They supplemented rather than supplanted the use of the military and police, but they did achieve moderate success in some cases.

There has, of course, been some important Gandhian work done after his death in India and elsewhere. Gandhian nonviolence has inspired non-governmental organizations, resistance movements, and protest movements all over the world. But those who wield political power have tended to pay only lip service to Gandhian ideals. A striking example is Myanmar, where Aung San Sun Kyi said she was inspired by Gandhi when she led the resistance movement. But she only seems to have believed in nonviolence as a policy, as is shown by her behavior towards the Rohingyas when she achieved political power.

Gandhi admits that good and evil are relative terms in the sense that what is good for one person can be evil for another who faces different conditions. An agriculturist may sometimes have to kill an animal; especially during a famine, it would be a sin not to kill animals in order to save the crop from being eaten up by animals. And it is no better to employ someone else to do the killing. In a somewhat similar manner, Gandhi claimed, as we saw earlier, that it is consistent for him to have supported some wars but not others when he appears to be confronted with different situations. But this sort of relativism is consistent with his claim that truth and nonviolence are the supreme principles and that violence is always wrong, even when we have a duty to commit it. A follower of nonviolence has a duty not to commit violence, a duty to minimize violence, a duty not to impose nonviolence by compulsion. Sometimes these duties conflict and this leads to moral dilemmas. Gandhi provides us with a way of dealing with such dilemmas. Broadly, it is that each time we have a conflict of duties, we should try our best to promote a nonviolent society and conditions where such dilemmas will occur less frequently in the future.

According to Gandhi, although the application of ahimsa may be relative, ahimsa itself is infallible and an eternal law of our species. That is one reason why he asked us to become ahimsaists rather than Gandhiites.

Gandhi believed that if there is any country in the world that in the future would follow the path of nonviolence and provide an example for the world to follow, it was India. Was this optimism justified? It is true that India has a great heritage of teaching of nonviolence, but it would be naïve not to recognize that nonviolence as a creed or a way of life (in the sense of love and compassion in all areas of life) was not generally practiced in India. The fact that certain virtues are preached in a certain society is often because the corresponding vices prevail in that society.

Gandhi himself was aware that, besides a great heritage, India also has a history of practices such as untouchability, gender exploitation, class exploitation, religious conflict, and animal sacrifice. But he maintained until the end that
the nonviolence of the brave could overcome such evils. The tragedy was that “India was not ready for the lesson of the ahimsa of the strong than that no programme had been devised for teaching.”

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NOTES
3. Haksar, Gandhi and Liberalism, chapter 3.
6. But Gandhi also uses nonviolence as a policy in a way that brings it much closer to nonviolence as a creed, almost co-extensive with it: “Himsa does not merely mean indulgence in physical violence; resort to trickery, falsehood, intrigue, chicanery and deceitfulness—in short, all unfair and foul means—come under the category of Himsa, and acceptance of Ahimsa, whether as a policy or a creed, necessarily implies all these things” (The Law of Love, 82, emphasis added). This is not the sense that Gandhi requires when he says people who are nonviolent in one sphere but not in others are displaying “nonviolence of the weak”; it is such people, according to Gandhi, who constituted the bulk of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Gandhi and Moral Agency: A Study of Political Literature

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ABSTRACT
Despite decades of writings on Gandhi’s moral and political thought, some of Gandhi’s philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated. One such concept is Gandhi’s idea of moral agency. I critically engage with some recent political-historical literature on Gandhi to extract philosophical discussions in the vicinity of moral agency. For this, I take two related steps. First, I argue that even though this literature presents considerable theoretical discussion of Gandhi’s ideas, when considered individually, this literature produces only an incomplete picture of Gandhi’s philosophical concepts. Second, I show that a comprehensive view of Gandhi’s concepts emerges when grounded in the concept of moral agency. To this second end, I tie together various individual discussions on satya (truth), ahimsā (nonviolence), and disinterest to reveal the subliminal presence of detached moral agency in Gandhi’s thought.

I. INTRODUCTION
Despite decades of writings on Gandhi’s moral and political thought, some of Gandhi’s philosophical moral concepts are still not theoretically articulated. One such concept is Gandhi’s idea of moral agency. A significant reason for such a lack of theoretical articulation is that the literature on Gandhi’s thought, with a few exceptions, typically takes an integrated view of Gandhi’s life and his ideas. Often, the integrated reading of Gandhi’s ideas, like nonviolence, truth, and self-rule, conceals the theoretical basis of his thoughts. In fact, in some cases, such integrated reading leads to a wrong understanding of Gandhi’s ideas; for example, the image of Gandhi as a saint has led to distorted understanding of Gandhi’s views on friendship and welfare. So, in the following, I discuss some of the recent historical-political literature on Gandhi’s ideas that avoids such a reading of Gandhi. Contrary to an integrated reading of Gandhi’s ideas, the selected historical-political literature provides theoretical analyses of Gandhi’s concepts.

Given that historical-political literature is not directly concerned with moral philosophical concepts in Gandhi’s
thought, the moral concepts appear rather tangentially in the said literature. So, I extract Gandhi’s moral concepts from these theoretical discussions. I take two related steps in extracting these moral philosophical ideas. First, I highlight how Gandhi’s conceptions have underlying moral ideals; for instance, his conception of truth is not mere truth-telling but a search for objective principles, which may be understood only with detachment from selfish interests. Second, I suggest how some of the characterizations proposed in this literature are insufficient to establish the necessary inter-relations in the concepts proposed by Gandhi. For example, a Gandhian case for political realism cannot be construed on the basis of nonviolence while ignoring Gandhi’s concept of swarāj (self-rule), the ideal society whose conception is essentially grounded in nonviolence. A framework view of Gandhi’s different moral conceptions is necessary to appreciate his moral universe.

My view is that a notion of moral agency forms the basis for Gandhi’s framework of thought. By moral agency, I simply mean to suggest that the concept of an agent holds a central space in Gandhi’s moral thought in the sense that most of Gandhi’s ideals make better sense when read as characteristics of moral agents. That is, in Gandhi’s scheme, truth is desired by someone, satyāgraha and nonviolence are states of mind, swarāj is attained by free agents, and so on. I will show that the literature I survey attempts to reach Gandhi’s notion of moral agency from several directions, even though individually their respective directions seem insufficient. The task is to place these attempts in a coherent framework grounded in detached moral agency. It must be noted that I do not provide a detailed characterization of Gandhi’s notion of detached moral agency in the present paper. Such characterization falls outside the scope of the present paper mainly because the literature I survey does not itself engage with the said notion.

II. NONVIOLENCE AND MORAL AGENCY

Political theorist Karuna Mantena argues that Gandhi’s ideas constitute “transformative political realism,” which basically means constructing political ideas as means rather than as ends. Mantena encourages transformative political realism in contrast to some problematic aspects of classical political idealism. She points out that, in political idealism, particular decisions are guided by ideals like justice and equality. Since these ideals as ends are fixed, their achievement often leads to “unintended consequences” such as violence for attaining justice. Mantena contends that Gandhi’s insistence on nonviolence and “means over the ends” shows that Gandhi was aware of these unintended consequences of idealism in politics. Thus, Mantena regards nonviolence as the central conception in Gandhi’s moral and political thought to offer a strong contrast to classical political idealism. She argues that Gandhi’s insistence on nonviolent means, instead of certain idealized ends, induces sensitivity towards the context in the actions undertaken.

With a similar emphasis on Gandhi’s insistence on means, Uday Mehta argues that Gandhi’s nonviolence articulates “a contempt towards instrumentality of actions.” In Mehta’s view, political idealism treats particular actions as mere instruments to arrive at pre-decided ideals like justice and equality. Extending the scope of Gandhi’s emphasis on means, Faisal Devji argues that Gandhi’s insistence on means and the adjoining principle of nonviolence prevents the sacrifice of the present morality for future virtues. For instance, war is an archetypical example of promising future peace by killings in the present time. In fact, Devji contends that Gandhi reverses this trend and sacrifices the future for present morality.

There are two implications of such an articulation of Gandhi’s notion of nonviolence. First, it demands moral concern in each social and political action, and second, it suggests, especially in Devji’s work, that Gandhi’s thinking is possibly not directed to the future or an ideal. I appreciate the first, but I find the second to be a limited reading of Gandhi’s moral thinking; I will explain my reasons for this after discussing the first implication. Nonviolence, as focused on the present (means) rather than the future (ends), is meant to underline that Gandhi’s moral view is uncompromising of the morality in each action.

As noted, a moral justification of the use of authoritative violence is often couched in terms of ideals like peace and justice. Gandhi perceives this as a straight contradiction. He asserts that the goal of a moral society cannot be based on achieving it by immoral means, and thus his well-known rejection of violence even to overthrow oppressive rule follows. This has radical consequences for moral responsibility. Under this scheme, the morality of action is contained within itself, and the immorality of actions cannot be justified in terms of future morality. So, Gandhi’s requirement of nonviolence demands moral responsibility on the part of the agent; the agent is asked to judge at every point whether or not the requirement of nonviolence is met.

This idea of nonviolence as moral responsibility can be located in Gandhi’s rejection of just-war views advanced in the classical Indian text the Bhagavad Gītā (henceforth, the Gītā). Krṣṇa motivates Arjuna not to focus on the morality of the present action and prescribes killings, even of loved ones, for securing a just kingdom. Gandhi opposes this view in his translation and lectures on the Gītā. He says that a just action “must not mean indifference to the results.” Gandhi says, “[I]n regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto [adopted to perform that action], and the capacity for it.” As against pre-ordained injunctions from caste or society, Gandhi advocates a need for reflection and knowing one’s responsibility. Gandhi observes that “we have to reflect to discover what our duty is.”

Attention on the morality of each action turns the focus on responsibility and agency in that the performance of each action demands reflection and responsibility on the part of the agent. In contemporary debates in moral philosophy, the primacy of agency is often preferred to a principle-based approach to action; the latter is often criticized for its lack of focus on the agent and the individual. If agency is indeed central for Gandhi, we need to find out which kind of agency brings about nonviolent action. I will attempt to uncover the aspects of Gandhi’s notion of agency in the later sections of the present paper. For now, I turn to
the second implication—Gandhi’s thinking is possibly not directed to the future or an ideal.

This second implication suggests that Gandhi’s nonviolence is concerned only with the present (means). Such a view considerably ignores Gandhi’s celebrated ideal conceptions, namely, swarāj (self-rule) and sarvodaya (welfare for all). Swarāj as an ideal makes for ends in the Gandhian scheme. Gandhi used the term swarāj rather broadly, which includes not only the moral condition of self-rule but also political freedom of individuals from excessive control of government, economic freedom of individuals and self-sustenance of the poor, national freedom from British rule, and so on.13 Swarāj, as political, economic, and national freedom, is regarded as the utopian state of society, which comprises morally self-governing individuals; these individuals constitute a society based on the principle of sarvodaya, meaning upliftment of all. Thus, Gandhi’s swarāj has at least two visible components: the moral component of self-rule and the ideal component of political and economic freedom, which are the goals of such morally governed individuals.

In her comments on Gandhi’s notion of swarāj, Mantena refers to swarāj as self-rule, which appears to accommodate the cherished goals within self-rule as follows: “Abstract ends need grounding in immediate, intimate, and precise practices as a way to ward off the temptation to look for ‘short-violent-cuts’ for temporary but ultimately self-defeating gains.”14 Mantena regards the ideal aspects of swarāj as abstract, which are reliant on the immediate aspects. Mantena’s interpretation of the ideal aspects of Gandhi’s swarāj as subservient to the immediate can be questioned. To repeat, Mantena’s main claim is that swarāj is grounded in immediate actions, but this claim alone does not give us reasons to give up the ideal aspects of swarāj. Gandhi’s own use of swarāj as an ideal (society) doesn’t provide a basis for such claims of Mantena either. On the contrary, it seems more reasonable to claim that, for Gandhi, the future morality is consistent with the morality of the present rather than subservient to it.

Here, I am only suggesting an alternate way to relate means and ends. That is, it need not be the case, as Mantena seems to propose, that the end is built into the means. The case for means to relate to ends could be that only a careful selection of means is suited for the end. In this alternate reading, nonviolence is a necessary condition for swarāj, not the sufficient one. In my view, Mantena ignores the classical ideal aspects of Gandhi’s thoughts due to the demands of her position as a political realist. The position appears to be such that political realism is incompatible with political idealism. That may well be the case with the forms of Western political idealism Mantena addresses, but as suggested, Gandhi’s political idealism does not suffer from the same problem.15 I will not pursue this matter any further because debates in political theory are not my basic concern.16

Once we appreciate the significance of Gandhi’s notion of nonviolence as a means to attain some distant ideals, both the role and the goal of the moral agent in Gandhi’s scheme become perspicuous. With reflection and knowledge, Gandhi’s agents are meant to adhere to the principle of nonviolence at every step to attain swarāj and to reach sarvodaya. Once we see the nonviolent agent as engaged primarily in the welfare of others, a more specific notion of moral agency emerges. The following discussion on Gandhi’s notion of truth is expected to throw more light on this aspect of moral agency.

III. TRUTH AND AGENCY

Another prominent moral concept in Gandhi’s thought is satya (truth) and its complement satyāgraha (desire or quest for truth). Interestingly, Mantena translates satyāgraha as nonviolent action and does not directly incorporate the concept of truth.17 The notion of satyāgraha as search for truth is often understood as reaching for the ideal. So, it could be that Mantena misses out on the truth aspect of satyāgraha due to her commitment to political realism.18 However, if truth is not included in Gandhi’s frame of thought, then the intrinsic connection between truth and nonviolence in Gandhi’s thinking will be lost. Gandhi tied the two together in the following remarks: “ahimsā is the means and truth is the end” and nonviolence and truth are like “the two sides of a coin.”19 I will presently develop this connection.

Unlike Mantena’s virtual denial of truth in satyāgraha, Shruti Kapila regards truth to be the key to understanding Gandhi’s politics. Kapila argues that Gandhi’s politics requires “attachment to the truth,” which is a close paraphrase of the idea of satyāgraha.20 But Kapila doesn’t explain what it means to hold such an attachment and how an agent forms it. Needless to say, Kapila views attachment as a positive idea since it concerns truth. Interestingly, the notion of attachment also appears in Mantena’s reading of Gandhi, but in a sense almost contrary to Kapila’s use of “attachment.” These apparently contrary notions of attachment take us closer to Gandhi’s idea of moral agency. Let’s see how.

Modern politics generally aims to advocate resolution of conflicts that arise due to attachment to interests, such as class interests and territorial interests. Mantena claims that Gandhi countered modern politics by replacing attachment to interest with detachment from interest.21 Under “interest,” Mantena includes class interests, property interests, caste interests, and the like.22 Mantena claims that, in Gandhi’s view, “principled conviction (in one’s own interest) is an alibi for violence.”23 In this sense, attachment (to interests) is a negative idea, according to Mantena, since it is the source of violence. In contrast, detachment (from interests) is a positive idea as a source of nonviolence because detachment takes the form of “selfless action that aim[s] at actively minimizing harm and suffering.”24 Thus, selfless action, according to Mantena, promotes nonviolence in the form of non-harm.

When put together, Mantena and Kapila’s analyses throw significant light on the notion of agency as a satyāgrahi. Mantena contends that nonviolence asserts renunciation of selfishness, and Kapila asserts that Gandhi demands attachment to, or conviction for, truth. Given that both the aspects of attachment to truth and detachment from selfish interests are indeed present in Gandhi, agency emerges as
But there are limitations in trying to arrive at a virtue.

Devji contrasts disinterested friendship with state-

The idea is to give up the expectation of gain in one's relation with the other. Devji contrasts disinterested friendship with state-mediated contracts, as well as with mere brotherhood. According to Devji, the conception of brotherhood is limited and interested in that it is naturally given; brotherhood is laced with betrayal, violence, and sexual rivalry. Similarly, contractual relations which are mediated by the state are based on shared selfish interests; the registration of tenancy between the tenant and the landlord is executed to preserve the interests of both. As against the relations based on brotherhood and contracts, disinterested friendship is completely voluntary; in other words, social relations based on disinterest are purely for the sake of friendship. According to the disinterested notion of friendship, the relationship of friendship between individuals assumes the nature of a moral imperative instead of a relationship formed out of convenience of interest.

However, neither Kapila nor Mantena by themselves explain this connection between truth, nonviolence, and detachment in their individual narratives on Gandhi's thought. Mantena is unable to incorporate truth into her extensive narrative on nonviolence due to her non-ideal conception of morality. Kapila, in contrast, does not align her narrative on truth to the significance of nonviolence in the form of selflessness. It is worth underlining that apart from being incomplete, these studies on Gandhi are disjointed due to the absence of a bridging concept; no concept relates nonviolence (Mantena) and truth (Kapila).

When we adopt a more comprehensive view of Gandhi's moral concepts, three aspects of Gandhi's characterization of agency emerge: moral responsibility of adhering to nonviolence, detachment from selfish interests to make possible the exercise of moral responsibility, and attachment to truth. Let's see if there is any narrative in the existing literature which coherently ties these features together.

IV. DETACHMENT AND AGENCY

Independently of the literature discussed so far, the concept of detachment seems to bridge the concepts of nonviolence and truth in Gandhi, as hinted. There are indeed some suggestions in political literature that directly refer to a concept of detached agency in Gandhi's thought. Faisal Devji's analysis of Gandhi's thought is useful here. Devji criticizes modern politics as sacrificing present morality in order to reach some ideal in the future. According to Devji, Gandhi presents a contrasting picture to such a view of politics. Devji argues that Gandhi insists on the present and ignores the future. Devji invokes the concept of disinterest to elaborate on one aspect of Gandhi's opposition to modern politics. As noted, modern politics is sometimes understood in terms of conflicting interests. According to Devji, Gandhi alters the interest-based conception of politics with the notion of disinterested social relations. "Disinterest" means repudiation of one's interests, especially those of prejudice, for instance, the prejudice of mild enmity between Hindus and Muslims. In that sense, Devji's notion of disinterest is a special case of the more general notion of detachment invoked by Mantena.

Devji views disinterest as a means of mutual arbitration on existing prejudice between parties. The idea is to give up the expectation of gain in one's relation with the other. Devji contrasts disinterested friendship with state-
attachment to truth. Given the limited scope of the present paper, it is best that I postpone the task of developing the proposal to interpret disinterest as a virtue to another occasion. But this at least makes clear how it is possible to develop Devji's somewhat restricted idea of disinterest in terms of detached moral agency in Gandhi's thought.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS
As anticipated in the introduction, several aspects of these historical-political studies, individually and collectively, signal the underlying conception of moral agency. Shruti Kapila asserts the importance of self-transformation and attachment to the idea of truth by the agents. Faisal Devji refers to disinterest as a particular form of social relation, that is, disinterested friendship. But references to agency are rather vague and restricted in these accounts of Gandhi's thoughts. The common feature that restricts these analyses in directly discussing agency is that these accounts are preoccupied with political and historical perspectives instead of a moral perspective. For instance, Devji's analysis of Gandhi's moral conceptions is limited to the historical contexts of Gandhi, Mantena's discussion to her defense of political realism, and Kapila's narrative to political judgment; none seem to directly appeal to the idea of moral agency.

However, my main purpose in this paper has been to show that even if there are various ways in which we reach crucial ideas like attachment to truth, detachment from selfish interest, moral responsibility, and social disinterest, the notion of moral agency is a possible common ground where all these ideas can meaningfully sit together. Agency as a common ground to Gandhi's various concepts can be articulated as follows: The agents retain moral responsibility, ideas of attachment and detachment meaningfully ascribe to individuals, and agents are disinterested.

Needless to say, the idea of detached moral agency needs much explanation and scrutiny. In the present paper, my main aim has been restricted to underlining the primacy of moral agency in Gandhi's moral framework. My sense is that once we appreciate such primacy of moral agency in his thought, various other aspects of Gandhi's thinking appear to expand to the general aspects of moral philosophy. For example, we can now appreciate how there is a possibility to see a version of virtue ethics in Gandhi's thinking. The idea of detached moral agency as a virtue leads to the necessity of nonviolence. Also, in a very preliminary manner, such a notion of agency reveals the metaethical possibility of viewing the goal of the welfare of the other as the content of moral truth. For Gandhi, satyagraha is intrinsically connected to sarvodaya.

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NOTES
1. Earlier objections to this biographical approach were made by Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi the Philosopher," Economic and Political Weekly 38, no. 39 (2003): 4159–63. There are many challenges to the theoretical articulation of Gandhi’s moral concepts. I have discussed some of the methodological challenges to a metaethical study of Gandhi in my "Approaching Gandhian Metaethics: Some Methodological Issues," in History of Indian Ethics: Gender, Justice, and Ecology, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria and Amy Rayner (New Delhi: Routledge, forthcoming).
3. The centrality and the features of Gandhi’s notion of detached moral agency were discussed in Samiksha Goyal, "Moral Agency in Gandhi’s Thought," Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division, April 9, 2021, virtual presentation.
Gandhi’s Means-Ends Argument Revisited
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ABSTRACT
“The means may be likened to a seed, and the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.” Gandhi uses this analogy as well as several other analogies for the relation between means and ends as an argument for his insistence that resistance to oppression must always be nonviolent. In this paper, I will attempt to unpack the significance of each of these analogies as an argument for nonviolent resistance. I will also argue that Gandhi’s means-ends argument cannot be divorced from certain political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions, and I will discuss the significance of these assumptions.

I. INTRODUCTION
The United States invaded Afghanistan twenty years ago. The rationale of then-President George W. Bush was that even though the Taliban was not itself the perpetrators of the attack on the World Trade Center, members of the Taliban were still responsible because they had “harbored” those who had helped to organize the attack. The ensuing fighting over the last twenty years has cost the lives of 2,442 American soldiers and almost 170,000 Afghans, of whom one-third were civilians. The United States has also spent $2.313 trillion on operations in the war. It had also put the United States on a trajectory in which it sanctioned torture, kidnapping, and targeted assassinations with the use of drones. Now, after spending twenty years fighting the Taliban, the United States has completely withdrawn its military from Afghanistan, and President Joseph Biden conceded that the United States has indeed lost the war.

Only a few days before withdrawing from Afghanistan and completing the evacuation process, two suicide bombers at the Abbey Gate of the International Airport in Kabul killed at least thirteen American soldiers and perhaps more than 170 Afghans hoping to be evacuated. In his comments to the press concerning this attack, President Biden said, “To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay.” Subsequently, the United States military launched a retaliatory drone strike that killed two ISIS militants and wounded another, although it was not known whether they were themselves involved in the attack at the Kabul airport. And on August 29, 2021, one day before the United States announced that it had completed the evacuation of American troops, an American drone strike was reported to have killed ten civilians, including seven children, an aid worker for an American charity organization, and a contractor for the US military. Thus, the logic of war prevails. When violence occurs, the response must be retaliatory violence, even in defeat.

Gandhi is undoubtedly the most well-known critic of the logic of war and advocate of nonviolence in the twentieth century. His advocacy, of course, took the form of a nonviolent practice that developed powerful mass movements in both South Africa and India. Gandhi also constructed a number of eloquent arguments for his claim that resistance to oppression and injustice should remain nonviolent. In this article, I will revisit what I consider to be his most powerful argument for nonviolent resistance—Gandhi’s means-ends argument. I will, however, attempt to demonstrate that this argument cannot be divorced from certain practical political, psychological, and spiritual assumptions.

Before proceeding further, it is important to make clear what Gandhi is arguing for. Nonviolent resistance, which Gandhi calls Satyagraha, must be distinguished from simply being nonviolent in the face of oppression or injustice. In the ordinary use of the term, one can be “nonviolent” by doing nothing or by running away from danger. For Gandhi, this is not genuine nonviolence. Furthermore, doing nothing or running away from danger is unacceptable, as he insisted that there is an obligation to confront and resist oppression and injustice. Or a group of people may resist nonviolently because they are not yet strong enough to challenge the oppressors with violence. Here again, this is not Gandhi’s understanding of nonviolent resistance, as it is precisely when a group is strong enough to use violence against the oppressor that it can demonstrate its commitment to nonviolence. Nonviolent resistance is not “passive resistance,” although Gandhi in his earlier writings sometimes uses that term, but active strategically planned non-cooperation. Furthermore, nonviolent resistance may also involve more direct forms of intervention—obstruction, e.g., sit-ins, or symbolic self-sacrifice, e.g., hunger strikes. What it must not do, however, is initiate violence. It must...
not direct violent attacks against the agents of oppression, against the leadership of an oppressive regime, or even against symbolic representations of the oppressive regime. Furthermore, the participants in Satyagraha campaigns must allow blows to be inflicted on their bodies by the agents of oppression without striking back.

II. THE ARGUMENTS

Gandhi’s means-ends argument is actually a complex of interconnected arguments, all of which attempt to demonstrate that using violence as a means against an injustice cannot produce a just result. In contrast, most revolutionaries historically have subscribed to the assumption that when an unjust regime uses violence to maintain its power, it must be met with violent force. A more moderate version of this assumption can grant that there are occasions when violent force may not be necessary, but it still insists that revolutionaries must at least be prepared to use violence. In both these forms, the revolutionary logic remains within the orbit of the logic of war.

The most direct formulation of his means-ends argument appears in Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, which is translated literally as “home rule.” This was written by Gandhi in 1909 as he was returning by ship from England to South Africa, after having failed in his attempt to get the British to end its anti-Indian legislation in South Africa. *Hind Swaraj* is addressed to Indian nationalists of various persuasions, and it is organized as a dialogue between a “Reader” who poses questions and an “Editor” who, in effect, gives Gandhi’s answers to these questions. A number of its chapters contain a critique of the West’s obsession with technology and material goods, while other chapters were addressed to those who sought independence from the British Empire through violent force and often by acts of terrorism.

Gandhi allows that it is possible to drive out the colonial oppressors through violent force, but he argues that this will not produce true independence, as such violence only replaces one form of tyranny with another. “My patriotism,” Gandhi proclaimed, “does not teach me that I am to allow people to be crushed under the heel of Indian princes if only the English retire.” In the chapter entitled “Brute Force,” Gandhi has the Reader pose what is perhaps the central question of the relation of means to ends. “Why should we not obtain our goal, which is good, by any means whatsoever, even by using violence? Shall I think of the means when I have to deal with a thief in the house? My duty is to drive him out anyhow. You seem to admit that we have received nothing, and that we shall receive nothing by petitioning. Why, then, may we not do so by using brute force?”

Gandhi’s reply takes the form of three analogies, which constitute an extended argument for the relation between means and ends. Here is the first analogy.

Your belief that there is not a connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. . . . Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom.

Here is the second analogy, which is the best-known of his analogies.

The means may be likened to a seed, the end to the tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan. . . . We reap exactly as we sow.

In the third analogy, Gandhi considers the difference between stealing a watch, buying a watch, and being given a watch as a gift. Gandhi here argues that while, in one sense, the end seems to be the same since the individual is now in possession of a watch, if it is, in fact, quite different. Specifically, he argues that “according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means.”

While each of these analogies has a superficial plausibility, we need to unpack them and consider how good they are as arguments for the conclusion that resistance to oppression and injustice must remain nonviolent. Consider the first analogy—that we cannot get a rose through a noxious weed or use a cart to cross the ocean. The point of the analogy is to highlight that only certain structural forms can produce certain desired results and that only certain tools will accomplish certain goals. However, if that is all that is meant by the relation of means and ends, then no one would disagree. As an argument for nonviolence, it begs the question, for what we want to know is not simply that we need some appropriate method to challenge oppression but what form of activity will be effective in doing so. Furthermore, as explained above, Gandhi concedes that it is possible to drive the British out of India through violent means. The problem, for Gandhi, is not that violence cannot be effective in decolonization but whether, in the process of using this tool, the end will be undesirable. Gandhi’s claim is that decolonization achieved through violence will not lead to true independence. In other words, what we need to know is why violent resistance cannot lead to this end.

In the second analogy, the claim is not merely that we need an appropriate means to accomplish the task but that the activity is internally related to the goal achieved, as a seed to a tree. In other words, the end is not something that awaits the result of the activity but is itself organized and shaped by the activity. Thus, what we call the means and the ends are segments of a continuous process. If the means are unjust, then the result will have that injustice built into it. Notice, however, that the analogy assumes that violence is inherently unjust. In contrast, an advocate of violence might well argue that if violence is used in pursuit of a just cause and is used judiciously with attention to certain moral norms, it is not unjust. In other words, the advocate of just revolutionary violence might appeal to the just war tradition and argue, by extension, in favor of
certain reasonable moral criteria of revolutionary warfare. In fact, even if those moral norms were not respected, it is not clear why revolutionary violence will inevitably corrupt the new society to be created.

The last analogy raises a different kind of problem. Clearly, if one steals a watch, one has in their possession a stolen watch. Nonetheless, the watch that is stolen functions just as well for telling time as a watch that is purchased or is a gift. In other words, while the thief has done something wrong, the goal achieved—possessing a reliable watch—is not affected by the activity which has led to its possession. In all, the three sets of analogies need some more additional premises to be successful as arguments for nonviolent resistance.

There is an additional argument in this same chapter of *Hind Swaraj* embedded in a thought experiment that Gandhi constructs. This thought experiment is his answer to the Reader’s question about the need to drive the thief out of the house by any means. Gandhi considers two scenarios. In the first, he imagines that you are so angry that you gather your neighbors together to attack the robber, and then she and her associated robbers retaliate in kind. The result is a continual escalation of violence. In the second scenario, you put your anger aside, take pity on the robber, and decide instead to destroy her motives for stealing. When the robber comes again, you make your possessions easily accessible. While she may steal again, she becomes confused and agitated, appreciates your loving heart, returns your things, and gives up stealing. While Gandhi admits that robbers will not always act in this way, he insists that the difference between these two scenarios demonstrates “that fair means alone can produce fair results and that . . . the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms.”

I live in New York City and making my possessions more accessible to thieves will not likely produce the results that Gandhi imagines. In fact, both scenarios seem unlikely even in a small village or in almost any other real situation. However, I assume that the thought experiment is not an attempt to account literally for the behavior of actual thieves but rather a parable concerning the logic of violence. I began this article with reflections on the war in Afghanistan and the inability of the United States government to consider opting out of the retaliatory logic of war, even in defeat. The point of these two scenarios as a parable is to consider how we are trapped ideologically in that logic and what alternatives are possible to move us away from it. I now want to consider Gandhi’s implicit assumptions, two of which are suggested by this parable, and the way that these assumptions can ground Gandhi’s arguments and move us away from the logic of war. The two assumptions highlighted by this parable are that violence leads to escalating cycles of retaliation and that “the force of love and pity” is stronger than physical force.

### III. VIOLENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

“To use brute force . . . means that we want our opponent to do by force that which we desire but he does not. And if such a force is justifiable, surely he is entitled to do likewise by us. And so we shall never come to an agreement. We may simply fancy, like the blind horse moving in a circle round a mill, that we are making progress.” Each side in the struggle draws sustenance and legitimation from the violence of the other side against it. In fact, being attacked violently is not just a loss of human life but is also experienced, by those who remain alive, as psychological humiliation; and so, to compensate for that humiliation, each side needs to increase its violence. Eventually, one side may lose. But whatever the gain of the other side, the logic of war is reinforced; and it may only be a question of time before there is a new war, often initiated by the descendants of those who were defeated. When Germany was defeated in World War I, this paved the way for its reassertion of military power, leading to World War II. The US invasion of Afghanistan has led to an endless cycle of violence and ultimately, twenty years later, to the Taliban’s return to power.

However, as bad as the continual cycles of violent escalation are, the problem is deeper. Even if the ostensible goal has been reached and is not in immediate danger of being reversed, violence brings about several additional problems. The first is that, whatever the advocates of just war or just revolution may claim, violence is almost never self-limiting. Ronald Terchek puts the point this way: “Part of Gandhi’s.analogy reveals that violence stems from his view that violence cannot be easily contained. Too often, he argues, it invades, like a cancer, anything that stands in its hungry way. Justifying the use of violence to serve some higher end, those who practice violence often extend its use to anyone and anything they believe get in the way of their goals.” Furthermore, violence has a number of unintended spin-off effects that spread out over time. Michael N. Nagler uses an analogy an “event cone” in physics. “Even the tiniest event—say the emission of a gamma from a decaying particle—ramifies into the future, changing patterns and altering seemingly unrelated events at a great remove in time and space. When you see its event cone, the working of violence begins to look a lot less ‘surgical.’ It too can create a ‘butterfly effect’ of cascading disorder.”

Finally, there is an even more serious problem to which Gandhi alludes in the second and third analogies. Let us assume that the revolutionaries are successful and that they attempt to organize the society according to their ideal of justice. However, they have themselves been changed through their use of violence. The agent cannot be separated from the action. The watch that is stolen is not just a watch, but the agent is also a thief who is in possession of a watch, and the revolutionaries, who have achieved their goal through violence, are now violent human beings in charge of a new regime. It is not surprising that, in societies created through revolutionary violence, those who are now in control often attack each other, that violent factional disputes often occur, and that violent repression to maintain order becomes the norm. In short, the end created by violent means is not the ideal just society envisioned by the revolutionaries but a society which is within the logic of war, with all its continued violent consequences. Thus, what is created by a violent revolution is an endorsement of the logic of war. “For Gandhi,” writes Karuna Mantena, “when coercion is deemed rightful conduct against recalcitrant opponents or
Nonviolent resistance is self-limiting. To quote Mantena again: “The novelty of Gandhian satyagraha (nonviolent action) lies in its self-limiting character; it is a form of action that seeks both to constrain the negative consequences of politics and work toward the reform of existing political relations and institutions.” Nonviolent resistance is self-limiting in several ways. First, it keeps the possibility of dialogue with the opponent open. Second, it opts out of the logic of war with its escalating cycles of violence and unintended consequences. Third, the discipline of nonviolence is itself a form of self-limitation.

However, Gandhi recognizes that nonviolent resistance will also escalate when those in power refuse to concede their just demands, but this escalation does not lead to violent conflict without limits. If the momentum is maintained, consistent nonviolent resistance will destabilize the oppressive regime and bring about a just resolution to the conflict. “If a regime intends to remain in power indefinitely, it will require extensive, long-term interaction with those it rules . . . the broader the regime’s system of control, the more vulnerable it is, because it depends on too many actors to ensure that violence against resisters will always work.” The oppressive regime is vulnerable because, when challenged, it depends on violence to maintain control.

Furthermore, as Gene Sharp has argued, the power of the ruling body is never monolithic and depends “intimately upon the obedience and cooperation of the subjects.” The power of the rulers requires the tacit consent of their citizenry. If enough citizens withdraw their consent, the regime collapses. If the regime responds to nonviolent resisters with violence, they undermine their moral authority, and more people will be likely to join the resistance. If they do not respond, then the nonviolent movement is perceived as winning, and again more people will be willing to join it. What gives the nonviolent resistance its power is precisely its ability to remain nonviolent in the face of the violence of those in power. This was a point recognized by a secretary to General Smuts, who, as head of the South African government in Transvaal, was Gandhi’s main adversary. “I often wish that you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone . . . and that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.” Richard Gregg has described this strategy as a “moral jiu-jitsu.” “The nonviolence and good will of the victim [the nonviolent resister] act in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the user of physical jiu-jitsu does, causing the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance would render him.” However, while we can explain the effectiveness in such political and psychological terms, Gandhi believes that Satyagraha embodies and manifests a deeper spiritual truth.

V. THE POWER OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: THE LAW OF LOVE AND THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

At the spiritual level, Gandhi called nonviolent resistance “truth-force,” “soul-force,” and “love-force.” The truth, for Gandhi, is that there exists “some deeper, permanent power or force that allows us to experience the meaningful interrelatedness and unity of all reality.” Human beings are interconnected on some fundamental spiritual level, what Gandhi sometimes refers to as “heart unity,” and the utilization of this deeper spiritual connection is what Gandhi terms “the force of love.” Thus, “the force of love is the same as the force of soul or truth.” Given this deep spiritual interconnection, the force of love entails ahimsa (non-harm), and, therefore, opposition to oppressive institutions cannot intend to harm those who occupy the seats of power or their agents. Furthermore, this force must be understood to work in certain ways, which Gandhi calls “the law of love,” and those who would harness this force effectively must do so by recognizing how this law works.

“The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work great wonders.”

What nonviolent resisters do is develop a strategy by which they can connect with their opponents even as they oppose them. Their nonviolence then becomes a form of communication, since it expresses a respect for the humanity of their opponents and makes clear that while they seek to destroy the oppressive system, they do not wish to destroy the human beings who are the agents of that oppressive system. They, therefore, offer the agents of oppression the opportunity to understand the way in which they too are trapped within the system of oppression. This opens the possibility of destabilizing not just the regime but the logic of war and, therefore, provides an incentive for the oppressors themselves to change.

The law of love works through the law of suffering. Those who refuse to cooperate with the oppressive system will suffer the consequences, e.g., loss of position, prison, or some other form of punishment. If blows are struck, they will receive them without violently responding. Gandhi argues that such suffering is not a byproduct of nonviolent resistance but an essential component. “Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer.” The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.” Gandhi offers several reasons for this position. First, any significant change involves suffering. “No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering. Mothers suffer so that the child may live. The condition of the wheat growing is that the seed grain should perish.” Second, since we can always be mistaken about our cause, better to sacrifice oneself than
to sacrifice another. “If this kind of force is used in a cause that is unjust, only the person using it suffers.” Third, it opens a potential heart-unity communication with the oppressor. Gandhi assumes that in the long run “the sight of suffering on multitudes of people will melt the heart of the aggressor and induce him to desist from his course of violence.” Finally, nonviolent resisters communicate to their opponent the strength of their conviction in a way that violence cannot, as they demonstrate that their suffering is a conscious choice. “Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means pitting of one’s own soul against the will of the tyrant.” In all, the law of love and the law of suffering are unified in nonviolent resistance as a spiritual means to attain a just end.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF NONVIOLENCE

If Gandhi’s analysis is correct, nonviolent resistance is the only way to attain a reasonably just end. However, there are situations in which violence may seem unavoidable. How can we respond nonviolently to an oppressor whose intent is genocide? What kind of nonviolent resistance is possible against a terrorist group? Even if Gandhi is correct that violence always corrupts the end, it would sometimes seem that we have no choice but to be violent.

It may come as a surprise to some readers that Gandhi himself recognized that complete nonviolence is not always possible. Gandhi insists that if the choice is between cowardice or opposing injustice with violence, then violence is preferable. When Gandhi’s son asked what he (his son) should have done had he been present when his father was almost killed, Gandhi replied “that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence.”

There are, therefore, no easy answers to these questions. There may be some situations where there are no opportunities for effective communicative nonviolent resistance and where the use of violence against an immanent attack may be the least violent response. However, if we do choose to use violence, we must be clear that there are no other options, we must restrict the violence to a minimum, we must attempt to use it in a way that allows for the possibility of nonviolent interaction in the future, we must not glorify the violence, and we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are doing something that is anything more than a tragedy.

Before concluding, I want to consider whether Gandhi has anything reasonable to say about a current example—the Ukrainian violent resistance to Russia’s invasion. As I am finishing this article, the war in Ukraine has been going on for over four months with huge casualties on both sides. However, only one country—Russia—has invaded the territory of the other country, and all the fighting and, with rare exceptions, all the bombing has taken place within the territory of Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia has employed massive terror bombing, sometimes using cluster and phosphorous munitions and often directly targeting civilians, hitting residential buildings, markets, and train stations that have no discernible military purpose, as well as hospitals, schools, theaters, and civilian shelters. Finally, there have been credible reports of significant human rights abuses by Russian soldiers, abuses that, in some cases, appear to have been organized from above. Russia’s goal, at least initially, seemed to be the occupation of the whole territory of Ukraine and the erasure of Ukraine as a country and as a culture. Thus, it would be reasonable to say that the Ukrainian military resistance was a fight for the self-determination of Ukraine as both a political and cultural entity, a goal to which Gandhi would certainly have been sympathetic. However, insofar as the Ukrainian resistance is a massively violent one, could there be a reasonable nonviolent alternative?

Gandhi developed his analysis of nonviolent resistance in the context of the colonial occupation of South Africa and India and not as a means to defend one state against the invasion by another. However, in the weekly journal Harijan in 1940, Gandhi did briefly consider how India, once it achieved national independence through nonviolent means, could respond to the aggression of another state without resort to violence. While recognizing that it is unlikely that modern states could, in general, accept nonviolence as a policy, Gandhi, in that article, offered his own suggestions for what a people committed to nonviolence might do. The first is that the representatives of the state would let the occupiers in without resistance, but then they would make clear that they would not cooperate in any way with the occupiers, even if that meant death. The second is that the people, having been trained in nonviolent resistance, “would offer themselves unarmed as fodder for the aggressor’s cannon. The underlying belief is that in either case even a Nero is not devoid of a heart.” In this same passage, Gandhi imagines that the invaders would be forced to relent when they confront “the unexpected spectacle of rows and rows of men and women simply dying rather than surrender to the will of an aggressor.”

The first scenario, if applied to the current situation, would mean that Ukraine would simply surrender, that it would allow Russia to occupy the whole country, and only then would they begin the struggle for self-determination through nonviolent resistance. But that would mean that they would first need to give up what they already have—national self-determination—in the hopes that they could, at some point in the distant future, regain it (and with the possibility that they might not succeed in doing so or even of genocide). The second scenario would make no sense in the context of modern warfare, and, especially in this case, where those under bombardment, often at a great distance, are not directly seen by those who are bombing them, where Putin and the leadership of Russia have no interest in avoiding the killing of ordinary civilians (and may, in fact, intend to kill civilians as a terror tactic), and where, through extensive propaganda and censorship, much of the Russian public is unaware of the horror inflicted upon the people of Ukraine.

I conclude, therefore, that nonviolent resistance in this kind of situation is not a reasonable, effective means to a just end. This, however, does not mean that Gandhi’s analysis has no relevance. As suggested above, Gandhi’s analysis entails, I believe correctly, that it is important not to glorify the violence and that we should see such violence as nothing more than a tragic necessity, that it be used in a way that holds open the possibility of negotiations and nonviolent solutions in the future, and that the territory...
of the other country—Russia—and the lives of the people who reside within them should be respected. Furthermore, as a cautionary note, those who are violently resisting should recognize that violence has a tendency to generate unintended spin-off effects, that it cannot not be easily limited to its intended goal, that those engaged even in necessary violence can be easily corrupted, and that the use of such necessary violence today should not be used to legitimate the logic of war in the future.

NOTES
4. I borrow the term "the logic of war" from Jonathan Schell, who, following the analysis of Carl von Clausewitz, uses it to describe the way in which "violence, although initiated in pursuit of political goals, can take on a life of its own, which distracts from the original goals, and may eventually compete with them or supplant them entirely." Jonathan Schell, The Unconquerable World: Power of Nonviolence and the Will of the People (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 132.
5. Satyagraha literally means "holding on to the truth."
6. Marx, for example, allowed that there might be situations where socialism could be brought about through democratic means, although he assumed that in most situations violent force would be necessary.
8. Gandhi, in fact, had an admiration for the courage of such advocates of violence, including some terrorists, even as he strongly disagreed with their methods.
14. Martin Luther King, with this argument clearly in his mind, puts the point this way: "[E]nds are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process . . . in the final analysis, means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends." This quotation is from King's Christmas sermon on peace delivered in 1967 in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. The full text of the sermon can be accessed at https://onbeing.org/blog/martin-luther-kings-last-christmas-sermon/.
15. The just war tradition has argued that the practice of war is just so long as certain criteria are met. These are the criteria of jus in bello (justice within the war)—noncombatant immunity, humane treatment of prisoners, and proportionality (the measures taken should not be more violent than is necessary to achieve the military goal). In this way, the advocate of violent revolutionary action might argue that the action is just so long as it refrains from intentionally harming civilians and does not inflict unnecessary harm on the agents of the unjust regime.
30. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 113.
31. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 112. I would add that work needed for any significant goal requires suffering.
33. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 362.
34. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 134.
35. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 132.
36. I am indebted to Douglas Allen for these last reflections. Allen has creatively formulated a Gandhian response to terrorism that allows for a carefully delimited violence against it. See Douglas Allen, Gandhi After 9/11: Creative Nonviolence and Sustainability (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 7.
37. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha), 386.

II. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SWARAJ (SELF-RULE, INDEPENDENCE, FREEDOM)

Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi advocated self-governance for India. Gandhi anchored this vision in Yoga philosophy. This essay will explore how the call for radical independence from the influence of others can be seen in Gandhi's favorite passage
in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, chapter two, verses 54–72. These verses give practical instruction on how to remain unruffled in the midst of resistance. By finding sovereignty within oneself, worlds can change. Gandhi trained the freedom fighters of India in this yogic technique. He inspired Howard Thurman, who brought word of this technique to the African American community after his meeting with Gandhi while living in India in 1934 and 1935. Two decades later, James Lawson learned from Gandhians while teaching school in Nagpur. Lawson, who taught Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks, continues to train people in the skills of social and economic analysis and thoughtful, direct actions to effect change. Freedom comprises the core of Gandhi's message. Society must become free of all forms of tyranny: interpersonal, corporate, and self-imposed.

Until philosophers rule as kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide . . . cities will have no rest from evils . . . there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other city.

**SELF-GOVERNANCE, SVARĀJ, SOVEREIGNTY**

Mahatma Gandhi was a person in turmoil. While in India, he struggled within his father's home, feeling selfish and lustful as a teenage newlywed, seeking his own pleasures even when his father was mortally ill. In England, he struggled adapting to a foreign culture. In South Africa, he suffered the indignity of personal insult because of his race. In India, he felt the vast suffering of a nation under the thumb of colonial domination that inflicted famine and misery on millions. In each instance, at home, in England, in South Africa, and back in India, he sought agency first for himself and then for India as a nation. The term rāj refers to kingdom or governance; the prefix sva indicates self. Combined, their meaning can be translated as self-governance or sovereignty. Echoing the words of Socrates, Gandhi insisted that without personal transformation, an entry into and adherence to a philosophical view, there can be no social change. For Gandhi, that philosophy was nonviolence.

As is well-known, while in England, Gandhi discovered the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which for him became the touchstone, the narrative through which his own story could take on greater meaning. One portion of the text in particular spoke to him deeply: the last eighteen verses of the second chapter. According to his secretary Narayana Desai, Gandhi recited these verses every day, finding inspiration in their simple meaning: Be the best person you can possibly be, at all times and in all circumstances. In these verses, Gandhi found a template for the hero, a person capable of self-rule who can also serve as an example for others.

**THE STEADY SAGE OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ**

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most translated (and revered) texts of world literature, provides a roadmap for moving away from dualistic, us-versus-them reactivity. Krishna gives the following instructions:

Be the same in success or failure.
This "sameness" is called Yoga.

Mahatma Gandhi gravitated toward the iconic "person of steady wisdom." He saw that such immovable souls were able to endure great suffering and bring about lasting change. He trained himself to become such a Yogi and trained millions of Indians to endure the merciless beatings meted out by the British army. His method changed the course of world history. Colonial rule collapsed throughout the globe. People regained their self-rule, their sovereignty. By adhering to the principle of nonviolence, even in the face of physical harm, they sparked the conscience of their oppressors.

The following verses became Gandhi's anthem and are translated here in their entirety to give a full sense of Gandhi's emphasis on steady wisdom as the key to the transformation of self and society. This poem-within-a-poem can be parsed into four basic messages: the acknowledgement of one's ignorance, the changeability of the world, the consequences of entering a downward spiral, and the freedom option.

This discourse opens with Arjuna's question. Arjuna has been utterly paralyzed by his situation. He feels miserable, defeated, confused, and impotent. His world has been so radically shaken by treachery committed by his own cousin-brothers that he cannot move forward. Likewise, Gandhi, in his autobiography, grapples with his own lust, his feelings of "less-than," his rage at his own mistreatment and the mistreatment of others, and the seeming enormity of the intransigence of British imperialism. Like Arjuna, he seeks a hero, a template, an exemplar. He seeks a pathway through which to govern his passions. The words spoken by Krishna to Arjuna speak also to Gandhi's condition. So, the first message lies in the opening question: We must look for a way of being in the world that will provide peace and tranquility.

II:54. Arjuna asks Krishna:
How can the person of steady wisdom be described,
that one accomplished in deep meditation?
How does the person of steady vision speak?
How does such a one sit and even move?

The second message of this passage asks for a reconsideration of the fixity of the external world. The external world "arrives" because we say it is so, because of agreed-upon conventions about right and wrong, tasty and disgusting, worthy and unworthy. Krishna provides a measured critique and analysis of this habitual way of engaging the world. He calls into question the relationship between the senses and the objects of the senses. Krishna urges his listener to "dial it back," to recognize that a sense object does not exist before the sensory organ (indriya) "lands" upon it, seizes it, and makes it real. Careful direction of the senses can help shape one's emotional relationship with the world. By learning to step back into a place of consideration before, in Nietzsche's words, "going
under," in this case under the thrall of the senses, one can gain a measure of mastery that ultimately leads to self-understanding and self-control.

55. The Blessed One responds:
When a person leaves behind all desires that arise in the mind, Arjuna, and is contented in the Self with the Self, that one is said to be steady in wisdom.

56. The person who is not agitated by suffering (duḥkha), whose yearnings for pleasures have evaporated, whose passion, fear, and anger have evaporated, that sage, it is said, has become steady in vision.

57. One whose passions have been quelled on all sides whether encountering anything, whether pleasant or unpleasant, who neither rejoices or recoils, such a person is established in wisdom.

58. And when this person can draw away from the objects of sense by recognizing the senses themselves like a tortoise who draws in all five of its limbs, such a person is established in wisdom.

64. By giving up desire and hatred even in the midst of the sense objects through the control of the self by oneself, a person attains peace.

65. This peace generates for that person the end of all sufferings (duḥkha). The one with a peaceful mind indeed attains steady intelligence.

Third, Krishna articulates a cascade of unfortunate consequences that can result if one does not gain self-control. Attachment leads to desire. Thwarted desire leads to anger. Anger confuses the mind. A confused mind knows no tranquility. The emotional fallout from uncontrolled desire not only can ruin one's day but also can take down entire families, villages, and nations.

66. There is no intelligence if one is not disciplined.
Without discipline there is no meditation.
Without meditation there can be no tranquility.
Without tranquility, how can there be happiness?

Fourth, Krishna emphatically declares the possibility of freedom. If one can reverse the outflows of the senses through managing one's emotions, one can become like a still ocean. One can be wakeful in the midst of ignorance. Echoing the description of freedom found in both Buddhism and Samkhya, one can move away from ego fixity and obsession into a state of no ego, no possessions, no lust for the things that bring bondage. In short, the Prajñā Sthiti, the person established in wisdom, becomes godlike, Brahmī Sthiti, and enters the divine abode of Brahma Nirvana, a clever mash-up of ascent to a heavenly realm characterized as a place where the winds of desire no longer blow.

71. The person who abandons all desires moves about free from lust, free from possessiveness, free from ego. That person attains tranquility.
72. This is the godly state, Arjuna.
Having attained this, one is not deluded.
Staying in this even up until the time of death, one reaches Brahma Nirvana.

This final verse has often been heralded as acknowledging the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition and showing the commonality of freedom across India's many faiths.

HOWARD THURMAN: DEALING WITH DECEPTION

Martin Luther King, Jr., drew deep inspiration from the work of Howard Thurman (1899–1981). He read nightly from Thurman's book Jesus and the Disinherited (1949), which was on his nightstand in the Memphis hotel at the time of his death. The book, a rhetorical masterpiece, opens by emphasizing that Jesus as a person lived on the margins. Fully human, his struggles mirrored the struggles of all enslaved people: facing the “three hounds of hell” described by Thurman as fear, deception, and hate. At the midpoint of the book, Thurman turns to Gandhi as he seeks a way out of the tenacity of deception. Rather than acquiesce, rather than compromise, Thurman calls for a third solution: “complete and devastating sincerity.” From a philosophical point of view, he calls for an uncompromising speaking of truth. Thurman, who met with Gandhi in India in 1936, quotes Gandhi’s letter to Muriel Lester: “Speak the truth, without fear and without exception. . . . You are in God’s work, so you need not fear man’s scorn. If they listen to your requests and grant them, you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength.” Gandhi’s philosophy called for drawing strength from the opposition and scorn of others. On the salt marches and other protests, the Gandhian refusal to strike back when hit by the British police signaled the marchers’ and protestors’ steadfast resolve, a state of being established in an equanimity that soon caught the attention of the world. Ultimately, equipoise won out over aggression.

Well aware of the ongoing work of Gandhi, Thurman writes: “[B]e simply, directly truthful, whatever may be the cost in life, limb or security. . . . In the presence of an overwhelming sincerity on the part of the dispossessed, the dominant themselves are caught with no defense, with the edge taken away from the sense of prerogative and from the status upon which the impregnability of their position rests. They are thrown back upon themselves.” Thurman goes on to critique the very basis of power itself:

The experience of power has no meaning aside from the other-than-self reference which sustains it. If the position of ascendancy is not acknowledged tacitly and actively by those over whom the ascendancy is exercised, then it falls flat. . . . That advantage due to the accident of birth or position is reduced to zero. Instead of relation between the weak and the strong there is merely a relationship between human beings. . . . The awareness of this fact marks the supreme moment of human dignity.

This passage outlines the nonviolent strategy that eventually prevailed in the Civil Rights Movement. Make the world aware of the plight of the oppressed. Reveal the techniques used by the oppressor, whether low wages, exclusion from real estate wealth, voter suppression, overt targeting by the police, failing schools, and more. But rather than develop hate, exercise love. Disarm the enemy. In recognizing their humanity, they must reciprocate.
Thurman recognizes the difficulty of this undertaking: “Love of the enemy means that a fundamental attack must first be made on the enemy status . . . an ‘unscrewing’ process is required.” Thurman points to the ultimate goal: a dignity that is “universal, knowing no age, no race, no culture, no condition.”

Thurman met with Gandhi in 1936. Independence for India followed more than a decade later, in 1947. Gandhi’s long struggle, from the start of the satyagraha campaign in 1918 to the salt marches that began in 1930 to the final push in 1942, took nearly thirty years. It provided a roadmap for others not only to overthrow colonial rule but also to seek civil rights for all people.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1886–1962) was moved deeply by the sufferings she witnessed in her childhood and through both World Wars. She was well apprised of Gandhi’s successful work on behalf of not only India’s freedom but also the freedom of India’s disenfranchised, including women, religious minorities, and persons of low caste. She chaired a drafting committee within the newly formed United Nations that issued the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The document relied heavily on the wisdom of an international team of philosophers and legal experts, including representatives from Lebanon, China, and India. Its preamble states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.” Many have worked to fulfill the ideals of this document, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and Jimmy Carter. Roosevelt’s advisors included the Confucian philosopher P. C. Chang, who employed the term “dignity” as a rough translation of the Confucian term “ren” or human-heartedness. Hansa Mehta, from India, insisted that Roosevelt strengthen the advocacy for women in the document. The general attitude set forth in the Declaration set the stage for important civil rights work in the 1950s and 1960s, which took inspiration from Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha, which was considered by John Lewis to be “a grounding foundation of nonviolent civil disobedience, of active pacifism.” Satyagraha requires speaking truth, holding truth, and, in the words of Thurman, dwelling in “overwhelming sincerity.”

Hundreds flocked to the south to support the freedom rides and the lunch counter sit-ins, and hundreds of thousands attended the mass demonstrations in Washington, D.C. Eventually, the nonviolent movement prevailed. Ground-breaking legislation passed, including the Voting Rights Act. Programs such as Head Start and the distribution of food stamps were implemented to help redress educational and wealth inequalities.

James Lawson continues to train activists in Los Angeles and beyond. His words convey the essence of how to apply this strategy of staying tranquil while effecting social change:

One of the things I lifted up, and still do in teachings and trainings . . . is that religion at its best tries to get human beings . . . to accept their fundamental humanity and take responsibility for the management and control of their anger, for their fear, for their animosities. Do not pretend it comes from somebody else. Develop a spiritual life. You can be in a very hostile situation, but you can still try to shape your own life. Life is a gift. And you can mold it. Meet hate with love and strategic action.

Lawson eloquently calls for self-governance, sovereignty within oneself, as an essential ingredient for making social change.

James Lawson continues his decades-long offering of monthly workshops, accessible to all who register for electronic access. In the rhetorical style of an experienced preacher, on July 24, 2021, Rev. James Lawson offered the following oft-heard phrases: “Love the enemy.” “Be generous.” These simple precepts echo the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gītā: Treat all individuals as if they were the same. The first statement can serve to counter racism. The second statement can affirm the need for supportive governmental policies that seek to undo the ravages of inequality.

Lawson advises against fighting fire with fire. When meeting an opponent, he counsels, “Don’t imitate their language. Don’t adopt their theologies and idols.” He advocates being strategic and patient: “Explore the pathway of a humanity...
being fully alive. Identify yourself with the human family, the potential for life.” All humanity, particularly the outcasts, hold promise for the future. Rather than dismissing and rejecting the homeless, the ill, and the poor, Lawson urges us to see the other within ourselves.

Lawson criticizes anarchy and destruction. “Nonviolent philosophy proposes that how we do our journey is as critical as our destination.” He asserts that “methodology, strategy, behavior determine consequences.” He points out that, in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020, the mainstream marchers remained nonviolent; only the police exerted force. Lawson distinguishes between the looters and the demonstrators, noting the clear difference between a destructive riot and a peaceful demonstration.

Lawson’s most enduring critique calls out Plantation Capitalism, the economic system made possible by slavery that continues to disadvantage people with less power. He proclaims that this form of economy, by its very nature, is violent: “I see violence as the misuse of power. It is not just done by a fist or a gun or hitting someone over a chair, it is done by economic structures, systematic power, structural power.” At a celebration of his work in October 2021, he commented on the travesty of low wages. The federal minimum, followed by many states, is currently $7.25. A fair wage, allowing people to buy food and pay rent at current costs, would be $30 per hour. Only this can lead to the uplift of all persons.

Lawson warns that advocates for social justice and equality must always comport themselves with dignity: “Do not use bad language, bad philosophy, bad tactics.” Following the precepts of Jesus, Lawson urges that love must prevail. He paraphrases the letters of St. Paul: “Feed the enemy. Nurture, serve, and treat the enemy as a human being.” Rather than ascribing to a worldview that divides, Lawson teaches that we must see the universal sameness of human needs.

Veena Howard, a contemporary scholar of Lawson’s work, writes that “Lawson’s method of training points to his unique grasp on the challenges of nonviolent struggle, requiring deep philosophical understanding of the method, building strategic alliances, and planning precise strategies.” She continues, noting that “Through his deep study of theology, Gandhi’s life and philosophy, and the history of nonviolence, Lawson concluded that nonviolent action requires three main components: discipline, self-sacrifice, and strategic techniques of confrontation.”

CONCLUSION
Socrates urged that all political leaders must be philosophers. Though Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson rejected holding political office, their example inspired many people of good will to enter the public sphere, to effect change not only on the street but also through effective legislation designed to bring about the uplift of all people (sarvodaya). As we encounter the challenges of the twenty-first century, including ecological degradation, ongoing awareness of social inequalities, and a seeming overall diminishment of human well-being because of mistruths, we need to heed the wisdom of Socrates, Krishna, Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Thurman, and Lawson: Be reflective, speak truth, and uphold the dignity not only of the human person but also of the earth herself. Self-control holds the key to being effective in the process of making change. To thwart desire, anger, and delusion through the steady practice of understanding oneself provides the great gift of allowing a goal and mission to become primary, styming selfish ego and greed. This power moves mountains.

DEDICATION
This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joseph Benedict Prabhu (1946–2021), who taught philosophy and religious studies at California State University, Los Angeles for more than thirty years.

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Gandhian Swaraj and Its Incompatibility with Present-Day Populism: Some Philosophical Considerations

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ABSTRACT
In recent years, major political events have underscored the value of treating the topic of populism as worthy of serious philosophical attention. From the rise of Trumpism in the United States to the Brexit vote to Narendra Modi’s ascent to the unprecedented degree of success attained by Marine Le Pen’s party in France, it is clear that populist tendencies (especially within constitutional democracies) remain a serious worldwide impediment to genuine realization of democratic ideals. In what follows, I will use a Gandhian framework (which necessarily entails special emphasis on the notion of swaraj) to discuss matters concerning populism. I aim to show that the rich and complex conception of freedom central to Gandhian swaraj helps provide a way by which the ideals of democracy can be successfully synthetized with legitimate concerns of engendering populist tendencies (tendencies that ultimately undermine the democratic project).

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, major political events have underscored the value of treating the topic of populism as worthy of serious philosophical attention. This is the case in spite of the reassurance many may feel because of Donald Trump’s electoral defeat as well as by the United States’ ability to survive his presidency. The facts, however, remain: Trump was able to come to power within a democratic, constitutional system (replete with supposed safeguards and balances) that has long been seen as an international model and approximately 75 million citizens of a so-called liberal democracy voted for him to continue as president in what was (despite Trump’s cries to the contrary) a free and fair election. Additionally, as has been widely noted, if not for Trump’s incompetence, the United States very likely might not have survived his presidency. The rise of Trumpism in the United States is but one of many recent political occurrences in the world that indicate the need for greater reflection on populism. From the Brexit vote to the dominance of the Fidesz Party in Hungary to Narendra Modi’s ascent in the country that gave the world Gandhi, it is clear that, even without Trump in the White House, populist tendencies (especially within constitutional democracies) remain a serious worldwide impediment to genuine realization of democratic ideals. Thus, it is incumbent on those concerned about the future viability of liberal democracy to seriously reflect on both the threats populism poses to that viability and on why exactly it is antithetical to the realization of true democracy.

I will use a Gandhian framework (which necessarily entails special emphasis on the notion of swaraj) to discuss matters concerning populism. I aim to show that the rich and complex conception of freedom central to Gandhian swaraj helps provide a way by which the ideals of democracy can be successfully synthetized with legitimate concerns of engendering populist tendencies (tendencies that ultimately undermine the democratic project).

While some scholars have emphasized Gandhian intercultural discourse in addressing the challenges of populism,1 I hold that explication of the Mahatma’s conception of freedom is necessary as a kind of preliminary, “ground-clearing” exercise before any such philosophical discussion can genuinely be fruitful. For me, this conclusion naturally follows given the central importance of individual freedom to democratic societies. It is my hope, therefore, that this work can serve as a supplement to other scholarly insights regarding populism that are found within the existing Gandhian literature.

My arguments will be predicated on my interpretation of Gandhi’s understanding of certain concepts (e.g., freedom, the individual self, social harmony) that I take to be central to the topic of populism. Though I will show that my interpretations are in keeping with Gandhi’s overall thought, people can, of course, reject his views (which has indeed largely been the case ever since he began his famous “experiments” with truth) and still affirm many of the values that are central to my arguments. In this article, I will mainly be content to leave the plausibility of Gandhi’s ideas as well as the accuracy of how he understands key conceptual notions to the reader. Instead, I will aim to show the implications that follow from these ideas and understandings for how we should think about populism. I’m comfortable with this approach both because there is an obvious lack of serious consideration in our world of populism from a Gandhian perspective and because there is no shortage of scholarly works that seek to establish the philosophical viability of the traditional Indian schools of thought which Gandhi always saw his most significant ideas to align with. Moreover, for me, it remains to be seen whether any other thinker can succeed in balancing the ideals of democracy with concerns that arise from populist tendencies as well as I take Gandhi to have done.

A SEEMINGLY INHERENT TENSION WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC PROJECT
More than two thousand years ago, Plato nicely captured the tension between the egalitarian impulses of democracy and sound political judgment in Book VI of The Republic. The great ancient Greek thinker, who was clearly not interested in the realization of social equality, argued that democracy is an inferior form of government on the grounds that it is ultimately antithetical to the expertise required for a society to be properly governed. His concern that, under such a system, those who are expert in only attaining electoral success (or capturing popular sentiment) will become leaders seems to have clearly been borne out in recent times. Plato’s concern is in line with Cristiano Gianolla’s claim that “populism is a modern political category that could not emerge without liberal democratic regimes.”2

If the honoring of individual freedom (which is implied by the value of social equality) is understood purely in negative
terms that involve non-interference in the individual’s life pursuits, then Plato’s criticism of democracy is legitimate. It is here, however, that Gandhi’s understanding of “swaraj” (self-rule) can be seen as a particularly useful conceptual tool by which advocacy of the democratic project can be significantly bolstered.

DECONSTRUCTING GANDHIAN SWARAJ
In explicating his understanding of swaraj, Gandhi states:

The root meaning of Swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may therefore be rendered as disciplined rule from within . . . independence has no such limitation. Independence may mean license to do as you like. Swaraj is positive, independence is negative. Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraints.1

Additionally, we read:

If we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. Here there is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realized it, we will endeavour to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself.2

Gandhi’s assertions above are predicated on a metaphysical conception of the self that is common within traditional Indian philosophy. Specifically, Gandhi means the notion of an all-pervading Universal Self that is identical with Absolute Reality. For Gandhi, this Self is one’s true being and personal swaraj is ultimately the same as a state in which the True Self is realized by the individual. Genuine national swaraj, Gandhi holds, can only be obtained once the individuals who comprise the nation have attained self-rule. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on what Gandhi’s words imply about freedom for the individual. These points, in turn, will help illuminate important insights pertaining to the proper objectives of the democratic state. Ultimately, in the process of seeking to give this illumination, I maintain that much insight can be gained on how the above tension that Plato captured can be adequately handled by proponents of democracy.

While it can be said that Gandhi’s conception of freedom (as I understand it) has clear religious overtones (which seemingly preclude its advancement in liberal society), I see his conception to be ultimately not so different from the one certain nonreligious writers on free will have put forth (conceptions that emphasize notions like higher order desires and proper motivations).3 This is the case even though Gandhi, in contrast to the typical academic commentator on free will, does not give much consideration to the implications his understanding of freedom has for the matter of moral responsibility. Philosophers have, of course, debated questions of human free will for centuries and it is unlikely any great philosophical resolution on the matter is forthcoming. The fact, however, that certain theorists on the topic have advanced positions that can be seen as compatible with Gandhian swaraj indicates the availability of significant philosophical resources which can be helpful to anyone who seeks to better illuminate Gandhi’s understanding of freedom within the context of contemporary Western society. Indeed, it seems to me that a society which succeeds in developing individuals who are free in the ways envisaged by certain writers on free will would be a society whose members embody (at least to a very significant extent) Gandhian self-rule. It bears reiterating that, for Gandhi, a nation cannot genuinely attain self-rule until the individuals who comprise it have attained it.

Ultimately, these points indicate that Gandhian swaraj can be explicating in a way that is acceptable to large segments of a diverse, liberal society partly by way of conceptual tools that are prevalent in mainstream Western (secular) philosophy. Accordingly, I hold that discussions of swaraj need not be hampered by perceived religious considerations. This conclusion indeed underscores the all-inclusive character of Gandhian thought (in which even God is understood as “the denial of the atheist”).

RECONSIDERING FREEDOM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SWARAJ
In reflecting on the above paradox, it seems we can attribute much of its force to the particular conception of freedom that is commonly supposed within our culture. This conception is indeed evident when we consider the high degrees of deference given in democratic societies to voters regardless of the lamentable choices they so commonly make. It is indeed a negative reflection on a country’s national situation when significant (though non-majority) segments of the electorate openly affirm their preference for Trump. Even more disconcerting from a Gandhian perspective, however, would be when a country in such a situation is more concerned about whether its voters have had their preferences interfered with than whether its people have attained genuine freedom (which, for Gandhi, necessarily entails responsible decision-making).

When it is clear to us that someone’s freedom (in the sense of non-interference) is being denied, we can more readily see that there is a justified basis for concluding a wrong has occurred. When making this kind of moral judgment, however, it is problematic to apply a conception of freedom that accords with the dominant Western cultural supposition that freedom can be understood solely in terms of what it is not (in other words, negatively). The notion that freedom is equivalent to non-interference is a prevailing one both in Western political theory and in everyday discussions within contemporary Western society. Indeed, it seems to me that discussions of freedom from the perspective of swaraj indicates the availability of significant philosophical resources which can be helpful to anyone who seeks to better illuminate Gandhi’s understanding of freedom within the context of contemporary Western society. Indeed, it seems to me that a society which succeeds in developing individuals who are free in the ways envisaged by certain writers on free will would be a society whose members embody (at least to a very significant extent) Gandhian self-rule. It bears reiterating that, for Gandhi, a nation cannot genuinely attain self-rule until the individuals who comprise it have attained it.
better align one’s thoughts and actions with a deeper self (however this concept is understood), then we can, in fact, resolve the kinds of tensions I discussed above.

Consider, after all, that when freedom is conceived primarily as the ability to understand and follow the dictates of a deeper self, the connection that character development has to the realization of freedom can be clearly seen. Thus, it would follow that genuine promotion of freedom entails use of pedagogical techniques that aim to develop human character.

It is worth noting, in fact, that what I take to be the Gandhian conception of freedom (having the ability to align one’s thoughts and actions with a deeper self) accords nicely with Plato’s view that reason is a separate motivator distinct from both the passions and the appetites. This is the case even though, as will be discussed below, Gandhi—in contrast to Plato—does not endorse a hierarchical model in which reason dominates the emotions. This point is noted by Douglas Allen in his discussion of Gandhi’s critique of socialism:

Gandhi does not believe that the real is the rational alone. The whole human being is more than a rational being and includes the non-rational, the pre-reflective, the emotions, and the imagination. True socialism must do justice to the whole person as a harmoniously integrated mind-body-heart (or soul) being.  

Gandhi would agree that when individual freedom is conceived solely in terms of the unimpeded pursuit of passions and appetites, Plato’s concerns become both understandable and serious.

In contemporary constitutional democracies, the tireless efforts of civil libertarians have, at the very least, kept concerns about government intrusion (which is seen to go hand in hand with government interference) front and center among the wider citizenry. That, in the modern world, no comparable work can be noticed that is devoted to understanding in man.

It is within the context of understanding satyagraha that we can perhaps most clearly notice how Gandhi’s approach to truth contrasts with the ones that have dominated in modern times. Gandhi does not regard reason as the sole means available to us for more fully grasping truth. Therefore, unlike so many in the modern world, he avoids giving it an overly exalted place—something that is entailed by the presumption that reason is the only tool by which diverse, disagreeing communities can realize social closure and harmony. Gandhi instead sees reason as an important tool that is genuinely helpful for attaining truth only insofar as it works in a way that is congruent with (and not in opposition to) the emotions.

Furthermore, we should remember that, for Gandhi, it follows that when one advances in her grasp of truth, she necessarily (to the same extent) comes closer to full self-
realization (which necessarily involves affirming a sense of oneness with all). Gandhi, we should remember, sees Truth (which is understood to be a unified oneness underlying the everyday world) as equivalent with the real Self. Thus, someone who advances in her grasp of truth and comes closer to attaining genuine freedom would experience greater feelings of unity with all others. It is worth noting here that my interpretation of the place of reason in regard to the emotions in Gandhi’s philosophy is consistent with arguments he makes affirming the existence of God as well as the validity of religious experience.9

Crucial for my purposes here are the implications this understanding of reason’s place has for engendering the feelings of sensitivity and identification that should underlie genuine affirmations of social equality. This kind of affective response, which is characteristic of a more advanced realization of Truth and is manifested in attitudes of acceptance and understanding directed toward the perceived others in society, cannot be evoked solely by reason. It follows, then, that since populism necessarily supposes divisions between one’s own group and others, populist movements cannot engender the kinds of affective responses that Gandhi sees as necessary for more fully realizing not only social equality but also truth and freedom.

Gandhi’s conception of the true self clearly recognizes the affective dimensions of human existence. He conceives of this self as inherently nonviolent. This is indicated by his declaration, “I am certain that nonviolence is meant for all time. It is an attribute of the atman (universal self) and is, therefore, universal since the atman belongs to all.”10 As I argue elsewhere,11 Gandhi sees the overt promotion of nonviolence to be essential for anything like the democratic project to succeed. Consequently, for Gandhi, it would follow that, to achieve and exhibit greater degrees of self-realization (i.e., freedom), a person must manifest nonviolence in her everyday actions. While Gandhi acknowledges that violence is an unavoidable aspect of bodily existence,12 he clearly holds that attainment of fuller self-realization requires us to actively seek limiting our violence to the furthest extent possible.

The connection Gandhi sees between nonviolence as a civic virtue and the flourishing of a pluralistic society is indicated by his conviction that violence entails a degree of certainty about what one holds to be true that is ultimately unattainable for us given the limitations of embodied human existence. The violent individual, after all, is so convinced of particular conclusions, which are all ultimately based on a limited and fallible grasp of reality, that he has no problem with imposing his understanding on those who may not share it (even if it means causing them intense suffering). Furthermore, when we inflict violence on others, we presume significant distinctions between them and us. As a result, we become less able to see the truth as it appears to them and thus hamper our own ability to identify with all. Consequently, we also hamper our prospects for full self-realization. This state entails a sense of unity with all and is also one that requires a fuller grasp of truth than any of us currently have. Thus, in explaining the “metaphysical basis” of Gandhi’s conception of democracy, Margaret Chatterjee states, “if all we have is a fragmentary view, we have no right to impose our fragment on others.”13

Given these points, we can conclude that the anger which is also so integral to populist movements ultimately conflicts with engendering what Gandhi conceives to be genuine freedom. Nonviolence, for him, applies to thought, word, and deed and it is (at the very least) difficult to conceive of how the psychological state of anger can coexist with nonviolent thought (questions about anger’s utility for motivating action notwithstanding). Anger, after all, commonly underlies and motivates the most conspicuous acts of violence. Thus, for Gandhi, it would follow that any movement which depends on the perpetual fostering of anger cannot exist harmoniously with the genuine pursuit and realization of democracy. To reiterate, for him, a truly democratic society must comprise truly free (i.e., self-realized) individuals.

Furthermore, it is clear that the emotion of anger moves one away from a holistic state of equanimity in which neither the rational nor affective side of the individual dominates. The seeking of such a state aligns with a common notion in Indian thought that the world of everyday things began as a primal state of equilibrium among the gunas (or fundamental strands that comprise the eternal string of nature). This state is also entailed in the description of the integrated one with steady wisdom (sthitaprajna) who is extolled in The Bhagavad Gita—the text Gandhi referred to as his “Eternal Mother.”14 Clearly, then, anger (an integral component of populism) is inherently incompatible with the attainment of Gandhian self-rule. This point is underscored by Gandhi’s famous decision in 1922 to suspend a satyagraha campaign after the events at Chauri Chaura (in which an angry mob set a fire that killed twenty-five people in a police station).

It is true that anger is commonly thought of as both a justified and valuable response to injustice. However, given (among other realities) the difficulties we have in productively controlling anger once it is allowed to manifest as well as the effectiveness of other, less damaging emotions in motivating moral action, Gandhi’s assessment of anger is at least worthy of serious consideration.15

It is also worth noting here that, in the context of accepting the importance of eradicating emotions like anger, we can notice that in Gandhi’s thought there exists a very real place for valuing the place of experts (a matter which Plato brings up in his indictment of democracy). Though Gandhi was leery of regarding himself as a moral exemplar, it is clear that he saw such experts of ethical practice to be indispensable role models for the development of good character (which, for him, entails freedom from anger). This point is evident in the defenses he offered of the legitimacy of religious experience as well as in his remark that “[a] Sannyasin (ideal religious teacher in the Hindu tradition) having attained Swaraj in his own person is the fittest to show us the way.”16 Thus, especially given the significant consensus that seemingly exists among members of diverse communities on who the moral exemplars are, we can further notice the relevance Gandhian insights have for overcoming problems inherent for the democratic project.
CONCLUSION
In recent years, the well-known challenges that the prospects of populism pose for the democratic project have perhaps never been clearer. However, rather than providing a basis for abandoning this project, these challenges can spur consideration of ways in which genuine democracy can be bolstered. Gandhian notions of freedom give us both a starting place and a framework for pursuing such worthwhile work. By refusing to separate considerations of national freedom from those of individual freedom and by conceiving of individual freedom in a way that goes beyond a simple emphasis on non-interference, Gandhian swaraj is a promising and rich conceptual resource by which we in the contemporary world can strengthen the pillars of democracy.

NOTES
15. For further discussion on this topic, see Court D. Lewis and Gregory L. Bock, eds., The Ethics of Anger (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

Gandhi’s Philosophy of Economics and Nonviolent Strategy for Civil Rights: A Requiem in Two Movements
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As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

ABSTRACT
In this essay, I discuss two “movements” to which M. K. Gandhi made significant contributions in a more symphonic than theoretical requiem, namely, Economics and Ethics and Black Satyagraha. In the first part, I problematize the relationship between economics and ethics. After outlining the threads of “Gandhian Economics” (developed further by Gandhi’s economic advisor, J. C. Kumarappa), I invoke Amartya Sen and Partha Dasgupta on rethinking how “wealth” and “well-being” are measured in an inclusive, egalitarian society, as well as Indian constitutional directives on economic rights that stem from Gandhian critiques of modernist and utilitarian economics. The broader context comprises the unsavory pressures of corporatism and the universalization of avarice, both of which manifest as commodity fetishism and the consumer mentalité. In the second part, I trace the systematic transmission of Gandhi’s messages to the post-slavery African American community that could help them morally ground their struggle against Jim Crow laws and the fledgling fight for civil and political rights as the movement evolved toward more articulate, reflective, and active resistance platforms. Drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois, Pauli Murray, Sue Bailey Thurman, Howard Thurman, Rosa Parks, James Lawson, and not least Martin Luther King, Jr., I comment on the potential contribution of Gandhi-inspired nonviolent ethics to humanist values, social justice, and the fight for minority and indigenous rights, including economic, political, and voting rights.

I. GANDHIAN ECONOMICS: SVARĀJ AND SWADESHI

“Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of Western civilization?” Gandhi: “I think it would be a very good idea.” Although most probably apocryphal, this story has survived since it has the ring of truth, inasmuch as it poignantly sums up the Mahatma’s diffidence towards the promises of Western Enlightenment to deliver a “civilization” worth its name.

To elaborate, the Raj government in India operated exclusively in the interests of the capitalists in Britain – if that foreclosure embeds any civilizing intent. Hence, indigenous industry would not be encouraged or supported on a mass scale in the subcontinent. The nationalist protagonists,
Therefore, argued that it would be advantageous to the country to patronize through other means indigenous industry, whether big or small. Decentralized indigenous industry with minimal state capital support would at least provide much-needed employment, however limited, to the unemployed masses. So that the Indian capitalist interests may not take advantage of the swadeshi (home-grown self-sufficiency) movement to ruthlessly exploit the consumer—as was done during the Bengal Partition in the early years of the last century—and for many other economic and sociological reasons, Gandhi advocated “the revival and encouragement of cottage industry.” Hence, khadi became the symbol of both the non-cooperative rejection of foreign-manufactured goods—albeit shewn from Indian raw and source material—and the embracing of indigenous industry in microscale forms, symbolized by the proverbial charkha (carkhā). What was foremost at the back of the moral and social reformer was the stark poverty of the masses.

Modern industrialization inexorably leads to imperialism as the industrial capitalists backed by their governments seek to ravage and exploit imperial markets. The scramble for these outposts among the industrial nations leads to wars, as we have had in the last two centuries and right up to this present moment, globally. Nothing much has changed since the East India Company set foot in India or the VOC in Indonesia. And it is India that bore the larger percentage of the liability for public debt—including footing the bills for British war efforts and developing her industries in situ, as also post-independence for the railway system. Industries that were established during the wars evaporated as soon as a war was over; the big business bosses in the Westminster and India Office steered the entirety of the commercial, industrial, and financial policy of the Government of British India.

Consider that the policies of governance and industrial development of India were first formulated in the East India Office, the London headquarters of the East India Company until it was taken over by the British government. The key architect of the policies was none other than John Stuart Mill, who worked in the company’s office from age seventeen, 1822 to 1858. It was in these prodigal years that he was influenced both by his father, James Mill, who wrote the three-volume work on *The History of British India* (1817), intended for civil servants working in India, and by Jeremy Bentham’s ideas of “the doctrine of utility.” John Stuart Mill was working on his magnum opus *Utilitarianism* while in the company’s office, which he published as essays three years after the abolition of the company in 1858. Although he criticized British expansion into India, it was his own mandates that helped establish the imperial-industrial complex of British India on the principles of utility that he wrote on in tandem.

In the 1930s, 73 percent of the population was dependent upon agriculture; other than being engaged in producing raw material as fodder for the mills and factories in England, and perhaps in the bigger cities of India, there is no way industrialization could reach and benefit the masses whose village crafts and home industries had all but been eroded. There could be no svarāj (self-rule) unless a way was found to mitigate the hardship and horrors of the grinding poverty of the masses. Gandhi’s vision was that of a free India where the mobilized peasantry in villages would successfully resist the spread of agro-industrial capitalism and oppressive violence of the colonial state.

The second divide was totally internal, namely, the growing urban-rural divide. Urban industrial schemes used the villagers for their cheap labor and raw material, which did not help to mitigate poverty in the least. Furthermore, the introduction of urban values, an urban economy and technology, and an urban way of life in the villages led to the destruction of traditional forms of sustenance, the village life, and the values that go with it. Gandhi was keen to free the village economy from the dominance of not only urban technology and urban finance but also urban values and ways of life. So the idea of progress and reform had to be circumscribed within the context of the rural environment and rural needs, which entailed the reconstruction of villages along moral and social freedom over and above political freedom. Hence, character building, self-improvement, self-sufficiency in essential goods for discriminate needs, and encouragement of village crafts and home industries are integral to swadeshi or “ethical economics.”

“Swadeshi” had become the popular slogan in India after the Partition of Bengal. Gandhi made a distinction between “political swadeshi” and “genuine swadeshi.” Political swadeshi meant an artificial barrier on the flow of goods from one place to another imposed by political divisions of the world. It could not contribute to world peace. These artificial barriers would ultimately foster battles and reprisals among competing territories. Gandhi thus felt the need for “genuine swadeshi.” It meant denying “to ourselves the enjoyment of goods not manufactured with our approval and within our knowledge.” Gandhi held that only thus would human beings become fully sensitive to the social repercussions of each of their transactions and pave the way for world peace. Kumarappa called this the “Economics of Peace”; “peace” here references the corollary moral principles of truth (satya) and nonviolence (ahimsā), which are integral to rethinking Gandhian economics as is noted by commentators on Gandhi’s economic philosophy.

To clarify this clarion call further, on October 27, 1934, the Indian National Congress passed the following resolution:

> Whereas much confusion has arisen in the public mind as to the true nature of Swadeshi and whereas the aim of the Congress has been from its inception progressive identification with the masses, and whereas village reorganisation and reconstruction necessarily implies revival and encouragement of dead or dying village industries besides the central industry of hand spinning, and whereas this work, like the reorganisation of hand spinning is possible only through concentrated and special effort unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress, J. C. Kumarappa is hereby authorized to form, under the advice and guidance of Gandhi, an association called the All-India Village Industries Association as part of the activities of the Congress.
Perhaps the best articulator of Gandhian economics in the grand vision for the nation-in-the-making was the aforementioned J. C. Kumarappa, who wrote his Master’s thesis at Columbia University, New York, entitled “Causes of Indian Poverty Through Public Finance.” Kumarappa was a considerable force behind the Sarvodaya Movement (welfarism based on social affections and care for others) such that he coined the nomenclature “Gandhian Economics.” Kumarappa drew on the urban-village divide and argued that the urban industrial schemes use the villagers for their cheap labor and raw material as well, which does not help to mitigate poverty. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, urbanization leads to the destruction of traditional village forms of life. Gandhi wanted to free the village economy from the oppressive dominance of urban finance and the engine of modern technology. Such a distributive means and character of production would be managed not by the state but under what Gandhi called trusteeship (structural social equality, derived from John Ruskin), wherein private property ownership is shunned (for each is but a custodian of their possessions), thereby moving wealthy individuals and corporations to voluntarily share and distribute their wealth among the needy and the masses. Such a move would then pave the way for grām swājāt. So the idea of progress and reform had to be circumscribed within the context of the rural environment and preferential social necessities with reasonable access, not our modern-driven indiscriminate wants or avarice.

Meanwhile, classical economists continue with the myth of economic growth, increasingly in the post-industrial, secular age; economic philosophers such as Amartya Sen and Partha Dasgupta argue that GDP by itself should not be the sole measure of economic and social well-being. Actual welfare coupled with literacy and productive education, and not mere GDP or GNIP, constitute the real measure of quality of life, which encompasses respect for human rights and dignity along with social engagement, advocacy, and activism. Changes in institutional arrangements and social attitudes rather than reforms simply effected through legislation or universal charters are needed if these rights and concomitant capabilities are to be realized.

We know that, for Gandhi, the operational concept of swadeshi coupled with svarāj forms a universalizable principle. Hence, outside of India, the message of swadeshi was carried by C. F. Andrews to southern parts of America where the only-just-freed slaves and their descendants were looking for a scheme that would empower their own industriousness in areas, particularly, of agriculture and crafting of small goods. Booker T. Washington, a Black educationist and social reformer, set up the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in a shanty dwelling in Alabama and enquired from Andrews about Gandhi’s organization of labor and trade and about how the rural and unemployed worked towards self-sustainability. Washington deployed a modified scheme among his own people, who were trained with meager resources in job skills such as carpentry, printing, brick making, agri-and-pharma culture, cotton cultivation, soil enrichment, waste management, and home economics. Not surprisingly, having to make do with little of the modern amenities at their disposal, since white America would not share their modern gadgets (even gas or electricity) with Tuskegee, the Black craftspeople invented some amazing amenities and gadgets, including an early form of solar battery, washing handset, and recycling. This was an experiment in self-sustainability that drew wide attention and won the accolades of at least two sitting Presidents of the United States. At Washington’s death, Tuskegee had more than one hundred well-equipped buildings, 1,500 students, and a two-hundred-member faculty teaching thirty-eight trades and professions. In recent times, newly independent nations such as Botswana have adopted the swadeshi model.

**ATMANIRBHAH: ECONOMICS FOR SELF-RELIANT INDIA**

Since, as we have demonstrated via Kumarappa’s insights, swadeshi is a dynamic and integral part of Gandhian economics, what does the strategy of swadeshi mean and entail for atmanirbhar (self-reliant economics in the Indian context)? To reiterate a point made earlier, Gandhi had emphasized trusteeship and economic independence over and above political independence. This would entail cooperative industry that would enable the uplifting of the most downtrodden (in terms of caste, class, gender, and perhaps habitat as well) by disengaging capital and labor in a way that would give equitable value to labor, kaarigār (modelled on the efficacious service of artisans, not as a mere commodity for profit). Such a socialized economy would systematically work toward freeing every individual from the yoke of poverty and catering for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and education for their offspring. Gandhi distrusted the state to achieve these goals, because a state is an impersonal machinery increasingly in the hands of an oligarchic party powerhouse, lacking in empathic concerns for suffering agents. Such is the limited fate of modernity vis-à-vis traditional wisdom of economics or artha in Arthaśāstra and Puruṣārtha (kingdom-of-ends).

It is obvious that tradition meets with difficulties when it attempts to negotiate the demands of a democratic, open, inclusive, and pluralistic society, that is, when it encounters modernity. But Gandhi’s sanguine point is taken. A holistic and de-hierarchized model of life and the world, where duties, roles, and functions are stressed within an overarching order of right, is a better model when social and moral ideals, such as freedom, justice, and equality, are relativized to this larger order. As Gandhi had stressed, an economics that disregards moral values is untrue. This extension of the law of nonviolence in the domain of economics means nothing less than the introduction of moral values; Gandhi used the adjective “moral” as synonymous with “spiritual.” In that regard, economics is tied closely to ethics, but ethics not conceived along the lines of quantitative or mechanistic formulae, such as came to grip the West since the nineteenth-century British empiricists’ reworking of classical moral philosophy. What is interesting about the Gandhian model of economics is that, in this technē, exploitation is replaced by service, acquisitiveness by renunciation or minimalism, global by local self-regulation, and state-controlled development by decentralization. “The economic system, politically
nonviolent and democratic, should be cooperative and constructive instead of [being] exclusive, competitive and militant.” Gandhi eschewed reliance on luxurious and superfluous goods and the entertainment fetishism that provides no moral or intellectual succor and does not help with the development of character and virtues. This does not, however, preclude public utilities on larger-scale plans, or centralized and capital-intensive public services as utilities for other needs, provided there is a measure of balance with small-scale, labor-intensive, decentralized, and community-based trusteeship or cooperatives that provide for the diverse needs of human beings and animals in a protected ecological environment. To be sure, economic equality never meant, for Gandhi, the acquisition of the same amount of wealth and goods by each individual. What it does mean is that “everyone will have proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat, and sufficient khadi with which to cover himself. It also means that the cruel inequality that obtains today [by the exigencies of caste and colonialism] will be removed by nonviolent means.”

There have been a few bold thinkers who have delved into moral and legal texts—as well as the exemplary teachings of contemporary social-reform leaders, such as Vivekananda, Vidyasagar, Ramabai, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinoba Bhave, the Dalai Lama, E. F. Schumacher, Arne Naess—in order to distil ideas into what the Kolkata-based theorist S. K. Chakraborty dubbed “Spiri-nomics” (“spirituality-cum-economics”). This is a messianic scheme, but is rather timely and is making the rounds, at least in India’s management and business arenas. However, what is lacking is a decisive set of projects and policies at the micro and macro levels that would successfully foster and nurture these values. It may, in the long run, bring changes to economics on the management and operational fronts for much-needed attitudinal shifts towards the care and well-being of people, sarvalokadaya.

II. BLACK SATYAGRAHA: IMPACT ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

Gandhian thought is being increasingly recognized and applauded within the African American milieu, but it has a longer history that is not well-known, as we saw earlier with the influence via C. F. Andrews on Booker T. Washington. Little did the well-attired English-trained lawyer thrown off the train at the Pietermaritzburg railway station in Natal Province in 1893 realize that his chance encounter the next day with “an American Negro who happened to be there” would have long reverberations across two continents. But the generosity shown by a powerless Black American, with which to cover himself. It

It happened over a period of time, partly through the convergent ingenuity of itinerant Indian freedom fighters and preacher-advocates of a home-grown peaceful voice against the proscription of “Negroes, Jews, and women” from mainstream American life. Inspired by the ideas of John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi’s radical journals from the humble printing press in Phoenix Settlement outside Durban reached America, usually through contacts in Britain and Europe. African Americans began to attend Pan-African and Colored Peoples’ Congresses in Paris or in London, where followers of Gandhi articulated the irrationality of the common plight of “Brown and Black races.” Among the American participants was W. E. B. Du Bois, whose acquaintance—and that of the other flamboyant all-African leader, Marcus Garvey—with expatriate Indian nationalists led to a steady stream of them on conference and lecture tours of America. They were joined in the mid-1920s by C. F. Andrews and Mirabai (née Madeline Slade), two close English emissaries (who visited the Tuskegee Institute and conversed with Booker T. Washington), followed by the American journalist-activist Gertrude Emerson, whom Gandhi and Tagore sent abroad to correct the misleading
polemics by the British (and their American imitators) about the nationalist, or better, patriotic, cause in India. A spate of Indian National Congress delegates also followed. These included Har Dayal (the founder of US-Hindoo Gadhar Movement), Tarak Nath Das (who led the Indian Immigrant Movement for India’s Freedom), Rabindranath Tagore (who lectured on Indian patriotism and swadeshi), Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Laxmi Nehru (who visited Punjabi-led freedom centers), Manilal Parekh (who lectured on Gandhi at Black colleges), and the long or short stays in America of Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya, Shyama Charan De, Anup Singh, Syud Hossain, Krishnalal Lal Sridharani, and Ram Manohar Lohia, along with J. B. Kripalani, R. R. Dwivedi, and V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.24 The lectures of these Indian compatriots, their various publications or press coverages, and the time they spent in Morehouse or Spelman college libraries, with Hubert Harrison in Harlem, at the Tuskegee Institute, or with Du Bois in New York and at Howard University, all went toward reinforcing the African American intellectuals’ growing admiration of and appeal to Gandhi, the “lean agitator in loin-cloth,” as Winston Churchill was to caricature the impervious leader. What was the specific message of Gandhi to which they seemed attracted? Again, the incisive analysis that Gandhi was offering both in his much-publicized words and politically-nuanced resistant strategy of the excessive, oppressive mentalité of sovereign colonial powers—of which the United States, by inference, was no exception within its own racialized or segregated spaces—was grist to the mill for a community that until late found it difficult to draw on resources from within its own comparatively short and troubling history in America sufficient to stand up against a mighty “White Power” at home. The passive resistance that Thoreau had offered and that the Quakers had instilled in African American minds, and the kind of militancy adopted by the antislavery abolitionists like Mary Allen Pleasant in cohorts with John Brown, either were not empowering enough or proved to be suicidal for the community; the Gandhian active resistance was a far better and, in the long run, more productive alternative. From Gandhi’s exemplary moves, they also learned that there were various other avenues they could avail themselves of in their struggle, such as not resisting arrests as a show of nonviolent protest, taking their grievances to the courts and engaging in legal battles, seeking electoral representation and fighting for voting rights, pleading for educational opportunities or support for their own home-grown initiatives, working towards self-sustaining rural and social institutions, and, last but not least, drawing on the spiritual wealth of the community’s own nativist, religious, and cultural heritages. As early as 1920, the Black pacifist John Haynes Holmes likened Gandhi to a “Social Jesus” of modern times, fighting for the wretched of the earth. In 1922, Richard Bartlett Gregg spent 18 months in Gandhi’s ashram and wrote a major book, The Power of Nonviolence, which was read by budding civil rights advocates in America, including those who became teachers of Martin Luther King, Jr. By 1932, Du Bois had declared in the pages of the Crisis: “There is today in the world but one living maker of miracles, and that is Mahatma Gandhi. He stops eating, and three hundred million Indians, together with the British Empire, hold their breath until they can talk together, yet all that America sees in Gandhi is a joke, but the real joke is America” (Crisis, November 1932). Such approbations were not intended to flatter Gandhi or urge him along in his struggle, but to shine a mirror at their own community’s weakness in not being able to rise to the occasion even while there was a world leader who was charting out strategies that all oppressed people anywhere could well adopt and find of consequential use.

Each major step in Gandhi’s struggle—his imprisonment, virtual impeachment for sedition, jubilant court-case speeches, fasting, and successful satyagrahas such as the Salt March—alongside his and India’s first Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s personal messages to “The Negroes of America,” was noted in the leading Black papers, magazines, and independent church newsletters. In particular, the Crisis (subtitled “A Record of Darker Races,” a journal of the NAACP, stamped for some time with seven Hindu swastikas, edited since 1910 for twenty-five long years by W. E. B. Du Bois), along with (Garvey’s) the Negro World, Atlanta Daily World, Chicago Defender, Christian Century, and others, stepped up coverage of Gandhi in the 1920s and 1930s. Articles featured the increasing traffic between Gandhi’s India and the American South, beginning with the first African American delegation to meet Mohandas Gandhi in 1933 (led by Howard Thurman). Gandhi’s moving interview with Sue Bailey Thurman is reported in Howard Thurman’s autobiography With Head and Heart, alongside a rare photograph of Gandhi, now deep in India’s crisis, with Sue Bailey.25 It was to Mrs. Thurman that Gandhi shared his hope and, indeed, premonition that his philosophy of nonviolence in the struggle towards equality, freedom, and an end to oppressive social-political governance will be successfully realized among “the Negros” more than among his own people in India because of certain deeply embedded historical contingencies and the bedevilling hierarchical caste structure, which in certain ways was even worse than racial stereotyping. As an act of reciprocation and gratitude, in 1947, Black America joined in the celebrations of India’s hard-earned independence with a delegation led by Mordecai Johnson (of Howard) and Benjamin Mays (of Morehouse). A Black delegation also attended Gandhi’s memorial rites after his assassination.

In the following decade, the pastor and educator James Lawson spent two years near Pabna (Wardha) and studied Gandhian nonviolence strategies, which he later drew upon and utilized towards coordinating the Freedom Rides that drew the Kennedys’ state intervention. A generation of Civil Rights Movement leaders—Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Whitney M. Young, Andrew Young, Vincent Harding, Fannie Lou Hamer, and James Farmer—came under the spell of the powerful educator-cum-preacher in Howard Thurman (whose personal collection on Gandhiana was far ahead of any college library collection in America). Women inspired by Gandhian ideals and especially the exemplary life of Kasturbai (Kasturba Gandhi) played some of the strongest roles throughout the history of the Civil Rights Movement—e.g., Mary McLeod Bethune, Pauli Anne Murray, Rosa Parks, Lou Fannie Hamer, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker—each of whom in their unique ways paved the struggle and roadmap towards racial and gender equality. Thus, African Americans were the first observers outside of India to appreciate Kasturbai’s exemplary role as a woman in the struggle for social justice, so much so that, in 1999,
Morehouse College posthumously conferred an honorary doctorate degree on Kasturbai while the cathedral’s organ bellowed out to set music (choreographed by the present author) Gandhi’s two favorite songs (bhajans) to a packed audience.

Eleanor Roosevelt also harbored a deep interest in Gandhi and things Indian; indeed, she honored the first Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharal Nehru’s invitation to her to visit India a few years after India’s Independence. Eleanor struck a lastling friendship with Pauli Murray, who, as I have shown elsewhere,\(^2\) while having close contact with communist workers, became a feminist gay Episcopal priest and steered herself gradually towards Gandhian nonviolence, which she had been studying. At a staged protest, she held up a hand-drawn placard: “India. Am. Negro.” A commentator later explained its significance, and I quote:

She [Murray] noted that Indians constituted a majority in their own country, while the “Am. Negro” constituted a minority “living side by side” with white people. She admired the Indians for a “willingness to sacrifice . . . to change heart of the enemy” and contrasted their activism with white people’s criticism that African Americans “move too fast, upset friendly relations between the races.” While the Indians made up a “well-disciplined movement,” Murray lamented that African Americans suffered from the lack of a grassroots movement. . . . In the weeks before Easter, Murray had met Gandhi follower Krishnalal Sridharani and read his War without Violence. She set out for home armed with nonviolent ideas, but they took her only as far as Virginia.\(^7\)

Pauli Murray, freshly graduated from Berkeley Law School, also served as junior clerk to Thurgood Marshall, later appointed to the Supreme Court, in the legal battle against desegregation that was won in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

Martin Luther King, Jr., himself had a virtual conversion to the Gandhian way after hearing the sermons of Mordecai Johnson; at Morehouse College, he acquainted himself with the writings of Howard Thurman, who began lecturing at Howard University in the 1930s. King, to his utter surprise, observed a fledgling group of student protestors (SNCC) versed in Gandhian tactics successfully stage a civil disobedience campaign. Then occurred the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat allocated for whites, which sparked the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, coordinated by the Montgomery Improvement Association. A marginal Baptist minister then, who reluctantly endorsed the civil disobedience campaign, King found himself coordinating the boycott in full vision of the (inter)national community. King narrates the following:

> While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India’s Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change. So as soon as our victory over bus segregation was won, some of my friends said: “Why don’t you go to India and see for yourself what the Mahatma, whom you so admire, has wrought?”\(^2\)

Thus drawn to nonviolence and civil disobedience, in 1959, he and Coretta Scott King traveled extensively in India, re-living Gandhi’s memory: he called this his pilgrimage to nonviolence. The tenor of the swan-song speech on All India Radio as he was leaving India is captured in the quote heading this paper.

King’s absolute conviction in the efficacy of “the Indian philosophy of nonviolence” to achieve racial justice was set out most forcefully in his 1958 book, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story. With young, nonviolent activists in tow, King eventually mobilized a mass movement, systematically enacting satyagraha-style sit-ins, nonviolent human barricades, civil disobedience, marches, rallies, noncooperation strikes, and pickets, spiced with passionate speeches, while risking arrests or police beating. In his 1963 classic “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (echoing parallel sentiments in Gandhi’s letters from his incarcerations): “[O]ne has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

Also in 1963, King, along with A. Philip Randolph, the flamboyant Bayard Rustin, and John Lewis (later to become a noted Congressman), orchestrated the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (arguably the largest mass nonviolent protest-campaign of its time outside of India), which heralded the federal civil rights bill under the Kennedy Administration.

We could surmise that, in Martin Luther King, Jr., (Black) America found the matured spirit of an indigenous Mahatma, prepared to lay down his life for an all-out struggle against the continuing oppression of its “untouchables.” The ongoing process of reconciling nonviolence with violence-prone authorities and racist institutions, however, was a long time in the making in racialized America, as in British India. This is how the fervently productive and politically significant threads were woven between the Indian Freedom Movement with its transnational advocates and a fledgling Black liberatory consciousness, beginning with Pan-African advocates like Du Bois and Garvey, and continuing well into the post-World War years, through to Indian Independence and the Civil Rights Movement in the South. We can hear whispers of Gandhi’s call to justice, truth, defying unjust laws, and nonviolent resistant action in the recent emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, Anti-Voting Suppression Campaign, Australian Native Land Rights, and various indigenous people’s rights movements across the globe.

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**NOTES**


2. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation.”
14. Problematic here is Gandhi’s idea of truth (or “Truth,” as Gandhi’s use of “Satya” is translated, apparently from the Upanisadic sat for “that which is” or the ultimately real). He does acknowledge that “it is difficult to know what is Truth, when to defend it to the point of Civil Resistance, and how to avoid error in the shape of violence in one’s pursuit after Truth” (*Young India*, March 30, 1922); he might have said rhetorically “what Truth is.” But even more confounding is that on the theoretical side “Truth” defies systematic philosophical articulation and otherwise propositional or logical defence, as has become the mainstay of contemporary epistemology; in that regard Gandhi’s oeuvre towards truth has been controversial, arousing much debate. For a recent summary, see Bindu Puri, “Gandhi’s Truth: Debating Bilgrami.”
26. See Purushottama Bilimoria, “Eleanor Roosevelt and Pauli Murray on America’s Civil Wrongs, Gandhi and India.”
28. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence.”

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


III. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA (FIRMNESS ON TRUTH, NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE)

Satyagraha and Swaraj: Equality Before Freedom

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ABSTRACT
This paper will examine Gandhi’s satyagraha as a method of securing rights by an agraha/firmness on truth. The paper will argue that, though satyagraha was a method of securing freedom/rights, it would be a mistake to align Gandhian freedom/swaraj with the liberty of the liberals. While the liberal tradition strove to maintain a just balance between the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, Gandhi seemed to have accorded primary value to equality and put its concerns before freedom. In this context, the paper will also address and counter criticisms like Ajay Skaria and Aishwary Kumar who have argued that Gandhian satyagraha as soul force involved “the vehement extension of force itself.”

SATYAGRAHA AND SWARAJ: EQUALITY BEFORE FREEDOM

The experience of being thrown out of a train in South Africa brought Gandhi into dramatic confrontation with injustice and a realization of the importance of rights. One can revisit the birth of satyagraha as a method of pressing for rights in Gandhi’s retelling of this story:

The constable came. He took me by the hand and pushed me out . . . I refused to go to the other compartment . . . and sat in the waiting room … winter in the higher regions of South Africa is severely cold.

What is significant in this retelling is perhaps how Gandhi stepped back from the anger that injustice inevitably provokes:

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights, or go back to India, or should I go back to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardly to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation.

Gandhi responded by constructing a method to secure rights: “Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering.” The term “passive resistance” itself came in for much scrutiny and was found to be inadequate, for it did not rule out the use of violence. Gandhi’s choice of satyagraha as the appropriate designation seemed to have been primarily guided by the insight that satya-graha/firmness on truth would maintain absolute nonviolence as an equality of deference/respect between the victim of injustice and the oppressor. This last is evident from the choice of self-suffering/tapas instead of that of meting out suffering to the oppressor: “[I]n satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent.” Gandhi’s choice of the term swaraj instead of “liberty” or “freedom” (to indicate the end sought by Indians) also indicates a commitment to nonviolence as an equality of deference/respect. This paper will argue that Gandhi’s conception of satyagraha as a method, and indeed his very selection of the term satyagraha itself, rested upon the priority he accorded to the claims of equality over those of liberty in the trio of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

In this context, the first section will bring out the foundations of satyagraha in an absolute equality between all existent things and in Gandhi’s argument that satyagraha protects swaraj. The second will examine the purva paksha or the contrary view (Skaria, Kumar), which envisions satyagraha as abiding in the notion of the proper, as it were, as an extension of the use of force. In the conventional use of the term, “force” is nothing if not the affirmation—an affirmation made possible by the sheer exercise of power—that the one against whom it is being exerted has no right to his/her truth-untruth. And, in the context of satyagraha, falls short of or is unequal to the one who is exerting the force of truth/satyagraha. In this connection, this section will suggest that satyagraha was an agraha/firmness rather than “force” as that term has been understood in the European and Anglo-American traditions of thinking of coercion and power.
The concept of firmness/agraha in satyagraha emerged from an alternative tradition and alternative understanding of transformation (of both self and the “other”) through tapas/austerity associated with the miraculous aspects of asceticism, which seeks to convert without domination, coercion, or the will to power over others.

I. SATYAGRAHA PROTECTS SWARAJ: SAMATA, SAMADARSHANA, AND SAMABHAVA

In Gandhi’s conception of it, satyagraha was quite literally an agra or firmness on satya/truth. It is significant that as a noun, agra has the sense of both insistence/perseverance and also of respectful encouragement. As a method of pressing for rights, satyagraha was an insistence that encouraged both oneself and the other to transform from an intolerant perspective—to grow in love, perhaps—and, as such, it involved as complete a nonviolence as was humanly possible. This was because the association of agra and satya in satyagraha derived from Gandhi’s insight into the inseparability between truth and nonviolence:

Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle . . . them . . . . Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end . . ., we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.  

Leaving aside the connection between truth and God for the moment, one might well ask why Gandhi should have thought that ahimsa/nonviolence is the only means to truth. The clue lies, perhaps, in understanding what Gandhi meant by truth and what he meant by ahimsa. For Gandhi, there was absolute truth/satya (as complete transparency), which was the end of the moral life, and relative truths (the everyday truths), which informed the means to “Absolute” truth. Truth (as Absolute and relative) could be arrived at by the practice of non-injury inspired by a dispassionate love of all beings. The reason Gandhi had connected the search for truth with the practice of nonviolence perhaps derived from his understanding that ahimsa/nonviolence was nothing but love.

Drawing on Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra, as much as from Rajchand Bhai’s Moksamala (and discussions on compassion/daya dharma therein), Gandhi not only worked with an expansive understanding of ahimsa but also believed that love alone had the power to dissolve hatred and anger. These last, Gandhi thought, were powerful sources of untruth. There may be good reason to accept Gandhi’s insights if one considers how such emotions (of anger, hatred) can obstruct the search for truth in terms of their close association with the individual ego and its deceptions. Witness that if one is to think of oneself as better than anyone else, one needs to deceive oneself about imperfections that make one both lesser than one thinks one is and lesser than other people, who, on their part, could often be hostile to one’s inflated self-images. Gandhi was well aware of such deceptions and their power to obstruct the truth: “I may not know that I am myself altogether free of self-deception . . . very likely what I say may be just a picture of my elongated self before you.” For Gandhi, the elongated self provoked anger and violence against those who broke its spell.

Gandhi had often argued that it was only nonviolence as love that could make for a non-egoistic response to the “other.” On consideration, it might seem apparent (from a healthy parent-child relationship, for instance) that love is the one emotion that can help to overcome ego-inspired self-centeredness. Gandhi had credited Patanjali with the discovery of the transformative aspect of love:

Ahimsapratishtaya tatsu thirdho veratyaga “HATE DISSOLVES IN THE PRESENCE OF LOVE” (Patanjali yogadarshanam ii.35).

With love dissolving hate and anger, an individual would be better able to arrive at truth. It would, however, remain impossible to arrive at Absolute truth in the human condition and consequently all humans would remain equally distant from such truth. An appreciation of this equidistance from truth perhaps strengthened Gandhi’s reasons for thinking that nonviolence was the only appropriate path to truth and, as such, the only means to press for rights or justice.

One needs to add a caveat to specify that Gandhian nonviolence qua love should not be confused with romantic love, which is necessarily directed towards a chosen other. Quite to the contrary, the love Gandhi invoked as ahimsa was love emancipated from confinement within the boundaries of a relationship or even a set of relationships. It was only once the satyagrahi could practice a non-possessiveness/aparigraha (equally about people as about things) and respond with love to “others,” as if they were his/her kin, that such “others” could be met with complete nonviolence.

It now becomes important to note that Gandhi’s selection of nonviolence/truth-force or love-force as the only appropriate means to arrive at truth (and thereby justice) between human beings derived not only from the connection between truth and love but, more importantly perhaps, also from Gandhi’s connection between equality and freedom. Gandhi’s oft-quoted critique of modernity notwithstanding, he had shared the liberal concerns for liberty (and rights), equality, and fraternity. However, one could go wrong if one took this to mean that Gandhi simply reiterated the liberal account of these values. Gandhi’s understanding of liberty and equality and indeed the relationship between them was quite his own and often drew on insights from traditional texts like the Bhagavad Gita. In conceiving satyagraha as a method of securing rights by tapas/self-suffering, Gandhi had drawn primarily upon the notions of samata, samadarshana, and samabhava as they had appeared in the verses of the Bhagavad Gita with which he was familiar, both from his own commentaries and from those of other scholars. Consider, for a moment, why Gandhi should have recommended the choice of suffering in one’s own person as the method of securing rights from unjust others. An answer could appear if one would recall that Gandhi was familiar with the miraculous power of self-suffering/tapas/austerity to transform oneself (and others equal to oneself) both from relations in the family and from myths about the power of austerity in the Indian...
tradition. However, Gandhi’s choice of tapas/self-suffering as the appropriate method for arriving at freedom/rights can be traced to the priority he accorded to equality over liberty and from the connection he had made between means and end. I am reminded here of Akeel Bilgrami’s foundational insight about the integrity in Gandhi’s ideas and his point that Gandhi’s political strategies often drew from seemingly far removed and “abstract epistemological and methodological commitments.”

The present connections become a case in point, for Gandhi chose ahimsa as the appropriate method to press for rights on account of the priority he accorded to equality. Gandhi thought that self-assurance about having possessed the absolute truth involved an assumption of superiority that denied the status of equality between oneself and the other who appeared unjust. This self-righteous denial of equality justified violence, which in turn ensured one’s distance from the truth. On this view, no one could be both non-violent/egalitarian and self-righteous about having arrived at absolute truth. The satyagrahi was accordingly always required to remain deferential to the equal right of his/her opponent to be close to truth. One might consider that the only way for the satyagrahi to maintain an equality of deference for the truth-untruths of the other and yet keep up the insistence on his/her truth-untruth was by practicing austerity/tapas for the sake of truth. Such self-suffering demonstrated both the seriousness of the satyagrahi’s insistence and the fact that such insistence did not and could not (in its humility) involve any disrespect to the truth-untruth of the equal “other.”

However, quite in keeping with the integrity in Gandhi’s ideas, there was another consideration at work here—that of the relationship between means and end. One could not attain rights by using means that neglected the performance of (what Gandhi saw as) the human being’s swabhavika/own-most duty of deference to the equability/samabhava that was owed to the opposing other. The use of unjust means (neglecting the duty of equability) would make it impossible to qualify the “end” achieved as true/just. One might consider here that the end (arrived at by unjust means) would be unjust because the means used would go against the swabhava/own-most nature of being human. Gandhi had often spoken of the own-most nature/swabhava of the human being in terms of “the unilateral obligation” incumbent on each individual “to own kinship” with all human/non-human others. Owning such kinship involved accepting that all beings were (like members in a family) equal.

The answer to the question why Gandhi should have thought that satyagraha as a form of self-suffering was the only means open to one who sought rights perhaps derived from another question. One indeed that lay buried in the Indian tradition, in an ancient text and a copious number of commentaries and interpretations thereof. This was Arjuna’s question to Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. One might recall that question and, more importantly, Gandhi’s interpretation of Sri Krishna’s reply. It was in his Discourses on the Gita and Anasaktiyoga that Gandhi initiated the discussion on absolute equality (not only between human beings, hostile beliefs, and opposing worldviews but also between all that exists). Gandhi wrote about Arjuna’s question in his Discourses on the Gita, radically re-interpreting Sri Krishna’s answer to Arjuna’s question in line with samabhava/having the attitude of equality to things as they are/exist. He suggested at the very start of his commentary that:

It is important to consider what Arjuna’s question was and what the circumstances were in which he raised it.17

It was in interpreting Arjuna’s question that Gandhi made his first argument about the absolute equality of the Gita.10 Gandhi recounted the scene and the question:

Arjuna requests Shri Krishna to station his chariot between the two armies, so that he may see the warriors on the field.

He sees that all of them are relatives and friends, whom one cannot easily bring oneself to kill.

Arjuna says: “I do not see any good in killing one’s kinsmen.” The stress here is on “kinsmen” . . .

Reminding the Hindus about the ethical implications of the espousal of a metaphysics of a vedantic oneness (reaffirmed by his own equation of Truth with God), Gandhi observed:

The first thing to bear in mind is that Arjuna falls into the error of making a distinction between kinsmen and outsiders. Outsiders may be killed even if they are not oppressors, and kinsmen may not be killed even if they are. . . . The Gita permits no distinction between one’s relations and others.20

Perhaps a comparison with Tilak’s commentary on the Gita (which Gandhi had studied) might serve to bring out the Gandhi who appeared radically insurrectionary to conservatives. It is interesting to make this point, especially given the argument by critics like Kumar that Gandhi was an upholder of limits/maryada dharma. One might recall (with profit) Tilak’s interpretation of Arjuna’s question and Sri Krishna’s reply:

The blessed Lord is telling Arjuna to fight, having regard to what his “dharma” is, . . . it is better to die performing one’s caste duties; following the duties enjoined on another caste is dangerous.22

There is clearly a radical shift between Tilak’s interpretation that Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to shake off his despondency and perform the duties enjoined by his caste and Gandhi’s alternative reading that Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to abjure all discrimination between one’s own kinsmen and “others.” It is in this radical shift that one might locate the source of discomfort that Gandhi might have caused to the conservative proponents of the Hindu dharma. The orthodox were discomforted by Gandhi, perhaps because he brought the notion of equality down from the rarefied plane of atmans/souls without bodies to that of embodied beings. Gandhi affirmed an absolute equality which could be practiced as an equality of regard between one’s own and others. He did this by bringing it home to the Gita, too close for comfort, as it were:
He (Arjuna) simply raised the question of distinction between kinsmen and others, in the same way that a fond mother would advance arguments favoring her child.\(^{23}\)

Gandhi remained emphatic that, in his very first response to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna had enjoined that it was incumbent on those who sought truth or God to see every “other” (human or animal) with samadarshita/an equal eye. Gandhi brought a radical fervor to his arguments about equality when he had observed (somewhat uncharacteristically) in this context:

> . . . should it be necessary to cut off, with a sword, one’s father’s head, one must do so . . . if one would be ready to cut off anyone else’s head in similar circumstances.\(^{24}\)

As he explained, the “extreme example”\(^{25}\) had been used only to bring home the lesson of an absolute equality of deference:

> . . . those who interpret the teaching of the Gita to mean that one ought to kill the wicked . . . should kill their . . . relatives if they are wicked. In practice, they will not be able to do so. Naturally, then, it would occur to the reader that where destruction is prescribed the work contemplates some other form . . . the Gita advises us not to make any distinction between our own people and others.\(^{26}\)

Such an interpretation of Arjuna’s question inspired Gandhi to think of a method of pressing for rights/justice that constitutively prioritized the claims of equality over those of liberty. He demanded that the satyagrahi, like Arjuna, needed to maintain an equability between (the truth-untruths and person of) the victim and the oppressor. For Gandhi, in fact, the satyagrahi was one who held “enemy and friend in equal regard.”\(^{27}\) Gandhi often emphasized the samadarshita of the satyagrahi: “In every step that he takes, the satyagrahi is bound to consider the position of his adversary.”\(^{28}\) Gandhi insisted:

> Even as the eye lashes automatically protect the eyes, so does satyagraha, when kindled automatically protect the freedom of the soul.\(^{29}\)

In part, this connection was made on account of the way Gandhi thought of swaraj. Freedom as Gandhian swaraj was both self-rule and home rule with the caveat that one could arrive at the second only to the extent that one actualized the first. One might consider that Gandhian swaraj as “self-rule” was based upon one’s control of the over-assertive self. Self-rule involved a progressive realization of humility which entailed the practice of equability between oneself and others. Perhaps it is because the term swaraj does not quite keep to the sense of “autonomy” (in the liberal usage of the term) that commentators, like Skaria, are led to suggest that the restraint in Gandhi’s “self-restraint” is nothing but a confinement in maryada/hadh/limit. This then takes me straight into the next section on the purva paksha.

II. THE FORCE IN GANDHI’S SOUL FORCE: THE PURVA PAKSHA

While much has already been said about the satyagrahi maintaining an equality of deference, little has been said of the truth which the satyagrahi sought. Bilgrami has argued that Gandhi could make a connection between truth and ahimsa because he thought of truth (like the pluralist anekantavadi Jains) as relative to the seeker.\(^{30}\) I have taken issue with Bilgrami,\(^{31}\) making the point that Gandhi had made a distinction between Absolute truth/God and truths that might be relative to one’s point of view and about which one might be deceived. In fact, to hold truths with humility was central to the search for truth itself, which could never be found without ahimsa as utmost humility/equability towards all. Gandhi’s very making of the distinction between absolute and relative truth demonstrates that he did not think of truth as relative. Further, the fact that Gandhi was involved in fasts to death for the sake of truth indicates that he was not content with a relativism about truth as an end of human life.

In more recent years, perhaps taking off from this Gandhian distinction between absolute and relative truth, Skaria does away with Gandhi’s “Absolute truth or God” altogether by speaking of the death of God in Gandhi. While one might accept Gandhi’s equation between Truth and God as indicating that morality can be quite independent of religion, Skaria takes these insights in another direction. He argues that, just as there is no absolute truth, Gandhi’s equality too cannot be absolute, for it rests upon a sharing of “finitude itself”\(^{32}\) and, from such sharing, it becomes an equality of limits. From here, it becomes easy for Kumar\(^{33}\) to go on to argue (as he does) that the agraaha in satyagraha is about a force and imposition of such limits/maryada dharma on the “other.” Skaria has argued that the “apprehension of the death of God”\(^{34}\) is important, for:

> It is rather the very impossibility of God as a sovereign being that sustains the emphasis on a universal love. Because of this very different starting point, even same or similar phrases such as “universal love” or “equality before God” rotate on very different trajectories.\(^{35}\)

The difference of starting point, as it turns out, is fairly significant as it somewhat dismantles equality itself:

> even though Gandhi emphasizes universal love, in his writings such love becomes inseparable from swadeshi (staying with one’s desh—country or place).\(^{36}\)

This happens (according to Skaria, of course) because “this absolute equality is satya . . . that . . . makes satya synonymous with justice... now the demand for equality and against inequality is ownmost to being. To this seizure Gandhi gives the name satyagraha.”\(^{37}\)

In order to understand what satyagraha as seizure involves, one needs to attend to Gandhi’s interplay of the two senses of swaraj, and Skaria argues that this interplay brings in the question of limit/hadh:
Swaraj here names the rule of the self, and in the process wrestles with the questions: What is proper to rule? What is proper to the self?\textsuperscript{38}

This leads naturally enough to the position that

Even if satyagrha's claim no sovereignty over the other, this is so because they submit to the sovereignty of the proper over the self. That grounding violence also implicitly imposes the sovereignty of the proper over the other too.\textsuperscript{39}

Taking off from the point that satyagraha involves the imposition of reciprocity, limits, and the proper/the kana on both oneself and the other, Aiswary Kumar argues that "satyagraha allowed Gandhi to conceptualize force as the fulcrum of every day virtue and action."\textsuperscript{40} One might now recall that it was the death of God that made for a starting point which necessitated "the insuperable vow of self-sacrifice in which the immanence of being had to be circumscribed by a transcendentalism of disciplinary limit." Suppose, further, Gandhi's "rhetoric of spirit"\textsuperscript{41} made for the complicity between the classical idea of the state and the injunctions of the moral law. Choosing to locate Gandhi's soul-force within the lineage of the European tradition, Kumar, in fact, argues that Gandhi's "spirit" veered close enough to Hegel's phenomenological elaboration of the "modern autonomous self," which acquired its form "in the shadows of force alone."\textsuperscript{42} Hind Swaraj was not as untimely as it looked. Gandhi was most modern, even if not decisively humanist, in ascribing this spiritual invincibility to force. For he had placed himself consciously or otherwise, within an early modern tradition in which the discourse on spirit had returned\textsuperscript{43} and, as it turned out, had been given, "at least since Hegel, a spiritual sanctity."\textsuperscript{44}

What this came to mean, as Kumar argues, was that "satyagrahic fanaticism"\textsuperscript{45} was centralizing rather than egalitarian and that it appropriated and silenced the other by "the imposition of limits on the unequal's faculties."\textsuperscript{46} Satyagraha itself remained "an ethical demand rooted in the . . . groundless recesses of faith."\textsuperscript{47}

To take issue with this set of arguments involves some talk not only of Gandhi's agaha but also, and perhaps more importantly, of Gandhi's truth/satya. To begin with, one needs to ask if there is sufficient warrant to say that Gandhi's assertion—"I have come to the conclusion that for myself God is Truth. But two years ago, I went a step further and said Truth is God"—rested upon insights into the death of God? If it is, then God has been dead in ancient Indian thought from its earliest beginning, for Gandhi's selection of truth as the appropriate name of God came in continuity with the satyam jnanam anantam (Truth Bliss Infinity) of the early Upanishadic tradition. More importantly, much that Gandhi said (and did) went against the idea that he had based his moral edifice on the death of God. It is important to note that while Gandhi perhaps sought to clarify that moral life was not dependent upon God, he not only spoke of devotion to a personal God, dwelling in his commentaries on the Gita on Sri Krishna's divine form, but also listened to the voice of God/inner voice at many critical moments of his life. Note the following from Gandhi:

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. . . . This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are false and deceptive. . . . Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.\textsuperscript{48}

Yet this is much more than a question of what Gandhi said. What is more important is that Gandhi did not, and could not, consistently locate himself as espousing a "groundless" Faith.

In this context, it is important to recall that, for Gandhi, there could be no faith which was held by the faithful to be groundless. Faith to be faithful had to be grounded in the humbling belief in that which was beyond itself and transcendent to human reality. It is also important to understand that in the worldview of the ancients—within which Gandhi was self-consciously located—a lot followed from being a part of a wider cosmos where order emerged from a ground other than human. Gandhi's faith rested in absolute humility and on a God whose voice he heard (and responded to) and of whom he spoke in his comments on the Gita. Perhaps then, one need not go back to the European tradition to interpret the agra in satyagraha. For satyagraha could well rest on what Gandhi claimed rested upon—the power of love to effect conversion of hearts—one that derived from the human being's love for Truth or God. It might then seem unnecessary to read agra as part of the more modern will to power of a spirit in Hegel's phenomenological account of the self. What then of Kumar and Skaria's account of the "force" in satyagraha? The force could dissipate if one considers that one cannot be compelled (in the conventional sense of the term) into transformation, which indeed is what Gandhi sought to effect through love. Gandhi responded to critics who accused him of coercion:

If my fast . . . is to be interpreted as pressure, I can only say that such moral pressure should be welcomed by all concerned.\textsuperscript{49}

It is significant to consider that if all moral encouragement/agaha and transformation are to be assimilated to the will to power, one would need to be open about the complete dismissal of the moral life in modern moral philosophy. This perhaps is not something modern moral philosophy would welcome. Consider what remains if moral encouragement is understood as an exercise of power and not goodness. So it may come to pass that one need not turn to Hegel to locate the genealogy of Gandhi's emphasis on a conversion of the
heart. One need only recall traditional Indian accounts of tapas as making for miraculous transformations:

There was a certain rishi; the fire emitted from between his brows put an end to all suffering. The point of this text is that, when the soul becomes alive, all miseries end and so the injustices perpetrated by the government will be no more when we become alive in our soul…. We want happiness in place of the present misery; if so we should suffer voluntarily and lay down our lives for the sake of truth."

Perhaps then satyagraha emerged from within a very different tradition—one which could not, and need not—be read from within the European and Anglo-American traditions of philosophy.

NOTES
10. Kumar, Radical Equality.
32. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, 14.
33. Kumar, Radical Equality.
34. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, viii.
35. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xiii.
36. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xiiii.
37. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, xvii.
38. Skaria, Unconditional Equality, 3.
40. Kumar, Radical Equality, 61.
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Making Sense of Gandhi’s Satyagraha
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ABSTRACT
The 153rd Anniversary of the birth of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is as much a cause for celebration as for reflection on the future of this globe we inhabit. The global spurt in the incidence of violence, intolerance, and hatred in the twenty-first century has given rise to vast cultural and moral chaos. This phenomenon has its roots in the sad demise of humanitarianism and the concomitant history of moral decomposition the world over. At this crucial juncture, Gandhi's worldview invariably activates the moral impulse towards building a nonviolent social order. Gandhi's worldview in its pristine form represents an idea of an accommodative truth built not merely on mutual tolerance
but on acceptance of the other as an equal and dignified soul. Gandhi’s life journey evolved through experiments for building a humane society based upon the troika of truth, nonviolence, and satyagraha. This paper aims to deliberate upon Gandhi’s worldview grounded in his moral philosophy of satyagraha and show how it can work as an effective countervailing tool and method to understand the growing culture and discourse of violence today.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mahatma Gandhi had an abiding faith in the unflagging power of nonviolence and ultimate victory of truth. It was out of this faith that Gandhi evolved his satyagraha (the exercise of soul force) against all injustice and exploitation. For Gandhi, satyagraha was not just a useful method of political action and social change and the satyagrahi was considered far more than a mere practitioner of certain skills. The satyagrahi was the embodiment of an ideal, and the satyagrahi’s lifestyle was a lifestyle worth emulating.

The centrality of satyagraha to Gandhi’s cosmology makes the alternative he proposed in normative terms very attractive. Satyagraha involved a relentless search for truth with steadfastness, commitment, fearlessness, and willingness to act. Gandhi suggested that the philosophy is not a weapon of the weak. On the other hand, it demands tremendous moral strength and fortitude, because satyagraha is not a physical force. The idea behind the satyagrahi is not to coerce or inflict pain on the adversary and seek his destruction. The satyagrahi’s object is to convert him or win him over by love, sympathy, and patience.

In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill will whatever. “It is often forgotten that it is never the intention of a satyagrahi to embarrass the wrong-doer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is must, always to his heart.” For Gandhi, “suffering love” was the best way to do this and formed the inspiring principle of his new method. As he rightly puts it: “I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race not the sword.”

Gandhi’s satyagraha, thus, was “unique [as] a method of securing rights by personal suffering.” Self-sacrifice is essential to satyagraha. Ajay Skaria quotes Gandhi as saying:

> If I do not accept . . . [a] law and suffer [bhogvi] the penalty for breaking it, then I have used soul-force or satyagraha. In satyagraha, I give myself in sacrifice [aapbhog aapu chhu]. To give oneself in sacrifice [aapbhog aapvo] is better than giving the other in sacrifice [par bhog], this all say. Besides, if the satyagrahi’s fight is wrong, then only he who fights suffers [dukh bhogvey chhe]. So, for his own error, he himself suffers. . . . No man can say with certainty that a certain activity is bad. But when he thinks it bad, then for him it is bad. In such a situation, he should not do it, and should suffer the consequences of this. This is the key to satyagraha.

In the words of Bhikhu Parekh, satyagraha, thus, was “a surgery of the soul,” “a way of activating soul force.” Parekh writes:

> The satyagrahi’s love and moral nobility disarmed his opponent, weakened his feelings of anger and hatred, and mobilized his higher nature. And his uncomplaining suffering denied his opponent the pleasure of victory, mobilized neutral public opinion, and created in him a mood conducive to calm introspection. The two together triggered the complex process of critical self-examination on which a satyagraha relied for its ultimate success.

It may be recalled that Gandhi’s steadfast commitment to working satyagraha in practical life saw him introducing very strict canons of moral discipline for the satyagrahi (vow of Truth) at his Sabarmati Ashram in 1916. A satyagrahi, according to Gandhi, must strictly adhere to the following eleven maxims:

1. **Satya (Truth)**
2. **Ahimsa** (nonviolence or love)
3. **Brahmcharya** (chastity)
4. **Asvad** (control of the palate)
5. **Asteya** (non-stealing)
6. **Aparigraha** (non-possession or poverty)
7. **Abhaya** (fearlessness)
8. **Ashrupshyata Nivaran** (removal of untouchability)
9. **Sharer Shrama** (bread labor)
10. **Sarva Dharma Samabhav** (tolerance or equality of religions)
11. **Swadeshi** (self-reliance)

Considering not all Indians in his satyagraha movements could live up to the expected moral standards, Gandhi subsequently, in 1939, stated the list of seven guiding factors that he held essential for all satyagrahis in India.

1. **A satyagrahi must have a living faith in God.**
2. **He must believe in truth and nonviolence as his creed and, therefore, have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature, which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering.**
3. **He must be leading a chaste life and be ready and willing, for the sake of his cause, to give up his life and his possessions.**
4. **He must be a habitual Khadi wearer and spinner. This is essential for India.**
5. **He must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.**
6. **He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules or discipline as may be laid down from time to time.**
7. He should carry out the jail rules unless they are specially devised to hurt his self-respect. The qualifications are not to be regarded as exhaustive. They are illustrative only.

TRUTH AND NONVIOLENCE
Among the above-outlined seven principles, nonviolence and truth clearly foreground Gandhi’s ideas of satyagraha. The other principles can be deduced from these two central tenets. Satyagraha was formed by combining two words— “truth” (satya) and “firmness,” “insistence,” or “determined pursuit” (agraha). Satyagraha, thus, literally meant “holding on to truth” or “truth force” and entailed that nonviolence (“of the strong”) would be adopted as the exclusive means for pursuing truth.

In comparison between truth and nonviolence, truth stands at a very fundamental level from the ontological point of view, whereas nonviolence is pivotal to the moral point of view in which truth itself is discovered. Nonviolence forges the way for the discovery of and the ultimate encounter with truth. Therefore, nonviolence is the moral way to truth and leads us to the ultimate victory of truth over untruth. Gandhi admits:

My study and experience of nonviolence have proved to me that it is the greatest force in the world. It is the surest method of discovering truth and it is the quickest because there is no other. It works silently, but almost imperceptibly, but nonetheless surely. It is the one constructive process of Nature in the midst of incessant destruction going on about us. Thus, nonviolence pervades the entire space of human activities and makes man morally responsible and responsive to truth. Truth as the law of existence remains undiscovered in the absence of nonviolence. While nonviolence is the law of our species, truth is the law of all existence. In this sense, truth is to be treated as the ontological principle, while nonviolence is to be treated as the moral principle. Gandhi had defined his personal goal as seeing God face to face. Gandhi, at the same time, was aware of the fact that the human mind cannot know the Absolute fully. To have found the Truth completely, Gandhi believed, would mean that one has realized oneself and reached one’s destiny; in other words, one has become perfect. Being aware of human beings’ inability to know the Truth wholly, Gandhi insisted on the importance of being open to those who differ with us. Although Gandhi never claimed to have known the Truth, he did claim to have found the way to it. Gandhi believed that humans could only realize Truth/God by pursuing ahimsa or nonviolence. Thus, realization of truth warrants an action rooted in nonviolence. Thus, for Gandhi, ahimsa or nonviolence is the means; truth is the end. Both are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. Truthfulness is the prerequisite for a pursuit of ahimsa.

THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE
Unlike the commonsensical understanding of nonviolence as non-injury or avoidance of physical violence, Gandhi expands its use to include a number of different meanings. In Gandhi’s philosophy, ahimsa is not primarily refraining from physical injury. Rather, he argues that ahimsa should be a principle guiding humans in their thoughts, words, and deeds. “Ahimsa,” Gandhi writes, “is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-doer.”

“Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant.” The general thrust of Gandhi’s injunction was that ahimsa cannot be realized unless you can calmly tolerate your opponent. Gandhi had observed, “It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa with General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend.” The principle of ahimsa, therefore, involves respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from hate, and a desire for peace. Moreover, for Gandhi:

a votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and, therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself.

Gandhi’s creed of nonviolence has no room for cowardice or weakness. Gandhi writes:

Nonviolence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. A helpless mouse is not nonviolent because he is always eaten by pussy. He would gladly eat the murderer if he could, but he ever tries to flee from her. We do not call him a coward, because he is made by nature to behave no better than he does. But a man who, when faced by danger, behaves like a mouse, is rightly called a coward. He harbors violence and hatred in his heart and would kill his enemy if he could without hurting himself. He is a stranger to nonviolence.

Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, Gandhi advised violence. Thus, when he was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, his eldest son asked him whether he should have run away and seen him killed or whether he should have used his physical force to defend him. Gandhi categorically responded that “it was his duty to defend him even by using violence... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a
Thus, for Gandhi, an ability to use physical force is necessary for a true appreciation of satyagraha.

Gandhi observes: “He alone can practice ahimsa who knows how to kill, i.e., knows what himsa is.” Gandhi continues:

It is my practice of ahimsa and failure to get our people even to understand the first principles of ahimsa that have led to the discovery that all killing is not himsa, that, sometimes, practice of ahimsa may even necessitate killing and that we as a nation have lost the true power of killing. It is clear that he who has lost the power to kill cannot practice non-killing. Ahimsa is a renunciation of the highest type. A weak and an effeminate nation cannot perform this grand act of renunciation, even as a mouse cannot be properly said to renounce the power of killing a cat. It may look terrible but it is true that we must, by a well-sustained, conscious effort, regain this power, and, then, if we can only do so, deliver the world from its travails of himsa by a continuous abdication of this power. . . . I do believe that we shall have to teach our children the art of self-defense. . . . I am most anxious that you should understand this new view of ahimsa. It is not a fall but it is a rise. The measure of love evoked by this discovery is infinitely greater than ever it was before.11

Perfect nonviolence, according to Gandhi, is impossible so long as we exist physically. As he himself opines:

Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward himsa. The very fact of his living—eating, drinking and moving about—necessarily involves some himsa, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. Thus, for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants, etc., and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so . . . for the benefit of the species, we kill carnivorous beasts.12

Gandhi further states: “In certain cases, taking life may be a duty. Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about, sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes in his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who dispatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man.”13

But Gandhi believes nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence. He writes:

[F]orgiveness is manlier than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I, therefore, appreciate the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his ilk. They would tear him to pieces if they could. But I do not believe India to be a helpless creature. Only I want to use India’s and my strength for a better purpose.14

SATYAGRAHA AS PRACTICE/ACTION

Although Gandhi never laid down a handbook of principles or procedures, based on the experience of satyagraha campaigns in India, one could draw a certain code of discipline, fundamental rules, and steps in a mass satyagraha campaign. Joan V. Bondurant explains these as follows.15 First, a code of discipline.

CODE OF DISCIPLINE

1. The following points were laid down by Gandhi as a code of discipline for volunteers in the 1930 movement:16

2. All satyagrahis had to willingly suffer the anger of the opponent without any retaliation.

3. All satyagrahis had to refrain from obeying any orders from the opponent even when threatened with severe punishment.

4. All satyagrahis had to refrain from insults and swearing. They also had to protect opponents from insults or attacks even when the satyagrahis’ lives were at risk.

5. All satyagrahis were required not to resist arrest nor to resist the attachment of property unless they were holding the property as trustees. They were also expected to refuse to surrender any property held in trust even at the risk of their lives.

6. All satyagrahis were expected to behave in an exemplary manner when taken as prisoners.

7. As members of a satyagraha unit, all satyagrahis were required to obey the orders of their leaders and resign from the unit if any serious disagreement arose. They were required to be prepared not to expect any guarantees for the maintenance of their dependents.

FUNDAMENTAL RULES

1. Self-reliance at all times. Outside aid may be accepted but should never be counted upon.

2. Initiative in the hands of the satyagrahis. Satyagrahis, through the tactics of positive resistance, persuasion, and adjustment, must press the movement ever forward.

3. Propagation of the objectives, strategy, and tactics of the campaign. Propaganda must be made an integral part of the movement. Education of the opponent, the public, and participants must continue apace.
4. Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with truth. Continuing reassessment of the situation and the objectives with a view to possible adjustment of demands is essential.

5. Progressive advancement of the movement through steps and stages determined to be appropriate within the given situation. Direct action is to be launched only after all other efforts to achieve an honorable settlement have been exhausted.

6. Examination of weakness within the satyagraha group. The morale and discipline of the satyagrahis must be maintained through active awareness of any development of impatience, discouragement, or breakdown of nonviolent attitude.

7. Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honorable terms. Every effort should be made to win over the opponent by helping him, thereby demonstrating sincerity to achieve an agreement with, rather than a triumph over, the adversary.

8. Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation. Satyagraha excludes all compromise, which affects basic principles or essential portions of valid objectives.

9. Insistence upon full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement.

**STEPS IN A MASS SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN**

1. Negotiation and arbitration. Every effort to resolve the conflict or redress the grievance through established channels must be exhausted before the further steps are undertaken.

2. Preparation of the group for direct action. Before any direct action is taken in a conflict situation, motives are to be carefully examined, exercises in self-discipline must be initiated, discussions are to be conducted within the group regarding issues at stake, appropriate procedures to be undertaken, the circumstances of the opponent, the climate of public opinion, etc.

3. Agitation. This step includes an active propaganda campaign together with such demonstrations as mass-meetings, parades, and slogan-shouting.

4. Issuing of an ultimatum. A final strong appeal to the opponent should be made explaining what further steps will be taken if no agreement can be reached.

5. Economic boycott and forms of strike. Picketing may be widely employed, together with continued demonstrations and education of the public. Sitting dharna (a form of sit-down strike) may be employed, as well as nonviolent labor strike and attempts to organize a general strike.

6. Non-cooperation. Depending upon the nature of the issues at stake, actions such as non-payment of taxes, boycott of schools and other public institutions, ostracism, and even voluntary exile may be initiated.

7. Civil disobedience. Great care should be exercised in the selection of laws to be contravened. Such laws should be either central to the grievance or symbolic.

8. Usurping of the functions of government.

9. Parallel government. The establishment of parallel functions should grow out of step and these should be strengthened in such a way that the greatest possible cooperation from the public can be obtained.

Whether a campaign could be called satyagraha or not can be determined by applying the above-mentioned standards. What specific action is to be undertaken in a satyagraha movement greatly depends on the nature of circumstances, but a successful satyagraha campaign depends largely upon the discipline, leadership, steadfast purpose, and equally upon the opponent will's to reciprocate as well. Gandhi himself was aware of the idea being abused in cases where it easily becomes duragraha.17

A study of most of the satyagraha campaigns initiated by Gandhi in India would indicate that they were largely successful. In those mass struggles, Gandhi introduced several forms of pressure such as economic boycott, non-payment of taxes, non-cooperation, and hartal. In addition to these and other methods, Gandhi introduced the highly controversial method of fasting. He knew that his fasts caused considerable unease among his critics and followers and went to great lengths to defend them. According to Parekh, his fast was a form of suffering love and had a three-fold purpose:

First, it was his way of expressing his deep sense of sorrow and hurt at the way in which those he loved had degraded themselves and disappointed him. Second, as their leader he felt responsible for them, and his fast was his way of atoning for their misdeeds. Third, it was his last desperate attempt, an “intense spiritual effort,” to stir their “sluggish conscience,” to “sting them into action,” and to mobilize their moral energies.18

Alltogether, Gandhi employed a wide range of methods, from the most negative to the most positive and comprehensive work of reform and social service involving the Constructive Program in later years.18 The Champaran Satyagraha stands out as the first satyagraha conducted by Gandhi on the soil of India. It established Gandhi’s leadership even though it was a non-political struggle. In this arduous tussle with the European indigo planters, his aim was to “promote peace between the planters and the ryots so as to secure to the ryots the freedom and dignity that should belong to all mankind.” It ended in complete success and established a measure of goodwill on all sides. The twelve months
or so from April 1917 to mid-1918 saw the application of satyagraha by Gandhi in three different engagements: with the landlords in Champaran, with the capitalists in Ahmedabad, and with the government in Kheda. The Champaran Satyagraha was of course an important episode in Gandhi’s life, but the mill-workers’ strike in Ahmedabad and the Kheda Satyagraha were not less important.

All three campaigns, none of them political in the strict sense of the term, were conducted with precisely defined objectives in view. They constitute classical demonstrations of satyagraha in different situations and against different adversaries. All three ended successfully. Through these campaigns India was introduced to mass satyagraha as an effective instrument for fighting against injustice and oppression and for securing rights without resorting to violence under any condition. The campaigns were effective demonstrations that the poor, the weak, and the dispossessed could stand up to defy the might of powerful indigo planters in Bihar, the mighty mill owners of Ahmedabad, and the government officials in Kheda.

During the nationalist movement in India, the most frequently employed methods of a satyagraha campaign were non-cooperation and civil disobedience, apart from submitting memoranda of demands to the authority. While non-cooperation (hartal, strikes, boycotts, and fasts unto death) was a mechanism for indirect pressure on the opponent, civil disobedience (picketing, non-payment of taxes, and defiance of specific laws) entailed several positive steps to confront the ruling authority face-to-face. Simultaneously with these two contrasting designs for political action, Gandhian satyagraha also entailed a Constructive Program (for the promotion of communal harmony, removal of untouchability, adult education, promotion of social and economic equality, and devolution of power through schemes of political and economic decentralization).

Thus, satyagraha was not merely a political weapon to challenge the British rule. It was also a detailed scheme to rid Indian society of the age-old social and economic prejudices. In other words, satyagraha was a continuous exercise with clear social and economic messages relevant to the underprivileged and exploited, apart from the political opposition to the British rule.

**SATYAGRAHA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Satyagraha was a theoretical construct of conflict resolution as well as a practical doctrine of political mobilization during the freedom struggle in India. In the narrow sense, satyagraha was strictly a method of political struggle, drawing on moral reasoning; in the wider sense, it was an extremely humane and creative way of dealing with disagreements and conflicts involving the ruler and the ruled as well as the socio-economically unprivileged and the wealthy. What is most distinct in Gandhi’s conceptualization is the importance of “rational” discussion and persuasion and their obvious limitations in radically altering the existing moral relationships between individuals in different socio-economic locations. Hence, satyagraha was to be a continuous process, seeking to transform the individuals involved by appealing to their humane moral values.

Notwithstanding the noble significance of satyagraha, the doctrine has invited certain criticisms. Gandhi maintained that satyagraha could prevail anywhere because it could convert anyone. Critics, however, argue that satyagraha will work provided the opponent also adheres to a certain level of morality. The efficacy of satyagraha in all situations is often questioned. It has been pointed out that Gandhi’s nonviolent campaigns could only succeed because of the benign and liberal British government; such campaigns could have been easily crushed under a strong, brutal regime like the Nazis.\(^{21}\)

Questioning the strength of Gandhian beliefs and his failure to understand the nature of totalitarianism, George Orwell pointed out that:

Gandhi believed in “arousing the world,” which is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see how Gandhi’s methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your intentions known to your adversary. . . . Moreover the assumption, which served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: Who is sane? Was Hitler sane?\(^{22}\)

Even satyagraha becomes monstrous when it generates fear as a response rather than surrender without subordination. After the Chauri Chaura incident, thus, Gandhi says: “I know the only thing that the government fears is this monstrous majority that I appear to command. They do not know that I fear it still more than they do themselves. I am literally sick over it. I would feel myself on surer ground if I were spit upon by them.”\(^{23}\)

Parekh believes “Gandhi was wrong to think that all or even most social conflicts could be resolved by touching the opponent’s heart. They sometimes occur because men of goodwill take very different views of what human well-being consists in. On the basis of the principle of the sanctity of human life, some find abortion, euthanasia, and war morally unacceptable while others reach the opposite conclusion.” Parekh continues:

Gandhi was probably right to argue that human beings are generally affected by the suffering of others and regret that suffering even if they are unable or unwilling to do anything about it. However, he overlooked the fact that, if they thought the suffering deserved, their reaction would be different. Not the suffering per se but one’s judgement of it determines one’s response to it, and hence it has different effects on different individuals, depending on their beliefs and values.
The Sharpeville massacre left many a white South African unmoved, the pictures of the Vietnamese victims of American napalm bombs did not disturb the consciences of many Americans, and the brutal Nazi treatment of the Jews had no effect on many a German.14

CONCLUSION
Gandhi's satyagraha had its limitations but is a very powerful, novel, moral method of political action and social change. Gandhi's vision of satyagraha suggests a way of ethical, moral living, which demands purity of thought and action, love and compassion, courage and humility, and self-restraint to pursue the ends that gives strength to resist evil with conviction and truth. Elaborating upon the significance of satyagraha, Neera Chandhoke remarks:

The Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha is historically contextual insofar as it was forged as a political weapon against a deeply unjust colonial state. Satyagraha is also theoretically contextual inasmuch as the concept is grounded in precepts taken from the spiritual traditions of at least four major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. Yet the Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha, and the overlapping theories of civil disobedience and nonviolence has proved highly relevant for struggles against injustice in other parts of the world.25

The idea of satyagraha has been borrowed and tried out in different countries with suitable adjustments to local circumstances. Gandhi's legacy of nonviolent resistance has inspired movements and leaders across the world to promote equality, dignity, and justice for all. It was invoked with much success in South Africa and in the United States and inspired movements and leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Cesar Chavez, Desmond Tutu, Václav Havel, Dalai Lama, and Aung San Suu Kyi to create a just society. MLK, for example, once aptly remarked, "Christ gave me the method. Gandhi gave me the method."24

NOTES
2. M. K. Gandhi, Young India, November 4, 1931, 341.
5. Gandhi, Harijan, March 25, 1939, 64.
7. Gandhi, Young India, August 1, 1920, 3.
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Gandhi, the Last Fast, and the Call of the Conscience

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ABSTRACT
Mohandas ("Mahatma") Gandhi was the modern master of the "political fast." Less than three weeks before his assassination on January 30, 1948, he commenced what would become his last fast in an attempt to bring peace to the strife-torn capital of Delhi. Fasting, Gandhi had often said, was the last remedy available to the satyagrahi or the principled nonviolent resister—and a "fast unto death" was a still more extreme step. I suggest that an account of what moved him to undertake a fast, which must perforce be distinguished from a hunger-strike, that is riveted only around a political and historical narrative cannot suffice. Gandhi speaks of "the inner voice," which is but the same as "conscience" and the voice of truth, as what impelled him to fast; indeed, on every occasion when he undertook a public fast, it was, by his own reasoning, imposed upon him by a higher power. Paradoxically, immersed as Gandhi was in political life, the entire arc of his life suggests his radical disavowal not only of instrumental rationality but also of politics itself.

I. THE LAST FAST
At his prayer meeting on the evening of January 12, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi stunned the nation into silence with his announcement that he would commence, at noon on the following day, a fast of an indefinite duration. It was to be his last fast: Gandhi may even have had a premonition of this and not merely because of his advanced age and the fact that there were some people baying for his blood. The likelihood that he might not outlive a fast unto death was all the greater since, to some, it seemed that Gandhi had lost his zest for life, even as he was publicly saying that he had more than enough to do with his principled adherence to nonviolence being put to the sternest test. Months earlier, on August 15, India had finally freed itself from the yoke of colonial rule, but the country that arose from the raging embers of the anti-colonial struggle of which Gandhi was the principal architect had been deeply divided and ultimately vivisected. The Muslim-majority state of Pakistan had been carved out of India and bloodshed ensued as Hindus and Sikhs had been left behind in Pakistan. Similarly, Muslims who found themselves in India after the Boundary Commission had done its work fled across the borders to the apparent safety of numbers. People saw only an enemy in those who had been neighbors and sometimes friends just days ago and they went for the jugular, agitated by the loss of their livelihoods, land, and property, and sometimes moved by the argument that they were duty-bound to protect the interests of their own religious community. A million people, at a conservative estimate, are thought to have been killed in the partition violence, and at least 15 million people had to become homeless before they could claim a new home. Everything that Gandhi had stood for seemed to have melted into air, and though in previous months he had more than once pronounced his desire to live until 125 years, lately he had proclaimed that he would like to die with the name of "Rama" on his lips from the bullets of an assassin's gun. Quite unbeknown to Gandhi, a Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin, Nathuram Godse, who had long nursed a number of grudges against him, was determined to give effect to the Mahatma's wish for a martyr's death. On the evening of January 30, 1948, Godse walked up to Gandhi and pumped three bullets into the old man's frail and yet muscular body. Gandhi was to fast no more.

Gandhi's last six months have been documented extensively and are of some importance in understanding the circumstances that precipitated his decision to undertake the extreme step of fasting unto death; they are also critical, as shall be seen shortly, to an appreciation of the differences, rarely if ever appreciated by public commentators and indeed even by most scholars, between "fasting" and "hunger-striking." Thirty fasts marked Gandhi's public life. What is clear from a study of Gandhi's long practice of fasting and his many pronouncements on the subject is that he always conceived of it as a "potent weapon in the Satyagraha armoury" and as the last recourse of the satyagrahi in quest of the truth. It was never to be undertaken lightly and "mere physical capacity to take it is no qualification for it," wrote Gandhi in 1939, adding that it was not be construed as a "mechanical effort nor a mere imitation. It must come from the depth of one's soul. It is therefore always rare." The "fast unto death" was still rarer, "the final weapon in the hands of a non-violent person. It is not given to man to do more." He had given much thought to these matters, and in 1932–33, while serving a sentence in jail for having fomented sedition against the British, he wrote frequently on the philosophy and ethics of fasting. Though on some matters he had found occasion to alter his views, moving (as he put it) from truth to truth, on the question of fasting Gandhi had retained a consistent view on this matter has hewed to the political events of the time and his extreme unease with the political climate in India in an attempt to discern Gandhi's thinking and motives. No sooner had India attained independence and Pakistan been birthed than the two countries had gone to war over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Gandhi was astute enough to know that the nation-state is nothing but the most organized and efficient entity that claims a legitimate monopoly over the use of violence, but what pained him especially was the blood-letting between Hindus and Muslims. No cause had been dearer to him or consumed more of his energies than Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi would not have been the first person to advance the view that the thousand-year-old presence of Islam besides Hinduism had produced an Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis.

What, then, moved Gandhi to undertake a fast unto death at the advanced age of seventy-eight? The conventional view on this matter has hewed to the political events of the time and his extreme unease with the political climate in India in an attempt to discern Gandhi's thinking and motives. No sooner had India attained independence and Pakistan been birthed than the two countries had gone to war over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Gandhi was astute enough to know that the nation-state is nothing but the most organized and efficient entity that claims a legitimate monopoly over the use of violence, but what pained him especially was the blood-letting between Hindus and Muslims. No cause had been dearer to him or consumed more of his energies than Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi would not have been the first person to advance the view that the thousand-year-old presence of Islam besides Hinduism had produced an Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis.
distinct to the world, rivalled perhaps only by the spiritual and cultural riches of Andalusia, but he was surely singular in adhering, as I believe is the case, to the radical view that the Muslim in India was incomplete without the Hindu just as the Hindu was orphaned without the Muslim. To make matters worse, Delhi was the seat of some of the most horrific violence, but it was also “the Eternal City” and the “heart of the country,” the capital city to which everyone had an equal right.

Gandhi had arrived in Delhi on September 9, 1947, in an attempt to quell the violence. The air was thick—and not just with smoke from burning houses and vehicles, and sometimes human flesh, but also with rumors. His two closest associates during the freedom struggle—Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhai Patel—now occupied the two highest positions in the government, prime minister and deputy prime minister, respectively, and there was talk that the disagreements between the two were so severe that the government might collapse. Patel tendered his resignation but Gandhi would have nothing of it: though he occupied no official place in the government, his word was the law of the father. He prevailed upon Nehru and Patel to keep the peace between themselves and work in unison for the good of the nation. Still, there were also rumors that Patel was hostile to Muslim refugees who had come streaming into Delhi from other parts of north India in the hope that they would be more secure in the capital city of the country that they were not prepared to disown, and it was being said that the houses abandoned by the Muslims of Delhi who had made their way to Pakistan were being handed down to Hindus who had fled Pakistan. These rumors were harder to repress and Gandhi was extremely disturbed by the obvious implication that the Muslims of India could not repose trust in their own government. It pained Gandhi that the Muslims felt they were unwanted in the country of their birth.

There was yet another delicate matter, one that a legion of commentators has described as the catalyst that finally moved Gandhi to take up a fast. In consequence of the war that had broken out between the two countries, India decided to withhold the amount of Rs 55 crores, amounting to about $200 million of the gold reserve, that was Pakistan’s share of the assets of undivided India. The members of Nehru’s cabinet were strongly in agreement that to hand over the money to Pakistan at this juncture would be imprudent in the extreme, as these assets would be used by Pakistan to advance its interests in Kashmir and wage war against India, and that no financial settlement was possible until an agreement had been reached on Kashmir. “A state freezes the credit of the other party in such circumstances,” Nehru told the press on January 2, 1948, while denying that the Indian government had done any such thing: “All that we have said was that we accept the agreement, but there must be an overall settlement [including Kashmir] and we shall honour it completely.” From Gandhi’s standpoint, this attitude was more than unstatesmanlike and unwise: forsaking a purely legal view, he was inclined to see the action not only as something that would provoke Pakistan to further fury and poison future relations between the two countries but also as unprincipled and unethical conduct on the part of India.

Three days into his fast, the government announced that it had decided to release the money, and the communiqué issued by the government noted that “it is anxious to remove as far as possible, without detriment to the national good, every cause which leads to friction between India and Pakistan.” The writer Manohar Malgonkar, in his book on the plot to assassinate Gandhi, states that when the assassin Godse and his collaborator, Narayan Apte, heard the news of Gandhi’s decision to fast as it came out over their office teleprinter, they “made up their minds to kill him,” and their resolve was strengthened when news of the government’s “capitulation,” as they would have seen it, had gone public.

II. FASTING AND HUNGER-STRIKING

I first wrote at considerable length on Gandhi’s last fast over three decades ago. The politics of the fast receives a far more extended treatment in my earlier essay and I also discuss its outcome. Five days into the fast, Gandhi called it off when the leaders of virtually every religious community in Delhi, political luminaries, and members of a peace committee representing all the constituencies and organizations in the city, some of whose members had partaken in killings, arson, and the looting of Muslim-owned homes, stood before Gandhi and pledged to lay down arms, restore peace, and furnish guarantees of safety to the Muslims. Interesting as all that may be to students of history and politics, it now appears to me that I was insufficiently attentive to what Gandhi variously called “the inner voice,” “conscience,” and what the Quakers know as the “still small voice” within oneself when he decided to subject his flesh to the torments of an indefinite fast. I recognized at that time that Gandhi’s use of fasting was on each occasion “an attempt to hone the public conscience and its guardians to an acceptance of the place of moral values in political and social life.” To a Sikh friend who had written to him asking him to explain his conduct, Gandhi replied: “My fast is against no one party or group exclusively, and yet it excludes nobody. It is addressed to the conscience of all, even the majority community in the other dominion.” But conscience is a prickly thing. Gandhi would not have been unaware that at least some members of the cabinet who acceded to his view that withholding from Pakistan its share of the assets of undivided India was morally unjustified did so because in all likelihood they did not want to have Gandhi’s death on their conscience.

Discussions of Gandhi’s deployment of fasting have, on the whole, revolved around its place in the grammar of satyagraha alongside acts of civil disobedience, noncooperation, the boycott, and other expressions of nonviolent resistance. Another strand of literature, displaying a theological bent, has been more sensitive to fasting as a form of self-purification not only in Hinduism but also in early Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism. Among Jains, the practice of starving to death has been known since antiquity, though the rite, known as sallekhna or sallekhna, is only undertaken by monks, nuns, and very rarely by lay followers when a person is in the last stages of a serious illness or otherwise desires to shed the coils of the mortal body in consequence of the fulfillment of all earthly obligations. As I shall shortly argue, there is something quite distinct in Gandhi’s recourse to fasting...
since he spoke of being directed by his “inner voice” or what is sometimes called “conscience,” but some other characteristics of the literature must perforce be addressed before we can turn to Gandhi’s invocation of the “inner voice.” Gandhi was one of history’s greatest exponents of fasting and the modern master of the political fast. George Orwell wondered whether Gandhi was moved by vanity, “by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a prayer mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power,” and he was not alone in marveling at the fact that all of India, and sometimes much of the world, seemed to come to a standstill when Gandhi went on a fast. The great poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, could barely contain himself and the sentiments of his people towards Gandhi when in 1943 he wrote a little poem, “Gandhi Is Fasting.”

Mighty Britain, tremble!  
Let your empire’s standard sway  
Let it break entirely—  
My Gandhi fasts today.

You may think it foolish—  
That there’s no truth in what I say—  
That all of Asia’s watching  
As Gandhi fasts today.  

From the philosophical standpoint, however, there is a problem of categories in thinking about Gandhi’s deployment of fasting over nearly the course of a lifespan. To the world at large, Gandhi was an astonishingly adept performer of hunger-striking, but Gandhi himself disavowed the entire tradition of hunger-striking as he understood it and remained adamant in distinguishing between the fast and the hunger-strike. Consider, for example, that the widely used educational portal, history.com, commences an article in its “this day in history” section entitled “Gandhi Begins Fast in Protest of Caste Separation” with this line: “On September 16, 1932, in his cell at Yerwada Jail in Pune, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi begins a hunger strike in protest of the British government’s decision to separate India’s electoral system by caste.” The editors who are credited as the authors of the piece move effortlessly between “fasting” and “hunger-striking,” displaying no awareness that Gandhi was a rigorous critic of hunger-striking and earned the opprobrium of many in India who were repulsed by his refusal to support left-wing “revolutionaries” who resorted to political hunger-striking. One might be inclined to put this error down to the ignorance of editors writing in an age of mass consumption and little reflection, but scores of scholarly works fare no better. The author, a political philosopher, of a recent lengthy piece hosted on a blog site run by Columbia University Law School on “Gandhi’s Fasts” describes it as her ambition “to investigate the meaning and different characteristics of the hunger strike, understood as a tactic within the repertoire of actions that constitute satyagraha,” and then states, rather baldly, that “it is well known that Gandhi went on a hunger strike many times between 1913–1948.” Yet Gandhi gave it as his firm view, as he wrote in an article in 1939, that “the majority of fasts do not at all come under the category of Satyagraha fasts and are, as they are popularly called, hunger-strikes undertaken without previous preparation and adequate thought. If the process is repeated too often, these hunger-strikes will lose what little efficacy they may possess and will become objects of ridicule.” The “hunger strike was,” Gandhi held, as David Hardiman explains, “a form of moral blackmail, [but] the fast—properly conceived—was carried out above all for self-purification.”

The category error, however, runs deeper than the tendency to confuse hunger-striking with fasting. If fasting is for Gandhi only or at least principally a form of self-purification, then all that distinguishes his public fasts, as they are called, from the fasting that is intrinsic to the religious practices of countless millions of Hindu women and men is his transformation of a practice confined to the domestic sphere to an act of political resistance and theater. By his own admission, Gandhi first learned about fasting from his mother, a pious woman who, much like many other Hindu women, fasted, to take only one instance, in the hope that her own penance would benefit her husband. Although it is not possible within the confines of this essay to dissect the politics of the distinction between women’s fasts, which are generally held to be private and domestic affairs, from the “political fasting” which is largely though not exclusively the prerogative of men, there is no gainsaying the fact that one of Gandhi’s gifts was to take institutions and practices that had long informed social life and religious practices in India and endow them new forms and meaning. The changes that he brought to the ashram, which is generally understood to be a form of communal living, or a repose—often in forested areas or mountains—where spiritual instruction is handed down from a venerable teacher to his students, is another case in point. There is a large body of literature that similarly testifies both to a long history of “political fasting” in India and to its place in practices of self-purification, but nevertheless Gandhi brought something quite distinctive to his understanding of fasting. To this end, it becomes necessary to turn to his unwavering—and what to his detractors and admirers alike was unnerving, even annoying—faith that he could not ignore the summons of his “inner voice” or “conscience.”

III. “CONSCIENCE” OR THE “INNER VOICE”

Gandhi had performed what history remembers as “the miracle of Calcutta” before he descended upon Delhi on September 9, 1947, for what would become the last mission of his life—to bring calm to the strife-torn capital city of the new and fledgling nation-state of India. When independence dawned upon the country, and Nehru famously intoned in Parliament on the midnight of August 14–15 about India awakening to freedom while the world slept, the architect of its liberation from servitude was in fact in Calcutta trying to keep the peace between Hindus and Muslims. He refused to join in the celebrations, informing a group of political workers from the Communist Party of India who came to see him, “I can’t afford to take part in this rejoicing, which is a sorry affair.” On August 31, the home where he was staying was attacked, and Gandhi could hear people who held him responsible for the partition shout, “Gandhi murdabad” (“Death to Gandhi”). There, too, he went on a fast from September 1, and by all accounts it had an electrifying account on everyone in the city. The scholar and writer Amiya Chakravarty was
present in Calcutta and noted that all ears were tuned into the radio, which had frequent bulletins on Gandhi's health, and in many homes the women, though they cooked for their families, gave up eating; when asked why they had done so, they replied it was not possible for them to eat “when Gandhiji was dying for their sins.”22 An acclaimed biographer of Gandhi, in his cryptic account of events at Calcutta, reports that “the Muslims were moved, the Hindus shamed. Not even the hooligans of Calcutta could bear the thought of having his blood on their conscience.” Peace descended upon the city; within two days the killings and acts of arson had ceased entirely. The most famous tribute came from Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India and the first Governor-General of independent India, who characterized Gandhi as the “One-Man Boundary Force”: “In the Punjab we have 55,000 soldiers and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting.”23

A mechanical reading of the events that transpired in Delhi would suggest that Gandhi undertook to do there what he had seen his fast achieve in Calcutta. He had been contemplating for days what course of action he should undertake. He was deeply disturbed at the thought, though this was far from being the first time that it had come to him, that the nation had followed him on the path of ahimsa (nonviolence) for nearly three decades from expediency rather than from any real conviction. “Our moral downfall has been so rapid,” he said at his prayer meeting on the evening of January 11, “that now I realize that our satyagraha, our struggles were all non-violence of the weak.”24 At the prayer meeting on the following day, Gandhi revealed that, as a “votary of ahimsa,” he had no other “remedy” left but fasting—but this realization came as something of an epiphany, as the summons of his conscience:

Though the voice within has been beckoning for a long time, I have been shutting my ears to it lest it might be the voice of Satan, otherwise called my weakness. I never like to feel resourceless; a satyagrahi never should. Fasting is his last resort in the place of the sword—his or others. . . . I have been brooding over it for the last three days. The final conclusion has flashed upon me and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life.25

The fast would end when Gandhi could be satisfied “that there is a reunion of hearts of all communities brought about without any outside pressure, but from an awakened sense of duty.” While conceding that he had friends who did “not believe in the method of the fast for reclamation of the human mind,” Gandhi urged them to desist from trying to dissuade him: “if there is clear indication, as I claim there is, of the Inner Voice,” then he had but to follow the path shown to him: “I do not embark upon it for the sake of the result it may bring. I do so because I must.”26

Time and again, Gandhi would aver, particularly in reference to his fasts, that he was called upon to resort to this supreme remedy when his conscience beckoned; indeed, they were imposed upon him by a higher power.
that to adhere to one’s conscience was to retreat into a state of nature; as the will of the people could be asserted through the legislature, the subjects of the state were required to relinquish their private judgment or “conscience.” Thoreau famously rebelled against this idea, asking with searching probity: “Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then?” I do not think that previous commentators have noted that Gandhi was also drawn to the Quaker idea of listening to the “still small voice” within oneself and it is not accidental that he had a large following among British and American Quakers. Thirdly, and finally, though a recent strand of scholarship has correctly suggested that Gandhi was rigorously critical of the idea of political rationality, that argument can be taken much further. Howsoever paradoxical it sounds, I have sought to demonstrate in my analysis of Gandhi’s last fast that even as we think of him as thoroughly immersed in political life, the entire arc of his life suggests the radical disavowal of politics.

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NOTES


3. CWMG, 75:177–78.


5. Harijan, February 18, 1933; CWMG 59:302.


16. Gandhi was consistently critical of hunger-striking, whether by revolutionaries or other protesters. During the 1924 satyagraha at Vykom in the South Indian state of Travancore, where an attempt was being made to give lower-caste Ezhavas access to the roads leading to the Shiva Temple managed by upper-caste Nambudiri Brahmins, some of the agitators turned to hunger-striking to force the issue. According to the historian David Hardiman, when Gandhi “heard of the hunger strikes, he sent a telegram advising them to stop it, as when applied in such a way it was in his opinion a form of violence.” See David Hardiman, “Changing Hearts and Minds through Non-Violent Protest?” Economic and Political Weekly 50, no. 51 (December 19, 2015): 32.


21. This is related by Nirmal Kumar Bose, a renowned social scientist who was one of Gandhi’s companions at this time, in My Days with Gandhi, reprint edition (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1987 [1947]), 229.


29. Harijan, July 8, 1933; CWMG 76:218–22.


IV. GANDHI’S PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA (WELL-BEING AND UPLIFT OF ALL), POLITICS, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

Gandhi’s Constructive Program: Toward a Vision of a Just and Decolonized Democratic Indian Society

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes various aspects of Mohandas K. Gandhi’s philosophy of Sarvodaya (uplifting of all), which he articulated through a practical Constructive Program. Gandhi, who neither accepted the title of philosopher in the Western sense of the term nor held any official political position, presents us with a social philosophy for a decolonized democratic society. He provided the path to Sarvodaya through the eighteen steps of the Constructive Program. An analysis of the historical evolution and taxonomy of the Constructive Program, including religious unity, removal of untouchability, economic equality, adult education, and health and hygiene, reveals that his program offers a path to decolonize and purge religious discriminatory laws to build a just, equitable, and democratic society ensuring “complete freedom” for all, founded on moral principles.

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The recent events of racist violence, its global repercussions, and the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the shortfall of the promises of justice, equity, and dignity, especially in the developed democratic states. They have also uncovered the prevailing systems of racism, violence, and economic and social inequalities, once systematically executed by colonial regimes as well as by traditional religious and social structures. In the development of Western democratic systems, political and social philosophers have rarely wielded political power, but their theories regarding equality, justice, individual rights, and the role of state and economic systems exude influence in imagining and executing systems for free and just societies. Political power players, despite holding power in democratic states in recent history, have seldom articulated a systematic moral vision of a just and free society. Mohandas K. Gandhi, who neither accepted the title of philosopher in the Western sense of the term nor held any official political position, presents us with a social philosophy and practical steps for his vision of a decolonized democratic society with nonviolent social and economic structures. He communicated his ideas through his notion of Sarvodaya and the catalog of eighteen steps of the Constructive Program.

Gandhi used unconventional moral strategies of nonviolent action and civil resistance to rid India of the colonial regime. Unlike other Indian revolutionaries, he also confronted the autocratic, sexist, and racist elements within India’s religious and social systems along with imperial subjugation. He rejected the colonial power’s methods of military warfare to confront racial violence and developed alternative moral and strategic methods of mass civil resistance. In a 1922 article, Gandhi differentiates India’s methods from the Western modes of exercising power: “Our present effort is to win deliverance from this slavery. If this land of Bharat [India’s original name before colonization] wishes to end her slavery, she can do so only with the help of her old weapons of non-violence and truth.” Gandhi uniquely insisted on the “weapons of nonviolence and truth” to fight slavery and, because of this insistence, he was met with criticisms from his fellow freedom fighters.

Gandhi’s moral philosophy and methods of satyagraha to build nonviolent revolutions have been theorized by scholars to mobilize the dismantling of unjust structures of power. Prominent social scientists such as Gene Sharp and Erica Chenoweth have focused on the strategic and pragmatic nonviolent civil resistance that has been used all over the world by various groups. However, Gandhi’s Constructive Program—a plan to build a just, fair, and independent citizenry and social, economic, and educational systems—has not received adequate attention in the areas of Gandhian studies and social or political philosophy. Although the Constructive Program seems counter to modern progress, its components can be reimagined for our current times. In this paper, by classifying the elements of the Constructive Program, I show that for Gandhi, a free and democratic society must internally rid itself of the colonial forces of “racism, sexism, militarism, and plantation capitalism,” using the apt classification by the prominent civil rights leader the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr.

First, I provide the history and evolution of Gandhi’s Constructive Program that he based on Indian philosophical principles and Western social paradigms of labor and gender equity for Sarvodaya. Second, I examine Gandhi’s reasoning behind the Constructive Program and the list of various elements found in India’s indigenous sustainable and spiritual systems, which he considered necessary for building a progressive and harmonious society. Third, I analyze the taxonomy of Gandhi’s Constructive Program for Sarvodaya that sets him apart from social philosophers and politicians: he offers not simply a theory but an action plan for developing a decolonized democratic society uniquely based on both individual rights and responsibilities, as well as social systems free from autocratic, capitalist, sexist, violent, anthropocentric, and racist ideologies of the colonial powers. Finally, I argue that Gandhi’s program challenges the workings of democratic nations that tout self-rule (parliamentary freedom) with laws for justice and equality but have failed in true self-rule (swaraj) built on the principle of Sarvodaya. Furthermore, it becomes clear how the overarching philosophy behind this program offers...
tools for correcting the moral failings of traditional systems as well as confronting modern-day problems.

**HISTORY OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM**

In the era when American political thinkers such as John Rawls theorized conceptions of a “well-ordered society” and social institutions in terms of fairness and justice, Gandhi also considered these issues and developed the constructive action plan that ran parallel to strategic defiance of the British rule in India. This program was oriented to maintain a sustainable lifestyle, social networks, equitable economic structures, and native systems of knowledge in response to oppressive and unjust foreign laws and systems. However, it was not until 1941 that Gandhi organized all the elements in a pamphlet and published it with the title: “Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place.” The comprehensive plan addressed all aspects of life for achieving “complete freedom.” Gandhi warned that the goal of equality would require building “brick by brick by corporate self-effort.” His program included measures for social reconstruction in the areas of education, health, sustainable economic programs, as well as social cohesion.

Some of his colleagues saw socialist undertones in the program. However, in a conversation on Marxism with a close associate in 1942, Gandhi lauded Marxists’ care for the poor, but differentiated his comprehensive ethical and grassroots efforts to address social unrest and individual dissatisfaction from those that focused on economic reform and reliance on machinery as the answer to these problems. Although Gandhi’s Sarvodaya and Marxian socialism both strive for social equality and liberty, the former is built solely on the principles of nonviolence in all aspects of life. Gandhi also disagreed with the utilitarian view, encompassing the welfare of the greatest number, and instead emphasized the good of all: “A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all.” Hence, each unit in the society was cared for equally, despite their status, birth, caste, gender, color, etc.

Gandhi observed that the equal good of all remained a fantasy in most modern democratic societies despite various legislative measures. In a 1947 speech, he invoked the first verse of the ancient Indian philosophical text Īśopaniśad: “Enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it.” Gandhi interpreted this verse as a call to the wealthy to share their wealth, and he uniquely elucidated the meaning at a time when communal violence had erupted due to the partition of India at its independence: “The moral of it was that we should deprive no man of his wealth, whether it be in the shape of life, honour or religion.” He visited rural areas and learned about the ill-treatment of the poor workers by the wealthy and invoked Hindu philosophical teachings to inspire the sentiments of charity and goodwill in his fellow religiously inclined Indians. Gandhi has been criticized for such idealistic statements that often yield meager results.

On the one hand, Gandhi sought to persuade the wealthy to share their wealth; on the other, he asked the Congress workers to create volunteer corps to educate and serve the marginalized. Political philosopher Anthony Parel articulates Gandhi’s intent about the Constructive Program: “The focal point of Constructive Programme is Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of civil society. However, the general thesis of the work is that the NGOs should work in tandem with the state.” Gandhi had witnessed the failure of the state in various developed countries, and he also expressed concern for the Indian leaders’ fascination for the similar British systems of governance. In the present context, I focus on the philosophical intent of decolonization in Gandhi’s program, which was oriented toward the reconstruction of just and equitable social and political systems for a free India as well as the decentralization of power. More importantly, I maintain that it was an integral part of his political decolonization of India from foreign rule and systems: political, economic, social, and linguistic. Gandhi expresses his view of English civilization by saying (to the English): “We hold the civilization that you support to be the reverse of civilization. We consider our civilization to be far superior to yours.” He wanted to restore Indians’ confidence in their own culture, but at the same time rid the inequalities and violence embedded in their own traditions.

In the thirty-two-page booklet, Gandhi addresses the needs of the most marginalized by both the colonial regime and India’s own caste and gender conventions. For developing a series of necessary elements for complete self-rule, he drew both from the social and spiritual wisdom of India’s traditions as well as from Western ideas from thinkers like John Ruskin. Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* inspired Gandhi in his concept of Sarvodaya in 1904, as he was preparing to launch his first satyagraha campaign. Gandhi denounced modern civilization as violent and its machinations as inhumane, and he rejected most of what the foreign rulers had to offer. Gandhi published a letter in *Young India* outlining his vision for home rule to All India Congress Committee members: “My swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization. I want to write many new things but they must be all written on the Indian slate. I would gladly borrow from the West when I can return the amount with decent interest.” He affirmed his commitment to adhering to indigenous knowledge, spiritual, and social systems while embracing the significance of certain values presented by thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, and Henry David Thoreau.

In his 1908 manifesto *Hind Swaraj*, written in a dialogue form, Gandhi highlighted the inadequacies of modern advancements of science, technology, and legal and medical systems for the well-being of all citizens. He began to envision alternative modes of governance and social structures dedicated to the uplifting of all: “We have to learn, and to teach others, that we do not want the tyranny of English rule or Indian rule.” While *Satyagraha* campaigns were focused on ousting the English rule, the paradigm of Sarvodaya and the Constructive Program provided a path for organizing sustainable and nonviolent social and political systems for all citizens (complete independence).

In 1945, when Indian self-rule became imminent, Gandhi emphasized the value of the Constructive Program in “Draft for Congress Constitution.” He emphasized that social reform encompassed true freedom: “Constructive
programme is the chief plank for winning Swaraj by truthful and non-violent means. Its full execution means complete independence.”12 Gandhi was referring to the eighteen-fold plan that he had refined, addressing each aspect of life. Gene Sharp views this program as an attempt to oppose the “old inadequate social order” and build a “new social order.”13 Consistent with Gandhi’s 1945 speech, Sharp sees that “the constructive program has been described as the scaffolding upon which the structure of the new society will be built.”14 In Gandhi’s vision, Indian society must rid itself of both the colonizer’s oppressive educational, economic, social, and political systems, as well as internal unjust practices of untouchability and women’s customs relegating them to a lower status.

ELEMENTS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM AND COMPLETE DECOLONIZATION

A number of scholars note how colonialism contributed to dismantling India’s “civilizational infrastructures,” including social, economic, educational, and ecclesiastical, as well as disrupting the people’s worldviews rooted in indigenous systems.15 Amilcar Cabral, a prominent African anti-colonial leader, writes about the effects of disruption of native histories: “The colonials usually say that it was they who brought us into history: today we show that is not so. They made us leave history, our history, to follow them.”16 Colonialism resulted in fractures in native cultures past and present, and a recovery of histories required ingenuity. In his Constructive Program, Gandhi considered ways to reassert India’s traditions and culture. Simultaneously, he adopted practices oriented toward the flourishing of citizens in the free Indian state. After 1940, as the promise of legislative freedom was becoming a reality, Gandhi turned his attention to developing systems for complete freedom. Fearing India’s adoption of British regulatory social and economic structures at the expense of millions of common citizens, he proposed to Congress a constructive program as “the truthful and non-violent way of winning Poorna Swaraj . . . (and) is designed to build up the nation from the very bottom upward.”17

As a public and international figure, Gandhi was aware that the powerful Western nations, including Britain and the United States, despite their democratic polity, had failed their citizens along the lines of skin color, gender, and social status. Gandhi was also cognizant of India’s traditional system of monarchy in which social well-being, economic pursuits, and individual flourishing were connected to the stratification of varna (generally translated as caste due to set occupations: education/parochial, rulership/military, trade/investing, and labor/service) as well as self- and socially-regulated purusārthas or goals of life: fulfilling social and religious duties (dharma), acquiring wealth (artha), pursuing sensual pleasure and desires (kama), and aspiring toward religious/spiritual pursuits (moksa).18 Notably, while these systems informed rights and responsibilities for men, women’s duties were dictated through religious laws and social mandates.

Although these systems created a coherent social structure, they often proved detrimental to the upliftment of the common people. Gandhi experienced the strength and deficiencies of these systems, i.e., monarchy, religious-based laws, and modern democracies. Hence, he devised a plan that fulfills the true promise of people’s power in India’s complete (decolonized) self-rule (democracy). According to Anthony Parel, “[t]he innovator’s task was to increase the patrimony of the past and make it productive.” He quotes Gandhi, “I believe that it is our duty to augment the legacy of our ancestors and to change it into current coin and make it acceptable to the present age,” and suggests that “Gandhi’s notion of the state would be compatible with the ‘oceanic circle,’ a ‘parliamentary swaraj according to the wishes of the Indian people’—a mixture of the Indian idea of self-rule and the Western idea of representative government.”19 Because of his study of history and his experiences both in England and South Africa, Gandhi comprehended the imminent tyranny of all political systems when they go unchecked and when citizens lose control of the structures of governance.

In the first section of the booklet Constructive Programme, Gandhi writes:

We have long been accustomed to think that power comes only through Legislative Assemblies. I have regarded this belief as a grave error brought about by inertia or hypnotism. A superficial study of British history has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives.20

After an analysis of the eighteen-fold program, it becomes clear that it was oriented to lay out a list of actions to ensure autonomy and social harmony among citizens, which remains a mirage even today for developed democratic nations. The eighteen steps of the program, not systematic by any means, include the following:

1. Communal Unity
2. Removal of Untouchability
3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Other Village Industries
6. Village Sanitation
7. New or Basic Education
8. Adult Education
9. Women
10. Education in Health and Hygiene
11. Provincial Languages
12. National Languages
13. Economic Equality
14. Kisans
15. Labor
16. Adivasis
17. Lepers
18. Students

Although this program was mostly overlooked by the ruling party as India gained political freedom, as well as by social philosophers, its elements provide insights into the issues we are confronting today.
ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM: TAXONOMY AND TRAIL TO DECOLONIZATION

In order to understand its depth and breadth, the elements of the program can be organized into four main areas, which demonstrate how Gandhi's plan was inclined to build a voluntary force to create the necessary conditions for ensuring freedom, justice, and dignity for all members of society:

A. The promise of human dignity (Communal Unity, Removal of Untouchability, Women, and Adivasis)

B. Capacity for building economic equality (Economic Equality, Khadi, Other Village Industries, Kisans, and Labor)

C. Protecting native knowledge systems (Provincial Languages, New or Basic Education, Adult Education, National Languages, and Students)

D. Concern for education and health care (Prohibition, Education in Health and Hygiene, and Lepers)

Such classification of the eighteen components of the Constructive Program shows an effort for getting rid of both the foreign grip and dogmatic clutches of Indian customs of untouchability and ill-treatment of women. Although Gandhi's program relies on voluntary organizations, its broad scope includes the taxonomy of social, economic, educational, and political plans that he believed would assure pūrṇa swaraj (complete freedom) in the following ways:

A. Promise of Human Dignity (Communal Unity, Removal of Untouchability, Women, and Adivasis)

A free society must have racial and gender equality as well as respect for different belief systems, all necessary conditions for securing human dignity. India's untouchability has been compared to the United States' system of slavery. Notwithstanding their particularities, Gandhi believed that complete freedom must include purging the internal racism that has chained a great number of people into subservience. In his earlier life, Gandhi himself demonstrated sexist and racist behavior, which he confronted as he realized that such tendencies are violent. He boldly claimed that he would not hesitate to reject Hinduism, his own faith, if it substantiated a discriminatory practice, saying, “If untouchability lives Hinduism dies,” and championed equality for all. Equally, Gandhi recognized the suppression of women under India's religious laws and Western parliamentary systems. He witnessed the suffragette's struggle for the right to vote in Britain and the United States. Having seen women's defiant participation in Satyagraha campaigns, he encouraged Indian women to take leadership roles and play an equal part in India's fight for complete freedom. Gandhi regretted the actions of the members of his own party, saying that "Congressmen have not felt the call to see that women became equal partners in the fight for Swaraj. They have not realized that woman must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service. Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand."

He boldly deconstructs the Indian cultural views of women and simultaneously defends the equality of men and women in his notion of complete freedom.

Gandhi also considered respect for all religions and freedom to practice one's own religion as a hallmark of complete freedom. He saw religions as repositories of wisdom and worked to harmony among various religious groups: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." Gandhi struggled to convince India's warring people to adhere to his proposal of interreligious harmony. Nevertheless, Gandhi's position offers a theoretical and practical framework for living in pluralistic societies, which can be considered to build interreligious understanding.

B. Capacity Building for Economic Equality (Economic Equality, Khadi, Other Village Industries, Kisan, Adult Education, Labor)

Gandhi adopted voluntary poverty as he threw himself into the struggle for India's freedom. He envisioned politically independent India to be free from the ills of poverty that he had seen in the rich nations of the world, despite their parliamentary democracy. In 1947, Gandhi told a group of volunteers: "Real hard work will have to be done only after independence. Unless poverty and unemployment are wiped out from India, I would not agree that we have attained freedom. Real wealth does not consist in jewelry and money, but in providing for proper food, clothes, education, and creating healthy conditions of living for every one of us." Freedom for India, for Gandhi, meant dignity of life and labor of its citizens. Even though he believed in the moral persuasion of the individual, he eventually realized the importance of legislative measures to address socioeconomic disparities.

Gandhi argued for voluntary simplicity for the affluent and showed concern for poor economic conditions of the masses. He rejected the model of welfare economics and anthropocentric normative economics, instead providing a model that was sustainable while causing minimal violence to humans, non-human animals, and plants. For this, he emphasized reviving village industries (including spinning, soap-making, tanning, match-making, paper-making, etc.) and developing self-sufficient villages. Gandhi insisted volunteers visit rural areas to educate the illiterate citizens...
on current-day issues and their rights and responsibilities. The recent pandemic and other catastrophes have revealed the dangers of dependence on outside resources and misinformation. Gandhi’s prescient call for “every village to produce all its necessities and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities” holds promise for rural self-sufficiency and progress.\(^{25}\)

For Gandhi, decentralization of the economic structures formed an essential aspect for building a democratic and decolonized society. He feared the monopoly of large corporations and mechanized production enterprises. Physical labor and village industries represented the pride of family art and crafts and retention of native knowledge systems. Gandhi’s views were different from social philosophers who argued for dismantling the economics of physical labor through the mechanization of industries.

Similar to some Western thinkers, he did not see equality as all citizens having equal wealth. The contemporary American philosopher Harry Frankfurt, for example, also argues that “morality is not that everyone should have the same, but that each should have enough.”\(^{26}\) Gandhi campaigned for the accessibility of sources for all to live a dignified life, not a luxurious one. He himself demonstrated through his own example of voluntary simplicity.

Gandhi argued for reverting back to the indigenous industries that provided enough and encompassed a variety of regional knowledge systems of arts, agriculture, and crafts. At the same time, he argued for the care of farmers’ needs and for organizing labor unions. In a 1944 written speech, Gandhi provided specifics for the labor unions that were dedicated to the well-being of the workers:

- (a) Labor should have its own unions.
- (b) Education, both general and scientific, of both men and women should be regularly undertaken through night-schools.
- (c) Children of laborers should be educated after the Basic Education style.
- (d) There should be a hospital, a creche, and a maternity home attached to every center.
- (e) Labor strike.\(^{27}\)

Such constructive guidance was meant to support the workers in emerging capitalist markets and preempt exploitation by the rich stakeholders.

C. Protecting Native Knowledge Systems (Provincial Languages, New or Basic Education, National Languages, Students)

Linguists and cognitive psychologists have explored the relationship between language and the construction of reality. Chad Bower argues that language “reproduces ways of thinking” and connects linguistic patterns and conceptual frameworks. In her research, cognitive psychologist Lera Boroditsky shows how language conditions our conceptions of time and space, and she bemoans the fact that we are losing languages by the day.\(^{29}\) Gandhi was probably not thinking in these scientific terms; however, he committed himself to learning many of the languages of India. Gandhi believed that, in order to understand other people, we must learn their language; and, in order to understand ourselves, we must retain our native languages.

In his Constructive Program, Gandhi insisted on (1) preserving native languages to build an inclusive nation and (2) speaking a national language to conduct our business. He wrote: “The languages of India have suffered impoverishment. We flounder when we make the vain attempt to express abstruse thought in the mother tongue. There are no equivalents for scientific terms. The result has been disastrous. The masses remain cut off from the modern mind.”\(^{27}\) Gandhi wanted to break “the spell” of the English language on the elite politicians and officers. While his fellow politicians took pride in speaking the colonizer’s language, Gandhi insisted that to decolonize Indian knowledge systems, we must embrace our native languages. Gandhi himself was a polyglot; he learned at least eleven languages and always preferred to speak in his national language. India is the region of many languages that are tied to regional cultures, art, poetry, literature. To preserve the native traditions and indigenous knowledge, Gandhi advocated preserving regional dialects.

D. Concern for Education and Health Care (Prohibition, Education in Health and Hygiene, Lepers)

The Constructive Program included steps to build a healthy and moral citizenry. Gandhi emphasized prohibition not just on moral grounds, but because of the physical and social ill effects of substance addiction. He explicitly named the negative impact of substance abuse on personal health and society and urged Congress workers to find practical ways to habilitate the addicted and take care of the exhausted workers. He did not look down on those with addiction but provided a solution: “Congress committees can open recreation booths where the tired laborer will rest his limbs, get healthy and cheap refreshments, find suitable games. All this work is fascinating and uplifting.”\(^{30}\) He addressed health education and care for those living in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the effect of such health crises and lack of education on the well-being of rural people. Gandhi himself had experienced several plagues in which he took the responsibility of nursing the afflicted. Some of the lessons he had learned were of the values of sanitation, isolation, education, and nutrition. The Constructive Program pleads with those in power to create a voluntary corps for education to address health crises.

Notably, Gandhi includes “leprosy” in his Constructive Program. Our modern world has experienced the consequence of failing to understand AIDS and other contagious diseases. Gandhi knew that misinformation of the disease among the population, especially stricken with superstition, had relegated the afflicted to a status of pariah. In a 1947 speech, Gandhi announced: “Leprosy is . . . contagious like cold, cholera, plague, etc. Why then should people suffering from that disease be looked upon with contempt? When a person gets really affected by leprosy, people start looking at him with contempt. They refer to
him as a lowly creature. But real lowly creatures are those who show contempt." Gandhi made the same semantic choice to condemn segregation of the lepers as he did to denounce the practice of untouchability and racism toward Indians by the colonizers. Gandhi himself nursed lepers and pleaded with Congress workers to pay attention to the most neglected members of society: "The lot of the lepers who are much in need of attention is studied neglect. I am tempted to call it heartless, which it certainly is, in terms of non-violence." Gandhi not only summoned Congress volunteers but also held the state responsible in the case of public health emergencies. Historian Vinay Lal presents Gandhi as "a theorist of a biopolitics which placed the responsibility of well-being both upon each individual and the state. He knew enough about public health, and the importance of sanitation to discern that the advance of the plague in Johannesburg [the 1904 outbreak of the plague] was imminent, and he was sharply critical of the local authorities." Gandhi offered a plan to preempt the outbreak of diseases and also sought to prepare volunteers and authorities to protect the most vulnerable.

CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

In 1945, when Gandhi completed his draft of the revised and enhanced Constructive Program, India was on the verge of gaining political independence. Although eager about the prospect of India’s political freedom, he became concerned about the future of millions of marginalized masses who had participated in the campaigns of nonviolent civil resistance. He devised a plan oriented toward the care and well-being of all and a vision of just and equitable social and political systems for a pluralistic society. Witnessing the plight of Indians under British rule, Gandhi had "argued that the degeneracy of India was in part due to the degree to which Indians had brought colonialism upon themselves and were complicit with its continued dominance of their lives in their everyday daily acts." But as the dream of India’s freedom was becoming a reality, he made efforts to free Indian minds and governance structures from colonial tendencies as well as purify them from the clutches of Indian systems that were oppressive. Even though his trust in volunteer organizations may be considered utopian, he envisioned a path for complete autonomy, economic self-sufficiency, compassionate health care, education for all, indigenous knowledge systems, as well as the moral responsibility of citizens of India to build a society that fulfills the promise of flourishing.

In a 1937 speech, Gandhi admitted that the Constructive Program may need adjustments as situations may change: "[C]onstructive programme is not like Truth and non-violence valid for all time. Take the charhaka. If you go to the North Pole or to the Himalayan peaks or to Tibet, the talk of cotton won’t do. Still, I say that the constructive programme is for the good of our millions. Legislatures are only for a few." He was not dogmatic about the relevance of all of the components of the plan and trusted the local organizations to uplift their neighbors over laws and policies. Gandhi, as social philosopher and champion of the poor, examined not only the conditions of Indians but also the sway that Indian religious beliefs had on their lives. In addition, he critically analyzed Western social systems and offered solutions at a time when such alternative modes of governance and comprehensive social reforms were not being examined. He sought to empower the common citizen through non-governmental organizations that worked alongside legislatures to fight for their freedom and justice. He crafted a detailed plan that, if applied selectively and contextually, can offer direction even in today’s world of economic and social inequality, traditional autocratic laws, and colonial, imperial governance. In the era of heightened sensibilities about prevalent inequities, Gandhi’s Constructive Program provides philosophical insights and a catalog of actionable items to address the colonial, capitalistic, industrial, and traditional religious systems that neglected the well-being of millions, Sarvodaya.

NOTES

3. Gandhi wrote the complete draft in 1941, which was revised later in 1945. CWIMG, 81:354–74.
4. CWIMG, 83:459.
5. CWIMG, 37:381.
6. CWIMG, 93:105.
8. CWIMG, 10:307.
9. In 1904, John Ruskin’s Unto This Last inspired Gandhi to the life of simplicity, physical labor, and austerity. Gandhi published a paraphrased translation of the book as Sarvodaya.
10. CWIMG, 28:201.
12. CWIMG, 88:239.
14. Sharp, Gandhi as a Political Strategist, 81.
17. In 1944, Gandhi sent a lengthy speech to the Workers’ Conference, held in Bombay on October 28 and 29. CWIMG, 85:77.
18. Anthony J. Parel provides a lucid account of India’s ancient political systems and Gandhi’s progressive interpretations of some and deletion of others in “Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon,” The Review of Politics 70, no. 1 (2008): 40–63.
21. CWIMG, 70:279.
Gandhi: An Imperfect Philosopher

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ABSTRACT
Gandhi’s life is the ultimate challenge for a philosopher because, in it, he has united two seemingly contradictory dimensions—the political and the philosophical—in a way that is remarkable. This paper, therefore, argues that if we are investigating the life of Gandhi as a philosopher, then the question is not whether Gandhi’s thoughts and ideas were integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments, as argued by Akeel Bilgrami, or whether Gandhi failed as a moral or spiritual or philosophical person because he sacrificed any moral principle to gain political or other advantages, as assumed by many historians and political scientists. The question is plain and simple: How could Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life and at the same time remain true to both, as contended by Ernest Barker? This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

I
Gandhi is not a philosopher in the following two ways. First, he is not himself driven or motivated by the academic norms of philosophical discipline to be watchfully consistent in everything he says, nor does he see himself as bound to explain away his inconsistencies. Moreover, he often speaks and writes in aphoristic language that lacks precision, even if it is highly evocative and provocative. Second, his interest in philosophical problems goes beyond the interest of any simply academic philosopher. He attempts to address philosophical problems not just to get things cogently right, but with a view to articulating ideals which his actions will seek to live up to. Thus, ideas for him are primarily a foundation of his “experiments” or “strategies” to make our humanity better in various ways—less unequal, less given to domination and authoritarianism, less violent in word and deed.

The flipside of these two points is precisely that Gandhi is a philosopher in the following two ways. First, he is a philosopher in a thin sense, as many traditional philosophers were, a person with an enduring love for wisdom, but also, as many non-traditional philosophers were, with an enduring interest in critical thinking. Second, he is also a philosopher in a broader (thick) sense with his wide-ranging concerns that seek to understand fundamental truths about himself, about the “other,” about the world he and the “other” inhabit, and about his relationships with the world and the “other.” This gives Gandhi much wider and deeper yardsticks to judge any philosophical position or concept, wider and deeper than just assessing them for consistency and precision and rationality in some narrow sense, but also assessing them for their practicability, their ethical consequences for different kinds of suffering present in the world.

These two points show that the essential thing to appreciate about Gandhi is that you cannot understand him as a philosopher without seeing that the philosophy is reflective of him as a person. This is what distinguishes him from most of the philosophers in the academic profession. Throughout his life, he was trying to achieve and/or maintain integrity among his philosophical ideals and between his ideals and his life. In brief, what he tries to live/act/choose is, on the one hand, based on philosophical ideals, which are in turn based on his desire to reduce or minimize different kinds of human suffering. If Gandhi is understood as a philosopher in this sense, he epitomizes more than (and also in quite a different way) what the eleventh and last thesis of Karl Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach demands of a philosopher—namely, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” Of course, it is well known that Gandhi’s concerns and methods of inquiry are different from Marx’s, but on this thesis about the nature of philosophy, he is one with Marx, and it is in this sense that I would like to explore and understand Gandhi’s philosophy.

Since Gandhi sees human life as a whole and not in isolable compartments, he, unlike most modern academic philosophers, does not maintain the division of different philosophical inquiries into metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and logical questions. Therefore, one can develop a comprehensive understanding of Gandhi’s philosophy by studying any aspect of Gandhi’s philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, or ethics). It also means that we can begin our inquiry into Gandhi’s philosophy by investigating any of these aspects of his philosophy, but we cannot do so by pretending that these are strictly separable. For a better understanding of Gandhi’s philosophy, one should always be cross-referencing among different aspects of his philosophy, seeing their relevance to one another, no matter where one starts.

II
Gandhi’s life is the ultimate challenge for a philosopher because, in it, he has united two seemingly contradictory...
dimensions, the political and the philosophical, in a way that is remarkable. In the existing literature, some scholars have sought to understand and explain this dichotomy and the corresponding seemingly inner contradictions in Gandhi’s life. However, most of the scholars seem to have worked on one aspect of his life without seeking to understand how the other aspect has influenced and shaped it. The result is that, for a long period in the existing literature, we find two Gandhis who do not speak to each other. The first is the Gandhi of historians and social scientists, who is a political strategist completely unconcerned about philosophical issues. The second is the philosophical Gandhi, who has nothing to do with real political issues. Now, however, there is a growing realization that if we describe Gandhi in either/or terms, we miss the essence, something very intrinsic to the kind of person that he was. Recently, scholars have been consistently arguing that the process of understanding Gandhi’s life and philosophy with all its complexity will remain incomplete and perhaps inadequate if we cannot make sense of how he mixed “the spiritual with the temporal” (in the language of Ernest Barker), or how he had “an epistemic foundation that was both certain and flexible, determinate and yet adaptable, categorical as well as experiential” (in the language of Partha Chatterjee), or how he could have moral judgments that are both universalizable and modest, in that we are not encouraged to impose our moral judgments on others, without leading us to a moral relativism that rejects any possibility of a guiding principle to arrive at what is morally right or wrong (in the language of Akeel Bilgrami).

Though Barker acknowledges that Gandhi “could mix the spiritual with the temporal, and could be at the same time true to both,” he did not tell us how Gandhi does it. Chatterjee argues that Gandhi could do it only by accepting “a disjuncture between morality and politics, between private conscience and public responsibility, indeed between Noble Folly and Realpolitik.” He explains that “it was a disjuncture which the ‘experimental’ concept of ahimsa was meant to bridge.” A little later, he adds, “the experimental conception of politics could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises and failures.” Scholars like Samiksha Goyal and Nirmalangshu Mukherji go on to argue that unless care is taken to disentangle the two aspects of Gandhi’s life, an evaluation of his thoughts would be inadequate.

There are also some scholars who have tried to resolve the problem by introducing an idea of hierarchy between the two dimensions of human life, the political and the philosophical. Richard Sorabji writes, “Gandhi was first and foremost a spiritual and moral leader, and only after that a politician.” Does this idea of disjuncture, disentangling, or hierarchy help to improve the matter to any length? The idea of disjuncture did not resolve but overlooked the moral dilemma that Gandhi might have faced whenever he had to choose between remaining consistent, as philosopher, to his moral principles or making adjustments or compromises as a political strategist. It says that there was no such moral dilemma for Gandhi. At a personal level, he was consistent as a philosopher, but in politics, he allowed himself to be inconsistent because it was the only way he could solve the practical problems of an organized politics. This seeming disjunctedness can be bridged by the “experimental” concept of ahimsa (nonviolence): a religious ideal but introduced to solve political problems. Like the idea of disjuncture, the idea of hierarchy rejects any moral dilemma for Gandhi. According to those who propound a spiritual hierarchy, Gandhi always preferred to remain a philosopher over a politician. But we can accept this idea only by rejecting the idea that no Realpolitik can be developed by studying the life of Gandhi and he moved millions into political action not as a politician but as a Noble Folly. In brief, in all such cases, there remain two Gandhis. As long as it is not resolved how these two Gandhis can be understood in one single conceptual framework, there is work to be done in getting Gandhi right. One has to find a way of saying that Gandhi could be true to both of them or none of them.

I want to be clear that I am not arguing that Gandhi epitomized a perfect harmony between thought, word, and action and tried to make his actions live up to his ideals. Although I accept that Gandhi tried more than most of us to live an integrated life, I, like Ashis Nandy, agree with Arnold J. Toynbee, an English historian, when he said, “Gandhi was one prophet who was willing to live in the slum of politics. He could not afford to be a perfect Gandhian. It is a tribute to his memory when one calls him an imperfect Gandhian.” Therefore, the question is not whether Gandhi failed as a moral or spiritual person or whether he sacrificed any moral principle to gain a political advantage. The question is plain and simple: How did Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life?

In his seminal work “Gandhi, the Philosopher,” Akeel Bilgrami partially attempts to understand or explain this question. Bilgrami explains how Gandhi’s moral judgment is to be tied to what he called “exemplary” acts, thereby generating a form of universalizability that is unlike the standard one since Kant, which by Gandhi’s lights is cognitively coercive. This more modest version of universalizability, at the same time, was not so modest as to imply any moral relativism. According to Bilgrami, the source of Gandhi’s modesty is not in Mill’s idea of human fallibility, where we seek the truth though we are never sure that we have attained it. Rather, the source of Gandhi’s modesty is his insistence that criticism (with those whom one morally disagrees) is not implied by the making of one’s moral judgments. He adds that, for Gandhi, “[c]riticism reflects an impurity of heart, and is easily corrupted to breed hostility and, eventually, violence. With an impure heart you could still indulge in non-violent political activism, but that activism would be strategic, merely a means to a political end. In the long run it would, just as surely as violence, land you in a midden.”

There are two problems with such an understanding. First, it assumes that Gandhi’s political actions were directed by philosophical principles alone, distant from the concrete, practical situations at hand. On the other hand, on many occasions, Gandhi himself accepted that his political acts were also determined according to the exigencies of the situation. Second, Gandhi seemed to be ambivalent about removing criticism from moral judgment. Indeed, he was
an excellent critic of political and civilizational tendencies. In Gandhi’s own words, his book *Hind Swaraj* “is a severe condemnation of modern civilization.” He criticized everything that stands for modern civilization—speed/railways, court/lawyers, hospital/doctors, and parliament/politicians. He also criticized political acts of individuals. If he criticized the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as ordered by General Dyer, he also criticized the assassination of Curzon Wyllie by Madan Lal Dhingra. He wrote, “His [Dhingra’s] defense is inadmissible.” In some rare cases he also criticized some acts of individuals. Many times, when some residents of Gandhi’s Ashram transgressed Ashram rules, especially the Brahmacharya (celibacy) rule, he not only criticized the acts but also undertook fasts as penance.

This opens up two possibilities. The first is that, though Gandhi could not completely remove criticism from his moral judgment in practice in his own life, nevertheless he held that removing criticism from moral judgment is an important and correct moral position. In other words, he could not live up to his own ideal. Second, Gandhi did not seem to argue for the entire removal of criticism from moral judgment. The problem with the first possibility is that though it solves the philosopher Gandhi’s problem of how his ideas were integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments, it did not solve the problem of how the politician Gandhi practices a politics that could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises, and failures. In other words, this analysis helps us to understand how Gandhi as a philosopher was consistent within his ideas, but it is inadequate because it does not show us how to find consistency between his ideas and political actions. It, therefore, means that the idea of removing criticism from moral judgment does not integrate or merge two Gandhis. In other words, in Bilgrami’s analysis also there remain two Gandhis and, as it is said above, so long as it is not resolved how these two Gandhis can be understood in one single conceptual framework, there is work to be done in getting Gandhi right.

There remain two Gandhis in Bilgrami’s analysis because there is a problem in the way he explains Gandhi’s understanding of truth. Bilgrami writes, “the alternative source of the modesty in Gandhi has less to do with issues about truth, and more to do with the way we must hold our moral values.” He adds that, for Gandhi, truth is an exclusively moral notion. A little later, he writes, “truth has to be a more abstract value than a moral value because both (moral) truth-teller and the (immoral) liar share it.” But at the end of the paper, he himself raises the question “How can there be a value if no one can fail to value it?” and answers it in the following way:

The answer is: yes, someone does indeed fail to value truth in this more abstract sense. But it is not the liar. It is the equally common sort of person in our midst, what Harry Frankfurt has called, the “bullshitter.” This is the person who merely sounds off on public occasions or who gets published in some academic journals simply because, he is prepared to speak or write in the requisite jargon, without any goal of getting things right nor even (like the liar) concealing the right things which he thinks he knows.

But what my reading suggests is that in the Gandhian scheme of things, no human being can fail to value truth or the moral value of truth-telling, and for Gandhi, this understanding is based on his assumption of human nature. He believed that “[n]o human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption; no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil.” At the end of his paper, Bilgrami does acknowledge that Gandhi was convinced of the inherent corruptibility of our moral psyches. But what Bilgrami misses is that for Gandhi, no human being is beyond redemption either. Therefore, Gandhi did make some exemptions to moral principles like nonviolence, but not for utilitarian reasons (for the greatest good of the greatest number) or because for someone who is inherently evil or criticism cannot be completely removed from moral judgment, but rather due to the limitations of human beings. There is no way to determine what the greatest good of the greatest number is or who is inherently evil.

Now it is my turn to answer Bilgrami’s question: How can there be a value if no one can fail to value it? Or I can also add another question: Why do we seek the highest moral value though we are sure that we cannot attain it? Both are indeed good questions and only by answering them can we come close to grasping the question of this article, namely, how could Gandhi integrate both the philosophical and the political aspects of life and remain true to both of them?

Gandhi’s answer is that we can talk about holding moral values only in terms of degree (which should not be confused with multiple aspects of reality or “Anekantavada”). Gandhi strongly believes that although there is no way to find out who is inherently good or evil, nonetheless we can talk in terms of degree. We can ask how one person and his conducts or acts in comparison to another person and his conducts or acts are closer to a realization of possible moral perfection for human beings on earth. Gandhi also insisted that since there is no way to determine what is morally wrong, one should listen to one’s own conscience or inner voice. But listening to one’s own conscience does not improve matters because it does not help to determine who is and whose acts are closer to a realization of possible moral perfection for a human being.

When Gandhi was asked, “Does the ‘inner voice’ mean the ‘message of God’?”, his reply was, “The ‘Inner Voice’ may mean a message from God or the Devil, for both are wrestling in the human breast.” And when he was posed the next question, “How can an ordinary man distinguish the ‘message of God’?”, his reply was, “Not every person can know God’s will. Proper training is necessary to attain the power to know God’s will.” Elsewhere, he explained it further:

Willfulness is not conscience. A child has no conscience. The correspondent’s cat does not go for the mouse in obedience to its conscience. It does so in obedience to its nature. Conscien...
the ripe fruit of strictest discipline. . . . Conscience can reside only in a delicately tuned breast.\textsuperscript{23}

He also claimed that “having made a ceaseless effort to attain self-purification, I have developed some little capacity to hear correctly and clearly the ‘still small voice within.’\textsuperscript{24}” It means that for Gandhi, one’s level of disciplined life that one acquires for preparing oneself for the service of mankind (to make our humanity less unequal, less dominating, and less authoritarian) can help one to determine whether or not any particular act is morally right in some degree with one’s opponent/fellow seeker at that particular situation. For Gandhi, disciplining one’s life for the service of humankind is a lifelong process. In this way, whenever Gandhi is faced with a difficult situation or moral dilemma, he listens to his small voice or conscience to reach a moral judgment. And, for him, such moral judgments are universalizable and have both firmness (because such moral judgments are based on listening to his conscience, which has made a ceaseless effort to discipline his life, and he is going to act upon them for the service of mankind) and modesty (because he was sure about his limitations in his effort to discipline his life) that allow for a politics that could accommodate a potentially limitless range of imperfections, adjustments, compromises, and failures. In this way, Gandhi remained both an imperfect philosopher as well as an imperfect politician and was true to both the central aspects of his life.

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NOTES

5. Barker, “Gandhi as Bridge and Reconciler,” 51.
13. An incident on April 13, 1919, in which British troops fired on a large peaceful crowd gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab, India, to protest against the arrest of pro-Indian independence leaders.
14. Madan Lal Dhingra, an Indian revolutionary independence activist shot Sir Curzon Wyllie, an India Office Official on July 1, 1909.
22. Gandhi, Prayer, 75.

Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations

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ABSTRACT

Is it possible to understand Gandhi’s ideas by refracting them through a Kantian lens? How does Gandhi imagine and deploy a public space for individuals to meet as citizens to reflect on and to debate matters of collective concern? How does he understand the collaborative nature of soul-making? While Gandhi explicitly grounds many of these practices in Indian philosophical and religious frameworks, we show that his views also reflect a capacious enlightenment sensibility and that he offers us a distinctly modern account of citizenship. Moreover, Gandhi is often viewed as an arch nationalist, as a parochial preserver of Hindu tradition, and as a romantic political philosopher who looked back with nostalgia to an idealized past. We reject the simplicity of this portrait and argue that Gandhi is a cosmopolitan thinker whose strategic calls to action in the public sphere were future-oriented and even more
creative and radical than those that the cosmopolitan Kant advocated for his own idealized public sphere.

INTRODUCTION
We are interested in the role that the public sphere plays in Gandhi’s thought. In particular, we would like to ask whether it is possible to understand Gandhi’s ideas by refracting them through a broadly Kantian cosmopolitan lens. How does Gandhi imagine and deploy a public space for individuals to meet as citizens to reflect on and to debate matters of collective concern? How does he justify demonstrative protest in the context of the Indian independence movement? And how does Gandhi understand the collaborative nature of what we will call (borrowing from John Keats) soul-making? Gandhi explicitly grounds many of these practices in a distinctively Indian philosophical and religious framework. Nonetheless, his views—about our relation to nature, respect for law, and the significance of reason—emerge from a capacious enlightenment sensibility. Gandhi provides a modern account of citizenship and a model of how to think and to talk across differences.

Gandhi’s corpus is vast and complex, and his ideas evolved throughout his long life. To be sure, he was a harsh critic of modernity and a harsh critic of British colonial law and policy. He was also a profoundly religious Hindu. All of this is well-known and all of this frames his philosophical and political project. We wish, however, to call attention to important counter-currents in Gandhi’s thought that are not so often appreciated. Some of these may be strategic and can only be understood in the broader context of his thought, but some are themselves important ingredients in Gandhi’s philosophy.

In particular, we wish to call attention to the ways in which Gandhi’s thinking is grounded in the very modernity he criticizes and that frames his cosmopolitanism, albeit a cosmopolitanism that is grounded in the religious tradition and national sensibility for which he is so well-known. We do not pretend to conduct an exhaustive survey of Gandhi’s writings; in fact, we are intentionally selective, choosing those places where these intriguing counter-currents arise. Nor do we claim that these are the most important aspects of Gandhi’s thought, only that they deserve more attention than they have hitherto received, and that attention to them deepens our understanding of Gandhian philosophy.

GANDHI TODAY
Gandhi’s philosophical stance is contested. On the one hand, he is often viewed as an arch nationalist and ideologue, a parochial preserver of Hindu tradition, and, in many respects, a romantic political philosopher, rejecting modernity in favor of a return to a premodern agrarian civilization. This view emerges from a plausible reading of *Hind Swaraj* and is reinforced by certain remarks in his dialogue with Rabindranath Tagore. On the other hand, contemporary political debates in India reveal just how slippery a position Gandhi occupies in ideological space. No major political group today comfortably claims Gandhi as an ally. Religious traditionalists, Hindu nationalists, Muslims, Dalits, Marxists, and even secularists and liberals of different stripes are equally ambivalent about how closely they would be affiliated with Gandhi. This suggests, at the very least, that there is a complexity in Gandhi’s method and message that has hitherto escaped scrutiny.

We approach some of this complexity by addressing Gandhi from a new direction: Instead of seeing Gandhi simply as an anti-modern nationalist, opposed to Tagore and his cosmopolitanism, we will show that Gandhi is himself a cosmopolitan whose views resonate with those of the European enlightenment. We will argue that Gandhi shares some of the perspective of that archetype of European modernity, Immanuel Kant, even though their respective forms of cosmopolitanism differ in detail.

THE KANTIAN LEGACY: ENLIGHTENMENT AND COSMOPOLITAN PURPOSE
Kant might seem to be a strange touchstone for thought about the Gandhian project. After all, the whole point of the Kantian legacy is to stress the primacy of reason above all else, and an impartial, universalized form of reasoning that, unlike Gandhi’s theism and his use of Hindu scripture in articulating a moralized notion of self and society would appear to cut against that pure impartial reason and secular account of morality. Moreover, Kant’s cosmopolitan aspirations might seem to be at odds with the nationalism most often ascribed to Gandhi. Finally, Gandhi’s mobilization of communities to action, his use of the body (his own) in *satyagraha*, and the continual risk of intrusion of passion and irrational sentiment would also appear to be in tension with Kant’s insistence on the discursive use of reason in the public sphere.

We will show, however, that these tensions are not as deep as they might appear to be. Kant’s cosmopolitanism is not as secular as it is often portrayed; Gandhi’s Hinduism is not as orthodox as it is often portrayed. Nor is the contrast between the discursive and the enactive as sharp as many take it to be. Moreover, the contrast between what is regarded as Gandhi’s parochialism and Kant’s cosmopolitanism is overstated. When we adopt more nuanced views of Kant’s and Gandhi’s respective enlightenment programs and versions of cosmopolitanism, they will turn out to be more akin than different. This is not to say that Kant and Gandhi agree in all matters; they do not. It is instead to point out resonances that merit our attention as we try to understand Gandhi’s own cosmopolitan thought.

We will begin with particular attention to the three essays that ground Kant’s modernist political project: “What Is Called Enlightenment?” “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” and “Toward Perpetual Peace.” We will show that, taken together, these essays articulate a position strikingly similar to Gandhi’s account of citizenship and its relation to the public sphere: if Kant is a cosmopolitan, so is Gandhi.

In “What Is Called Enlightenment?” Kant argues for the importance of the public sphere: a locus in which citizenship is made possible through reason and dialogue. In the public sphere, all persons are free to express their opinions and to argue for them. That sphere (loka) thus constitutes a
shared discursive space that unites individuals as citizens in a common political project. The diversity of opinion is thereby brought to bear in a shared political purpose.

Kant argued that instead of constraining his subjects by force, an enlightened monarch ought to permit and to encourage citizens to debate and even to criticize laws and the state, constrained by—and only by—reason. Governance, he argued, should allow for moderate political change. Such deliberate political processes would then lead to greater stability than would revolutions. A robust public sphere, however intellectually unruly, he argued, would therefore be more conducive to peace.

This conception of the public sphere and of its role in enabling the free expression of all citizens informs Gandhi’s thought. One important point for present purposes is that Gandhi accepts Kant’s revolutionary idea that good governance requires not only the probity of public officials but also a citizenry that can provide checks on their government. Another—and this is often ignored when people contrast Gandhi with enlightenment thought—is Gandhi’s agreement with Kant that the public sphere is discursive in character. We will return to these points below.

In order to explore more surprising connections between Kant and Gandhi, we turn to the less familiar, but equally important, theological dimensions of Kant’s political thought as developed in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” and “Toward a Perpetual Peace.” In these essays, Kant argues for an alignment of human action with natural law, which, in the long trajectory of human history, leads to a perpetual peace for all humanity. In these works, Kant commits to a naturalistic teleology, to a universalist conception of law, and to the idea of Providence. All of these ideas are deeply imbricated with Lutheran theology.

In the first of these two essays, for instance, Kant states:

Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness of perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason.5

Kant continues: “Nature gave man reason, and freedom of will based upon reason, and this in itself was a clear indication of nature’s intention as regards his endowments.”7 Note here the alignment of reason with nature’s purpose. Despite the apparently secular or scientific language of “nature” in this essay, the teleological and intentional language that Kant uses suggests that nature is a proxy for the Christian God. This should inform our reading of Kant’s cosmopolitanism: it is not a purely secular ideology, but rather an extension of a Protestant view of the relation between persons and the Divine to a broader account of the relations between persons and nature.

In “Towards Perpetual Peace,” Kant appeals to Providence, making more explicit the theological underpinning of his account of the connection between the natural and human domains.

Perpetual peace is guaranteed by no less an authority than the great artist Nature herself . . . if we consider its purposive function within the world’s development, where it appears as the underlying wisdom of a higher cause, showing the way towards the objective goal of the human race and predetermining the world’s evolution, we call it Providence. . . . Modesty forbids us to speak of providence as something we can recognize, for this would mean donning the wings of Icarus and presuming to approach the mystery of its inscrutable intentions.8

This should give pause to anyone who would draw a sharp distinction between a modern, secular Kant and romantic theological Gandhi. Kant goes beyond mere talk of “nature,” assigning it not only a will but also “artistry,” and calling it “Providence,” a metonym for the divine. He even notes that nature in this sense exceeds the understanding of human minds, transferring the mystery of causes to the mystery of divine intention. This alignment of divine agency and human purpose is one way of articulating a cosmopolitan vision, and it is emphatically not secular. Indeed, we will see this very conception echoed in Gandhi’s notion that God’s handiwork in Nature is embodied in humanity, and that this alignment is what enables the possibility of peace.

We have demonstrated that Kant’s cosmopolitanism and his optimistic humanism are not grounded purely in pure reason, but rather in a sensibility according to which God speaks directly to persons and infuses them with the values and projects that He brings to creation. We say this neither to disparage Kant’s project nor to dismiss the centrality of rationality to Kant’s conception of the foundations of political order, but rather to point out that the context for that optimism and for that faith in reason is a broader religious faith. We will see when we attend to Gandhi’s thought that he shares both the religious framework that Kant articulates (mutatis mutandis) and the optimism grounded in human reason and its ability to animate the political sphere.

While we may not be able to know how Nature unfolds (Kant) or what God’s plan is (Gandi), both underscore and prescribe the use of reason by humans as they act as trustees for Nature. This includes treating humanity as a whole with dignity, as ends in themselves, and never as means. Soul-making in the public sphere cannot be understood without taking seriously the relation between human beings and nature, and the alignment between human aspiration to perpetual peace and natural law. It is to that soul-making that we now turn.

**GANDHI: SOUL-MAKING IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

Gandhi unified political action and moral development under the heading swaraj. This term denotes both political and personal independence or self-rule. Gandhi argued that the first is meaningless without the second. Personal swaraj, he argued, is a precondition for any morally acceptable action on behalf of political independence, or
Indeed for any public action at all. This is because legitimate participation in the public sphere requires rationality and non-egoistic moral motivation.

Like Kant, Gandhi moves from a religious frame to a secular ethical project. Gandhi’s focus on the practice of self-mastery is based on his reading of the Bhagavad Gītā. In that reading, he foregrounds the conception of individual duty (svadharma), duty grounded in one’s social role (varna-dharma), and the essential unity of humankind through identity with the divine (not the Christian God, but Krishna). This religious register is as foundational to Gandhi’s political project as Kant’s very different religious commitments are to his political project. And Gandhi’s project, while different from Kant’s in specific goals and in its conception of civil society, is nonetheless equally secular and cosmopolitan.

Gandhi’s theory of swaraj involves an account of the cultivation of the emotions, as well as of the mastery of the emotions by reason and conscience. That is, he is not interested in the abnegation of the affective, but in the harnessing of the affective life in moral discipline (yoga). Gandhi’s genius is to translate the cultivation of personal discipline into a project aimed at public, national discipline. Just as he understands persons as citizens of their families, villages, and nations, he understands the nation as a citizen of a community of nations, one that, like the family, is responsible for the moral upbringing of its members.

Two aspects of Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism are taken as evidence that he diverges from the ideals of the European enlightenment. The first is his use of embodied action in public affairs. The second is his emphasis on the role of the emotion of love in political action. We will show that each instead is a reflection of the Enlightenment sensibility refracted through a colonial Indian lens, and that each contributes to, and does not undermine, Gandhi’s status as a cosmopolitan thinker. We begin with Gandhi’s use of embodied action.

Gandhi crafts a set of methods for national soul-making. The space for this practice is the public sphere. Public action tests and adjusts the boundaries of law and morality that govern a social order and constitutes the dialectic between individual and social morality. In the context of a colonial struggle for independence, social action was primarily realized in the form of political protest. These protests were not only—or even primarily—understood as efforts to shape policy. But they were also means for shaping political emotions in the context of the movement for justice and freedom. Gandhi thought that such action could only be effective and acceptable when performed in public informed by this moral valence.

Gandhi took these actions to be relevant both to the intra-Indian and to the inter-national contexts. Gandhi thus aspired to a citizenship animated by cosmopolitan ideas he shared with Kant. We begin with the national context. During the Indian independence struggle, Gandhi proposed and enacted different forms of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, prominently including the salt march and fasts. Gandhi understood such public actions as representational or discursive: they are, he held, acts of communication and even of instruction. Gandhi’s term for these actions was satyagraha, indicating both grasping and insisting on the truth (or reality). This term is important because it reminds us that, however religious Gandhi’s foundations are, he took the edifice erected on those foundations to be universal in virtue of being tied not to one’s particular viewpoint but to reality itself, or truth.

It is true that these kinds of actions in the public sphere exceed the scope of those actually envisaged by Kant, who emphasized discussion and debate and not demonstrations. Kant would have thought that Gandhi’s actions are different in kind from purely verbal expression in pamphlets or speeches, and so not expressions of reason. Nonetheless, we will show that these actions serve the very political and discursive function that Kant identified as central to citizens’ participation in good governance.

Gandhi’s requirement of ahimsa was essential to all forms of action in the public sphere, whether they were petitions to courts and legislative bodies, acts of non-cooperation, or even civil disobedience. This requirement, as well as the internal constraint Gandhi imposed on the motivation and attitude of the satyagrahi who had license to commit such actions, was critical to Gandhi’s conception of legitimate practice and free expression in the public sphere. Dhirendra Mohan Datta puts the required attitude of the satyagrahi as follows: “[The satyagrahi] explains his just grievances coolly and calmly to the public and the aggressor, appeals to his reason, gives him time to think, and if even then the latter does not agree to rectify the wrong, the satyagrahi gives him due notice of his intention to launch the non-violent movement and then actually does so.” Reason—so central to Kantian thinking—is hence critical to Gandhi’s thought as well.

The Salt March is a well-known instance of non-violent political action in the public sphere. The march protested the salt tax and prohibition of private salt manufacture imposed by the British. Indians of different religious persuasions walked off their jobs, walked along with Gandhi to the sea, and made salt (an act of swadeshi or reliance on one’s own resources). In this way, they affirmed their freedom (swaraj)—both personal and collective—to assemble as citizens in a public space to make their case—through articulate action—against a government that they took to have acted unfairly. Here we have a clear example of public discourse in Kant’s sense of that term, albeit undertaken through what might at first appear to be nondiscursive means. That appearance of non-discursivity is, however, illusory. Because this public action is intended to communicate the fact that there is an inalienable right to self-determination, it makes a statement. Such action is simultaneously instrumental and rational; it is aimed at, as well as reflective of, individual and collective moral cultivation.

Nonetheless, however discursive they were, Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience were supplemented by what Kant would have recognized as discourse. Gandhi also constructed and advanced explicitly legal arguments—oral and written—for the legitimate extension of British Law to its colonial subjects. British colonial ideology and
legal theory made these arguments particularly poignant: given India’s status as a part of the British Empire, Gandhi’s argument for the uniform application of British law could only be dismissed on pain of parochiality and partiality.

Gandhi hence did not reject British law tout court, despite his critique of the violence of its application in the colonies and despite his more general critique of the adversarial legal system in Hind Swaraj. Instead, he used British law and legal theory strategically, relying on his skills as a lawyer to argue that the colonial application of British law is inconsistent with its claim to be grounded in universal, rational justice. Once again, we see Gandhi’s rationalist cosmopolitanism in action: he approves of the commitment to universality and to fairness; he criticizes the institutions against which he protests because they betray those very values.

Gandhi saw satyagraha not as a purely Indian idea, but rather as a strategy of global significance. In particular, he recommended it to African Americans in a solidarity that historian Nico Slate has called a “colored cosmopolitanism.” Slate describes alignments across the US and the Indian subcontinent in response to “the color line.” It is well-known that Gandhi’s method of nonviolence resonated with Martin Luther King, Jr. But Gandhian ideas circulated well before King’s time in Indian and African American journals (Chand and The Aryan Path in India and The Crisis in the US). In these journals, we find debates about the promise (and the risks) of “cosmopolitan” alliances between otherwise distant lands/populaces/cultures based on their shared humanity. The aspiration represented by satyagraha transcended national, ethnic, and religious boundaries and connected peoples beyond biological notions of race, constituting a more inclusive and trans-national public sphere.

Despite these obviously cosmopolitan commitments, many still read Gandhi as a narrow nationalist. One reason for this is the position he seems to take in the famous debate with Tagore. Tagore is often represented in this debate as the champion of cosmopolitanism against Gandhi’s alleged nationalism. But this is a caricature. Here is a passage that might suggest that Gandhi is a parochial nationalist:

I know families in which English is being made the mother tongue. Hundreds of youths believe that without a knowledge of English, freedom for India is practically impossible... All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been.

But let’s see what comes next. Gandhi writes:

I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any... I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world.

So, what might have appeared to be a parochial devotion to local languages and a disparagement of a cosmopolitan vision—when seen in context—is, in fact, a rooted cosmopolitanism. Such a cosmopolitanism is born of the intuition that citizenship in the world requires a mature sense of who one is, that participants in a global public sphere have a right to demand respect as equals from their colleagues, and that their intellectual vision should be global. Gandhi makes this point in another letter in this exchange when he writes:

Nor need the Poet fear that Non-cooperation is intended to erect a Chinese Wall between India and the West. On the contrary, Non-Cooperation is intended to pave the way to real, honorable and voluntary cooperation based on mutual respect and trust.

The resonances with Kant’s understanding of the public sphere are compelling: mutual respect and trust are the point, realized in the treatment of persons as free, equal, and as ends in themselves. Finally, consider the following remark in this exchange, in which Gandhi responds to the charge that swadeshi is parochial:

Nor is the scheme of Non-Cooperation or swadeshi an exclusive doctrine... The message of Non-Cooperation, Nonviolence, and swadeshi is a message to the world. It must fall flat if it does not bear fruit in the soil in which it has been delivered.

These actions in the global sphere suggest that while Gandhi is indisputably engaged in a practice of national soul-making, this practice is infused with a cosmopolitan ethos. We have shown that Gandhi uses public action as a form of argument, as the public deployment of reason. But the public sphere is not only the domain of reason: persons bring their affective lives into their political interactions as well. And this takes us to another dimension of the conversation between Gandhi and Tagore.

Tagore, in Creative Unity, defends the universality of creative human affect, and so can be read as defending the importance of emotion in the public sphere against the emphasis on reason in political action we have been ascribing to Gandhi. Martha C. Nussbaum draws our attention to Tagore’s advocacy of love for one’s country, a love that she argues is a necessary public emotion grounded in an aesthetic sensibility. In Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice, she argues that reason and argument, narrowly understood, cannot serve as the vehicle for social and political change. She makes the case for the importance of the practice of appropriate political emotions in the public sphere.

While Tagore’s encouragement of patriotism is a fine example of the value of public emotion, this recognition of the role of emotional life in politics does not distinguish his position from that of Gandhi. Gandhi also argues for an essential role of emotion in political engagement. He assigns pride of place to what he calls “soul force” or “love force” (which is inseparable from the active practice of
ahimsa). This is an equally powerful way to represent the role of universal emotions in the public sphere. So, while many have seen Tagore’s patriotism to be an expression of his cosmopolitanism, and Gandhi’s advocacy of ahimsa to be nationalistic, the soul-force Gandhi advocates is, in fact, equally expressive of a cosmopolitan ethos.

There are two further senses in which Gandhi’s soul force or love force is cosmopolitan: first, understood as a political emotion, it neither presupposes a narrow view of a nation’s boundaries nor implies a dichotomy between insider and outsider; second, Gandhi’s soul-force is an embodied emotion that is always reason-governed in the service of justice and humanity as a whole. But how does Gandhi’s emphasis on the affective square with the Kantian valorization of reason?

Kant does not assign any role to emotion in the public sphere. This dismissal of the affective dimension of human relations rests on the alignment of his sharp distinctions between reason and emotion and between the public and the private. Gandhi does not share Kant’s prejudice against the rationality of the emotions, a prejudice that has come under sharp attack in recent literature on the emotions, including not only Nussbaum but also such theorists as de Sousa, Solomon, and Damasio. There is a growing consensus that the Platonic division of the soul into affective and rational parts is impossible to square with actual human psychology. Emotions involve judgments and appraisals. Reasoning often proceeds from affective premises. And the public sphere is a domain in which persons express pride, anger, disgust, and solidarity, as often as they offer cold, logical analysis. Gandhi’s introduction of love as a public emotion is hence a prescient corrective to the European prejudice against the emotions.

One of Gandhi’s devices for infusing public reason with affective force was his controversial use of the “fast unto death” as a political device. These fasts were often effective, but one might well think that they constituted an abandonment of public discourse in favor of rank blackmail, or at least an appeal to emotion unmixed with reason. While we do not condone these particular forms of embodied action, Gandhi took them to be actions that bring people to their senses. ConceIVED in this way, Gandhi’s fasts are public discursive acts, very much in the space of reason, although they make use of the body, an object often associated with the private sphere.

Gandhi’s use of his body in this way was not private: it was not an exercise in manipulation or simple emotional infection. In each fast, Gandhi used the body as a public expression—as a premise in an argument designed to open people’s eyes to injustice. The fast amounted to an assertion that Gandhi himself could not live with the injustice in question. Joined with the implicit premise that others are (or ought to be) like Gandhi in this respect, the fast entails that nobody should be able to live with that injustice. The inability to tolerate injustice is both rationally defensible and affectively immediate: an expression of justified disgust with a practice, a disgust that makes normal life impossible. This embodied discursivity is what enables Gandhi so effectively to fuse the rational and the affective in public discourse. This is another respect in which Gandhi enhances and extends Kant’s vision of the human rationality that infuses the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Indian philosophers who wrote during the period of British rule creatively synthesized classical and modern ideas. Gandhi has been widely recognized for creatively adapting Hindu practice in the modern context and in the anti-colonial struggle. Nonetheless, many have accused him of adopting a reactionary “back to the past” anti-modern, anti-cosmopolitan sensibility. We have proposed an alternate interpretation of Gandhi’s thought. We have shown that his philosophical project embodies a cosmopolitan aspiration that resonates with Enlightenment ideals, albeit with a distinctively Indian inflection.

We have also suggested a re-evaluation of the often exaggerated difference between Tagore’s and Gandhi’s positions, arguing that they are each cosmopolitan, albeit in different ways. Like Kant, Gandhi is committed to a universal vision of the public sphere as a domain of rational discourse, and like Kant, he grounds that secular commitment in a religious framework. But, like Kant, that religious framework is consistent with a secular understanding of the public. And Gandhi’s own cosmopolitanism goes further than Kant’s: it unites rather than divides the affective and the rational.

Finally, Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism is not a qualified version of cosmopolitanism. It is not vernacular cosmopolitanism, colored cosmopolitanism (Slate), cosmopolitan traditionalism (Carey-Webb), immersive cosmopolitanism, extreme cosmopolitanism, moderate cosmopolitanism (Ganeri), or a version of James Mill’s paternalist cosmopolitanism. While these distinctions have some descriptive advantage, their normative effects can be pernicious. (“It isn’t really authentically cosmopolitan, just some qualified semblance of the real thing—the European thing.”) To be sure, all forms of cosmopolitanism are qualified in some respect; the specific qualification reflects the context in which that cosmopolitanism arises. Gandhi’s cosmopolitanism is distinctive. It is Indian; it is liberatory. But it is no more distinctive, and no less an expression of Enlightenment values, and no more nationalistic than any other cosmopolitanism.

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NOTES


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9. A great deal more needs to be said here. In particular, the differences between the social orders envisioned by Kant and Gandhi are significant, as are the ways in which their respective religious commitments inform their understandings of duties, rights, and the structure of the public sphere. But there is not space here to follow this line of thought.


12. Gandhi’s own blind spot about the caste system—his view that it could survive if suitably understood as different forms of labor weighted equally and infused with equal dignity—was, as Slate (Colored Cosmopolitanism) argues, finally cleared up in part by cosmopolitan African American intellectuals. They, among others in India, convinced Gandhi that his aspiration to a shared humanity required that he give up his defense of caste.


19. There is a great deal more to be said about the many dimensions of Gandhi’s understanding of “soul force,” but that is beyond the scope of this essay.


BOOK REVIEWS

The Yogasūtra of Patañjali: A New Introduction to the Buddhist Roots of the Yoga System


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Patañjali’s Yogasūtra is a fascinating text. Besides a thorough reflection on meditation, this short treatise brims with philosophical acuity. Patañjali touches on the ever-pending question of self and identity, and on the ever-crucial question of freedom (or freedoms: are siddhi and kaivalya omnipotence-as-freedom and disengagement-as-freedom, respectively, two distinct ideals of freedom?). Moreover, Patañjali sketches a map of the content of the mind, the content that is to be emptied in the process of yoga. The mind consists—he writes in Yogasūtra (YS) 1.6—of valid knowledge (pramāṇa), erroneous knowledge (viparyaya), verbal construction (vikalpa), sleep (nidrā), and memory (smṛti). Imagination and emotion seem to be missing here—whether ignored, downplayed, or treated as subordinated to the noetic elements of the mind. The fact that Patañjali dedicates an independent rubric to vikalpa is worth noticing. It conveys his interest in language, in the possibilities and impossibilities of language. Still in the compartment of philosophy, Patañjali is interested in and provides his readers with an analysis of time (through the concepts of kṣana and krama, moment and sequence). Patañjali corresponds—and here I come to Pradeep Gokhale’s new book—with neighboring philosophical traditions, including Sāmkhya, Buddhism, and Jainism.

The Yogasūtra is usually identified primarily with the Sāmkhya tradition. It is rooted in the Sāmkhyan dualistic metaphysics that distinguishes between puruṣa and prakṛti, i.e., between the self above and beyond everything worldly and matter, which includes everything that is not the self, from the sun, the moon, and the stars to the human body and mind. Yes, even the mind belongs in this formulation to the category of matter, to prakṛti, not to puruṣa. Sāmkhya vocabulary in the Yogasūtra includes, besides puruṣa and prakṛti, the abovementioned concept and ideal of kaivalya. Kaivalya stands for the ultimate distinction between prakṛti and puruṣa, which amounts to ultimate freedom—freedom of the self from the world and the worldly, including freedom from the content of the mind. Mādhava Vidyārāṇya, in his famous fourteenth-century Sarvadarśanasaṅgraha: A Compendium of Every Philosophical School, refers to Patañjala-yoga, namely to the Yogasūtra and the philosophical school that emerged from it, as “seśvara [sa-iśvara] sāmkhya,” namely “Sāmkhya with Iśvara (god),” or “Theistic Sāmkhya,” emphasizing the Sāmkhya trajectory of the text.
Every Yoga scholar knows that there are Buddhist threads in the Yogasūtra, including the Brahma-vihāras, “the sublime attitudes” (YS 1.33), the concept of prajñā, “wisdom” (YS 1.48-49), the therapeutic paradigm that the Buddhists refer to as the “four noble truths” (catvāri āryasatyānī), a family resemblance between “the eight limbs of yoga” (āstāṅga-yoga, YS 2.29 onwards) and the Buddhist “eightfold path” (āstāṅga-mārga), and of course Patañjali’s debate with Yogacāra Buddhism (YS 4.19-21). But Gokhale’s claim is far more radical: according to him, Patañjali relies on Buddhist sources as much as, or even more than, on the Śāmkhya tradition. “In my survey,” he writes, “I found that more than 50 percent of the Yogasūtra’s aphorisms can be said to have a background in Buddhism, directly or indirectly. Less than 40 percent of the aphorisms can be said to have a background in Śākhya or other orthodox [āstika, i.e., non-Buddhist and non-Śākya] sources, directly or indirectly” (12). In other words, Gokhale opens a whole new Yogasūtra before us, revealing its deep Buddhist roots.

Gokhale’s book is a contemporary Yogasūtra commentary—a new Tiṅka if you wish—on this old text. Gokhale follows Patañjali’s text, chapter after chapter and sūtra after sūtra, translating, explaining and highlighting in each verse its philosophical roots, revealing not only Buddhist but also Śākya influence. In the following lines, I will focus on the salient Buddhist trajectory revealed by him, but the Śākya roots also deserve to be looked into. Take, for instance, the phrase mahāvṛata, “the great vow,” with reference to the five yamas, Patañjali’s principal ethical principles in YS 2.31. Gokhale is a pandit, a Sanskrit classicist. Every claim he makes is textually grounded in Sanskrit and Pāli sources. Not very often is a pandit’s work open for English readers. Gokhale’s book opens a unique window to working methods and tools that are usually hidden from the Western (or Westernized, I am thinking of mainstream Indian academia) eye. I recently read a book review article by a Western scholar who specializes in Indian philosophy suggesting that the pandits’ work is written “in a doxographical style, and along more or less clearly drawn scholastic lines.” In other words, he imagines a lack of creativity and a sense of religiosity in their work. He does not realize that often, the most radical critique of the tradition comes from within the tradition itself. Gokhale’s work is a rare opportunity for the writer to whom I am referring and for others to become acquainted with contemporary classicist thinking.

Gokhale’s book comprises four chapters, which are actually Patañjali’s own chapters with Gokhale’s new commentary. Gokhale also provides us with three effective appendixes. The first, “Buddhist Conceptions of Meditation, Yoga and the Bodhisattva’s Spiritual Journey vis-à-vis Pātañjala-yoga,” is where he visits the Buddhist texts that, according to him, influenced Patañjali. The second is titled “Asanga on Forms of Supernormal Knowledge and Powers.” Chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra includes a long list of siddhis—powers, special capacities, or yogic attainments—to be acquired through various meditations (sāmyama). Many of these siddhis are, in fact, different types of knowledge (“jñāna” is the word used by Patañjali), from knowledge of the universe and knowledge of the arrangement and movement of the stars, through knowledge of the content of other minds and knowledge of previous births, to knowledge of the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti. Self and Matter. Do not forget that the mind is “matter.” Hence, the sharp differentiation is between self and mind, between Descartes’s “I am” and his “I think.” For Patañjali, yoga is about cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ, YS 1.2). Hence, according to Patañjali, only when the mind is totally still, i.e., empty of any content, including the psychological substratum (the samskāras) underlying the thoughts, only then one’s amness (svarupa) can be revealed. Other siddhis, or yogic attainments, in chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra include powers such as the capacity of miniaturizing one’s body, of becoming invisible, and of determining the time of one’s death at will. Buddhist terminology differentiates between supra-ordinary types of knowledge and supra-normal powers or capacities, referring to them as abhijñā and rddhi, respectively. In his appendix, Gokhale takes us to Asanga’s Śrāvakabhūmi, where like Patañjali (or, according to Gokhale, Patañjali after Asanga), he sketches a list of powers, each with the meditation technique that leads to it. In his commentary on chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra, Gokhale underscores Buddhist parallels in the relevant sūtras. In his appendix, he shows us, through translated paragraphs from Asanga—why he thinks that Patañjali borrows from Asanga. The latter, Gokhale suggests, draws on earlier Pāli sources. The philosophical question about the continuity or ambivalence between siddhi and kaivalya as complementing or alternately contradicting concepts of freedom is, in light of Gokhale, a question about agreement or conflict between Buddhist (siddhi) and Śākya (kaivalya) influences on the Yogasūtra. Gokhale remarks that “Patañjali’s system of Yoga is not a coherent system because it is an attempt to synthesize two soteriological systems—Śākyam and Buddhism—which are mutually inconsistent in many ways” (13). Gokhale’s third appendix is titled “Discrepancies Between Patañjali’s Aphorisms and Vyāsa’s Interpretations.” This appendix supports one of Gokhale’s main arguments. Gokhale argues that Patañjali draws extensively on Buddhist sources, but Vyāsa, his Bhāṣyakāra, i.e., his foremost commentator, makes a political move (yes, politics in the realm of ideas) by distancing Patañjali from the Buddhists and situating him on the “right side” of the map, i.e., the āstika side (the Buddhists and the Jains are on the other side, the nāstika, namely the allegedly heretic side). According to Gokhale, Vyāsa is pro-Śākya, whereas Patañjali is closer to the Buddhists. Gokhale asserts:

Vyāsa must have been aware of the Buddhist background of the Yogasūtra, but he seems to have knowingly avoided acknowledging the Buddhist influence. He interprets the whole of the Yogasūtra as a Śākya text. He acknowledges the Buddhist position only when it is to be criticized or when the Śākya position is to be defended against it. (11)

And Gokhale adds:

Unfortunately, the Bhāṣyakāra’s narrow interpretation of Yogasūtra came to be treated as authentic at the hands of the later commentators, and the Buddhist background got completely side-tracked. (11)
Gokhale’s own attempt is to rectify the situation and to bring back to light the Buddhist roots of Patañjali’s text.

The implications of the picture revealed by Gokhale are far-reaching. First, Patañjali and Vyāsā cannot be one and the same person, against the belief of authoritative Yogasūtra scholars such as Philipp Maas, the compiler of a critical edition of the first chapter of what he refers to as Pātāñjala Yogasūstra, namely of Patañjali’s Yogasūtra and Vyāsā-Bhāṣya together. “According to manuscript colophons and secondary evidence,” Maas suggests, “both texts [the Yogasūtra and Vyāsā’s commentary] taken collectively bear the common title Pātāñjala Yogasūstra and probably have only one single, common author named Patañjali. This author collected the sūtras from different sources and furnished them with explanations, which in later times came to be regarded as the Yogasūtra-bhāṣya.”

I had my doubts even before reading Gokhale, owing to the sidhi (powers) section of chapter 3 of the Yogasūtra, where I felt that Vyāsā’s commentary is too distant from the text. Al-Birūnī’s eleventh-century translation of the Yogasūtra into Arabic also raises questions regarding the equation between Patañjali and Vyāsā, which I cannot delve into at present. But if Gokhale is right about Patañjali’s Buddhist roots and Vyāsā’s striving to conceal them, then author and commentator are surely different from each other.

Another implication of Gokhale’s narrative has to do with the date of Patañjali and, subsequently, with the question about Patañjali of the Yogasūtra and his namesake, the author of the Vyākarana-Mahābhāṣya, the Great Grammatical Commentary, who is usually dated to the second century BCE—are they two or one? If Gokhale is right about Yogācāra influence on Patañjali, then the two Patañjalis—the Yogasūtra-kāra and the grammarian—are definitely different from each other. The grammarian lived too early to have borrowed from these Buddhist thinkers. In light of Gokhale’s work, Patañjali of the Yogasūtra would have to be dated to the fourth or even fifth century CE.

Having introduced Gokhale’s book, I now wish to shortly discuss two verses of the Yogasūtra—1.33 and 2.5—that I have been thinking about for a long time. Apropos Gokhale, both are utterly Buddhist. It is their structural similarity which caught my eye.

YS 1.33: Through the practice of friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity toward the happy, the suffering, the virtuous, and the unvirtuous (respectively), the consciousness is clarified. (maitrī-karunā-muditā-ukeksānām sukha-dukhkhā-punya-apunya-visayānām bhāvanātāsa citta-prasādanam, my translation).

YS 1.33 is the first verse in a series of seven sūtras (YS 1.33-39), which prescribe different techniques of preparing the mind for meditation by acquiring a state of citta-prasādana, namely a sense of clarity or tranquility at the level of consciousness. The yogin can choose the technique that works best for him, as the particle vā, “or,” in each of the verses 34-39 implies. These techniques include, for example, prāṇāyāma (breath control, YS 1.34), or meditation of any desired object (1.39). There are two “twists” in sūtra 1.33: first, the fact that each of the four “sublime attitudes” is directed toward a different addressee. Friendliness is directed toward those who are happy, compassion toward the suffering, joy toward the virtuous, and equanimity (or indifference, or dispassion) toward the non-virtuous. Each type of addressee merits a different attitude. The second twist is that the ideal qualities listed here are not prescribed for the sake of creating a better society or world based on a more appropriate self-other relationship. They rather comprise a technique intended to facilitate meditative introspection and ultimately—in Patañjali—“aloneness” (nibbija-samādhi, kaivālya). The ethical and social dimensions of ideals such as maitrī and karunā (friendliness and compassion) are subordinated here to the yogin’s seeking for metaphysical transcendence. Barbara Stoler-Miller (1979), who worked on the brahma-vihāra formula in the Buddhist context, depicts a similar picture of a preparatory meditative work intended to facilitate the yogin’s inner-transformation, or “change of heart,” as she puts it. In the Buddhist framework, the yogin-monk is required to cultivate all four attitudes and apply them—in meditation—to every sentient being, rather than assigning each attitude to a different type of addressee as in Patañjali. Gokhale’s reading of YS 1.33 is altogether different from mine. Your reading, he would tell me, follows Vyāśa’s commentary, the same Vyāśa who aims to distance the text from its Buddhist roots. Gokhale translates this sūtra as follows:

The mind becomes tranquil by cultivation of friendliness, compassion, gladness and equanimity (or indifference), which have happiness, suffering, merit and demerit (respectively) as their objects. (46)

And he explains:

When Patañjali says that maitrī [friendliness] has happiness as its object, it means that developing maitrī implies desiring for happiness of the other. Similarly, when Patañjali claims that karunā [compassion] has pain as its object, it may simply mean that developing karunā about another person implies desiring that the pain of the other person may be removed. Similarly, to say that muditā [joy, gladness] has merit as its object implies that developing muditā towards another person implies appreciating the merit of the other person, and to say that upekṣā [equanimity] has demerit as its object implies that one should be detached from the demerit in the other person. . . . [Therefore] these attitudes may not be directed to specific types of persons, but they could be directed to all. Hence, maitrī will not be directed to happy persons only; maitrī as a wish for another person’s happiness would be directed towards all. Similarly, the other three attitudes can be addressed to all beings in the world. This gives us what can be called a universalist interpretation of the four attitudes. (47)

According to Gokhale, Patañjali adopts the Brahma-vihāra formulation from the Buddhists as it is, without any twists.
In his commentary of YS 1.33, Gokhale visits Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as also the Carakasamhitā (the famous Āyurveda treatise) and the Jaina Tatvārvitāsūtra. Gokhale suggests that, in the present case, Patañjali is closer to Asaṅga than to the other sources examined by him, and that the four sublime attitudes are for Patañjali universal and directed to all, not to any specific sector. But what about upeksā—equanimity, even indifference—as a universal attitude? Gokhale interprets upeksā in Patañjali (as against Vyāsa) as resonating in the meditation “May all beings be disassociated from sin (apunya)” (49). Upeksā, for him, is a matter of dissociation. Interestingly, in the Carakasamhitā (the intersections between yoga and medicine are worth noting, and Gokhale duly highlights them), upeksā conveys the proper attitude of the physician toward patients who are nearing their death, namely equanimity, or poise.

YS 2.5: Avidyā (worldly gaze) is (a matter of) misidentification of the impermanent, the impure, the painful, and no-self with the permanent, pure, joyous, and self (respectively). (anitya-aśuci-dukhka-anātmasu nitya-śuci-sukha-ātmakhyātir avidyā, my translation).

In YS 2.5, Patañjali offers a definition of avidyā, the worldly and, in fact, worldmaking gaze. This is Patañjali’s epistemological definition of avidyā. In YS 2.15, he adds a psychological definition of the same concept. In 2.15, Patañjali famously writes that “all is suffering for the discerning” (dukhkham eva sarvam vivekenah, reminiscent of the Buddhist “sabam dukkham”). It is implied that one who fails to see the suffering (dukhka) inherent in worldly existence, both on and under the surface, is “undiscerning.” It is the unseen workings of the samskāras (karmic residue) and the guṇas (the activators of prakṛti, or matter) under the surface that add the psychological dimension. The term “avidyā,” here undiscernment, does not occur in 2.15 explicitly, but is the heart of the commentators’ discussion. However, my current focus is on YS 2.5. Here Patañjali defines avidyā as misidentification of A, B, C, and D (the impermanent, the impure, the painful, and the non-self) as E, F, G, and H (permanent, pure, joyous, and self), respectively. The terminology is Buddhist through and through: anitya (impermanent), duhkha (suffering), and anātman (no-self, minimal self)—what could be more Buddhist? Gokhale explains that Patañjali appropriates the Buddhist conception of viparītā, contrary perception, or delusion (or, according to Gokhale, even “perversion”). But interestingly, in the Buddhist context, to mistake A with E, B with F, C with G, and mostly D with H, namely the anātman with the ātman, is a delusion since the anātman, and correspondingly impermanence, are the most adequate descriptions of reality. In Patañjali, the mistake or delusion works the other way around. Since Patañjali is committed to Sāmkhya metaphysics (or now, in light of Gokhale’s work, it is safer to say that he stitches together Sāmkhya and Buddhist trajectories), it is the permanence (of both puruṣa and prakṛti when “she”—prakṛti—returns to “her” primordial mūla-prakṛti state), hiding between the lines of the impermanent worldly existence, behind the veil of avidyā/viparyāsa, which awaits revealment. Patañjali, then, borrows the Buddhist definition of viparyāsa (that, according to Asaṅga, is the root of avidyā), but in its “new home”—the Yogasūtra—it conveys a metaphysical position which is the very opposite of the Buddhist stance. “Patañjali’s explanation of unwisdom [avidyā],” Alex Wayman explains, “is precisely the four varieties of delusion, an ancient doctrine of Buddhism, Vipalāsā in Pāli.” Wayman refers his readers to the Anguttara Nikāya. Gokhale refers his readers in the present case to Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya (AKB). The verse quoted by him (“catvāro viparyāsāḥ, anītye nihyam iti, duḥkhe sukham iti, aśucau śucitī, anātmāḥ ātmāḥ,” AKB V.9) is identical to Patañjali in content (the other way around, as I explained), but not in structure. Here the question of structure arises—the structure that is mutual to YS 1.33 and YS 2.5. If you have a group of four elements related to another group of four elements, Gokhale elucidates, there are two ways of presenting this relation, namely through a “respectivity model” or a “pair model.” In both sūtras, Patañjali employs the respectivity model: A, B, C, and D applying to E, F, G, and H. Gokhale explains that the respectivity model is “a useful device for giving information in a concise way.” Therefore, Vasubandhu frequently uses this model in the Abhidharmakośa (and uses the word “yathāākramam,” i.e., in the same order, or respectively). But in the Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya, his auto-commentary on the text, where conciseness is not a priority, he uses the pair model (as in the verse quoted by Gokhale). As a sūtra-kāra or a compiler of sūtras—like Vasubandhu of the Kośa, not the Bhāṣya—Patañjali is committed to conciseness, hence opts for the respectivity model.

Conclusion: After reading Gokhale’s book, the Yogasūtra looks different. Patañjali is revealed as a compiler who borrows a good number of verses from Yogācāra Buddhism. Gokhale is interested in the politics behind and between the lines of the text. Vyāsa, he argues and shows, emphasizes the Sāmkhya influence on the Yogasūtra and undermines the contribution of Buddhist and Jaina sources to the Yogasūtra as a textual melting-pot. But there is another political cat waiting to be taken out of the bag, which has to do with the present-day status of the Yogasūtra in the West as “the bible” of yoga (that is, āsana) practitioners. The West is always keen to exoticize India. The Yogasūtra and Patañjali have been (and still are) heavily exoticized. Numerous publications endorse the imagined picture of Patañjali as an original author who translates into words insights that come directly from his own meditative practice. Gokhale’s work de-exoticizes and demystifies the Yogasūtra. He reminds us that the crux of thinking, of scholarship, and of creativity at large is dialogue. His book reveals Patañjali’s treatise as inherently dialogic, corresponding as it is with several sources, Buddhist as much as—or even more than—Sāmkhya. Gokhale’s book is a must read for anyone interested in the Yogasūtra, in classical Indian philosophy, in comparative philosophy, and more broadly, in the intricate and intriguing relationship between text and commentary.

NOTES
Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge

Daniel Raveh’s Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge is not an intellectual biography about Daya Krishna. Instead, it is an invitation to read Dayaji by offering extracts from his work in context with his contemporaries, leavened with Raveh’s analysis. Krishna’s work is now housed for free at Open Library (https://www.dayakrishna.org/).

Raveh adopts Krishna’s dialogic method when he argues for broadening the list of scholars that philosophers have traditionally been in dialog with, so as to do philosophy without borders. Instead of only examining the works of scholars like Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gayatri Spivak, he argues for engagement with the ideas of scholars like Krishna, Mukund Lath, and Ramchandra Gandhi.

Due to space constraints, this review will only attempt to get others interested in reading Krishna’s work. In addition, although Raveh introduces Krishna’s work within the context of his conversational partners in twentieth-century Indian philosophy, I will focus on Krishna. I begin with a short biography of Krishna and then pick out highlights from each of the four chapters of Raveh’s book. The hope is to provide a sampler of Krishna’s work that will serve as enticement to further explorations of twentieth-century Indian philosophy, using Raveh’s work as a guide. All citations are to Raveh’s work.

DAYA KRISHNA

Krishna was born in Meerut (near Delhi) in 1924. He completed his PhD at the University of Delhi in 1955. His dissertation, titled The Nature of Philosophy, is a dialogue and critique of European philosophy as it was read in India before the 1950s. He taught primarily at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur. He wrote twenty books and two hundred articles. His most prolific period of writing was from the late 1990s to 2007. He died in 2007. His major works include the following: Political Development: A Critical Perspective (Oxford University Press, 1979); Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective (Oxford University Press, 1991); The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society, and Polity (Oxford University Press, 1998); and The Nyāya Sūtras: A New Commentary on an Old Text (Sri Satguru Publications, 2004).

CHAPTER 1: TOWARD A NEW PICTURE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

One of the enduring contributions of Krishna’s work is his (arguably provocative) critique of assumptions about “Indian philosophy.” I will focus here on his critique of three assumptions.

The first assumption critiqued by Krishna is that Indian philosophy can be neatly classified into nine schools. The main supposed division is between those schools that accepted the authority of the Vedas (orthodox schools) and those that didn’t (heterodox schools). Supposedly there are six orthodox schools of philosophy, such as Nyāya and Vedānta, and three heterodox schools, such as Buddhism and Cārvāka. Krishna critiqued this pedagogical assumption by pointing out that two foundational texts, Pātañjali’s Yogasūtra and Īsāvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṁkhya-kārikā, both contain passages that reject the authority of the scriptures, such as at YS 1.6-7 and SK 2. As a consequence, the idea that the orthodox schools outnumber the heterodox schools and are thus the dominant schools of Indian philosophy is also challenged.

The second assumption that Krishna critiques is pervasive, partly due to the work of the politician and philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The assumption holds that Western philosophy contributes rationality and pursues rational thinking, in particular through scientific thinking, while Indian philosophy contributes spirituality and pursues spiritual practices, such as through yoga. While it is true that Western philosophy has rationality in it and that Indian philosophy has spiritual practices in it, Krishna challenges the idea that there are no spiritual practices in Western philosophy and no rational thinkers in Indian philosophy. As Krishna points out, one need only look at the way in which Western philosophy is often taught, by excluding medieval thinkers that discussed spirituality, and at the way in which Indian philosophy is often taught, without much engagement with, for example, the philosophy of language. Given the wide belief that rationality is superior to spirituality, Indian philosophy is thus often ignored. Krishna worked to change what he held to be a false dichotomy.

The third assumption that Krishna sought to dispel was that doing comparative philosophy in India was primarily about comparing classical Indian to Western philosophy. Instead, he saw comparative philosophy as a means for various Indian traditions, including Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Kashmir
Shaivism, Bhakti, and Indian Muslim, to be in contemporary
dialog with each other. The Samvāda Project, inspired by
Krishna’s contemporary Krishnachandra Bhattacharya,
was one that Krishna pursued for two decades. The
topic of the first Samvāda, for example, was “what is the
status of propositions in the philosophy of language?”
Samvāda meetings were held all over India on a number of
philosophical topics. Raveh offers an interpretation of the
situation:

[...]he project is not about negotiating classical
Indian philosophy with modern Western
philosophy, but about establishing a dialogue
between two groups of contemporary Indian
philosophers, which he refers to as “Western” and
“Classical.” The Samvāda meetings enabled each
group to become acquainted with the intellectual
world and the philosophical toolbox of the
other. For [Krishna], as a member of the “Indian
Philosophy: Western” group, the Samvāda Project
is not about reaching out to classical sources in
Sanskrit instead of Kant and Russell. It is about
different methods of philosophizing. (43–44)

Using Bhattacharya, Raveh argues that Sa vāda is about
breaking down “caste” in a new sense. Bhattacharya says:

We condemn the caste system of our country, but
we ignore the fact that we, who have received
Western education, constitute a class more
exclusive and intolerant than any of the traditional
castes. Let us resolutely break down the barriers of
this new caste. (44)

Raveh says:

It is exactly in order to break the boundaries of
this “caste,” that the Samvāda Project came into
being, as also to invite the pandits to examine
their own boundaries and ways of seeing, and
understanding, through their “other,” namely their
brothers and sisters trained in Western philosophy.
(44)

And later:

The Samvāda Project, then, is not an encounter
between “contemporaries” and “ancestors,” but
between two groups of contemporaries, with
different training and tools, but nevertheless
with a common denominator, a sense of “Indianness,”
and a mutual past preceding the “bifurcation.” For
the Western-trained participants, for Krishna after
Bhattacharya, the project was a matter of creating
a new language for philosophical discourse. (44)

Raveh’s interpretation helps one see that what on the surface
can look as if it is just another iteration of a common form
of philosophy is, in fact, striving toward self-understanding
of the complexities of “Indianness.” Quoting from the
work of Elise Coquereau-Saouma (whose dissertation is
on Krishna’s understanding of Samvāda), Raveh endorses
her claim that Samvāda is about “breaking the ice between
thinking-communities, overcoming prejudices, and letting
go of frozen pictures” (29).

Raveh also discusses a controversial statement made by
Krishna to the philosophers Jay Garfield and Nalini Bushan,
where Krishna states that a philosopher who writes in
English is not an “Indian philosopher,” including those
working in India in the late nineteenth century to the early
twentieth century. Garfield and Bhushan, in their work Minds
Without Fear (Oxford University Press, 2017), use Krishna’s
statement to them as a convenient foil to argue against
the claim that if you write in English, you are not an Indian
philosopher, even though they were aware that Krishna
did not literally mean it. In an explanation of Krishna’s
statement, Raveh holds that Krishna was merely taking on
the role of the pūrva-pakśin, the opponent in a debate that
raises an objection. Krishna’s goal was to provoke Garfield
and Bhushan, through a counter-perspective, to develop
their project in a way that shows how the opposite could
be true. Krishna was asking how to make sense of their
work, given the imposition of colonial ideas that broke the
continuity of the traditions that existed before colonialism.

CHAPTER 2: THINKING CREATIVELY ON THE
CREATIVE ACT: A DIALOGUE WITH KRISHNA

I once complained to my friend’s twelve-year-old daughter,
Simone, that I wished I was more artistically inclined.
Simone responded by saying, “Philosophy is art.” Raveh
points out that, for Krishna, this is absolutely true. He says:

If Bharata, author of the Nāṭya-śāstra, the root-text
of art and aesthetics in India, dated “somewhere
in the first centuries CE, focuses on theatre, and his
great commentator, Abhinavagupta (10th century,
Kashmir), writes on art and thinks primarily of
poetry, then Krishna’s model of fascination, the
art-form closest to his heart, is the philosophical
text and the thinking-thread that binds it together,
what he refers to as “the art of the conceptual.”
(77)

According to Raveh, Krishna rejects the reduction of art to
emotion, asserting instead that art and aesthetics cannot
and should not be reduced to any single dimension. Raveh
further states that, for Krishna, “[art] ‘exists‘ in a space
and time of its own, that unstitch the ordinary, day-to-daily
space and time, and enable us to go beyond them” (85). Raveh
gives the example of film as one way in which one can be
transported out of their actual space and time and into,
for example, the court of the sixteenth-century ruler Akbar.
Raveh uses the example of film to illustrate his point about
Krishna’s conception of space and time in art. However,
because of Simone’s comment, it occurred to me to also
ask: do philosophical texts exist in a time and space all unto
themselves that take us beyond our own space and time?
In other words, in addition to trying to arrive at timeless
truths, can we also see philosophy as a means to transport
us in time and space?

Raveh repeatedly points out that one of Krishna’s core
drives was not only to move away from merely examining
the products of thought, but also to include the process.
For Krishna, the process of producing philosophical works is never finished. Krishna holds that when you see a philosophical text as finished, you will fail to understand it. For Krishna, unless one is intellectually dead, one repeatedly walks alongside various interlocutors. By always seeing philosophical works as essentially unfinished, philosophers are released from what could end up becoming a paralyzing quest for an ultimate truth and the finality of a mathematical argument. However, Raveh also criticizes Krishna's view of the role of process: "While Krishna emphasizes process he also emphasizes the objective world and the material aspects of life that spiritually focused Indian philosophy is often seen to drive us away from" (87–88).

CHAPTER 3: FREEDOMS

In his "An Attempted Analysis of the Concept of Freedom" (1952), Krishna writes:

"Man is the only Being who can choose not to BE. Therein lies his greatest freedom: the freedom from ends, from Life, from Conscious Being. He is the only animal who can commit suicide—a self-conscious annihilation of itself. Still, the self-conscious annihilation does not present itself as a "must." It merely presents itself as a choice—a choice that is the ultimate freedom of man. . . . If death is merely seen as external or internal necessity, man can only submit to it—whether with a protest or not, it does not matter. It is only when Death is seen as choice, as the self-conscious annihilation of one's own Dasein, that it appears as Foundational Freedom. (102)

Raveh refers to two kinds of suicide. There is one where "life fails to fulfil one's expectations, and one drowns in suffering and frustration" (102–103). This kind of suicide is not a free choice. Rather, it is something that is compelled by circumstance. The second type of suicide, as expressed in the passage above, is one where "one chooses Death, if one really decides to choose it, not because life has failed him, but because, well one chooses it" (102). Krishna endorses a view under which death can be a matter of choice. As Raveh says, "if one chooses not to die, not to commit suicide, despite the possibility, not the hypothetical but the actual-existential possibility, one's life is no longer 'given' but is a matter of choice" (103). Raveh also discusses Krishna's disdain for "spiritualists" who talk of "not dying" or "release from death." Krishna thinks this is a delusion.

Freedom as disengagement and freedom as omnipotence are notions of freedom that are extracted from Patañjali. Both notions are related to the notion of ultimate freedom, which is freedom from any constraint whatsoever. Raveh points out that Krishna argues against the notion of ultimate freedom. Instead, Krishna is interested in the notion of foundational freedom, which, according to Raveh, is the freedom of the human being to stand naked before himself with all his vulnerability. Raveh points out that, for Krishna, "empirical freedoms" in the social and political domains of the world, are not only as significant as [fundamental freedom], but even more significant, applying as they are to the collective sphere, to 'us,' not just 'me.'

Using the frame of analytic philosophy, my reading is that Krishna is not interested in the problem of free will as it is discussed in contemporary analytic discussions, where free will is linked with the principle of alternative possibilities and is understood as bestowing "the ability to do otherwise." While Krishna's analysis of fundamental freedom relies on the principle of alternative possibilities, his main aim is to show that we must be freed from the illusion of a "given" freedom—ones we are born with as part of our nature. He urges us to embrace a contextual and situational freedom that is always changing along with the human situation.

Although the chapter is primarily about freedom, Raveh includes a discussion of a new model of knowledge championed by Krishna: knowledge without certainty. Raveh quotes from Krishna's "Knowledge: Whose Is It? What Is It? And Why Has It to Be True?:"

"Knowledge does not belong to anybody, even though one may say "I know" . . . knowledge is a collective, cumulative affair of mankind, and if it had to be regarded as "belonging" to anybody, it would be to mankind as such, and not to this or that "I." But mankind includes not only those who lived in the past, but those who will live in the future also . . . knowledge is an ongoing human enterprise, a collective purusārtha. . . . A purusārtha is a matter of seeking, perennial seeking, as perennial as time itself, and hence not something that can be possessed, or meant to be possessed. (124)

Raveh explains that, for Krishna, no one should be excluded from knowledge because it does not belong to anyone. Krishna thinks of the idea of excluding someone or a group from knowledge as a case of epistemic injustice. Krishna's account stands in opposition to Śaṅkara's account of knowledge of Brahman as the only true form of it. Krishna's account involves inherent uncertainty:

"What is known is not only incomplete, but full of inaccuracies, inadequacies and errors, about which one knows nothing, except that they must be there, if the enterprise of knowledge has to go on, as it must. (126)

Krishna also says,

The attitude to knowledge is nowadays determined by governments, large companies, industrialists. They determine what will be done with it, and how it is to be produced. Knowledge is no longer independent of the purposes which we want to derive from it. And the purposes are only two: economic profit and military. Knowledge today is funded and controlled. It is controlled by big corporations, big business centers, or funded for military purpose. Power or profit? This is, to my mind, a very dangerous game. (128)
CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTS AND ACTIONS: DAYA KRISHNA AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Raveh points out that if the narrative of Indian philosophy is all about renouncing worldly matters, then social and political philosophy will not appear to be central to the history of Indian philosophy. Indeed, works written on social and political philosophy, such as Kautiliya's Arthashastra, don’t find a large following even amongst Indian philosophers. With respect to social and political philosophy in Indian thought, Krishna says:

[N]ot . . . much attention [has been paid] by those who have written on Indian philosophy. . . . It is in the social, political and legal thought of India, that one may find a counter-picture to the still prevalent one that has been developed around the centrality of the renouncer tradition. (136)

Krishna rejects the renouncer model based on the idea that the human condition is suffering. Raveh points out Krishna’s position on the issue:

Denial of the world, of matter, and of one’s responsibility towards the world (these lines are written as Brazil’s Amazon rainforest is in flames), is for Krishna a sign of ungratefulness on behalf of the yogin, the aspirant of beyondness. Withdrawal and return, with emphasis on the return, Krishna endorses wholeheartedly; denial and repudiation, he totally rejects. (137)

In his work Socio-Political, Krishna offers a narrative which is in contrast to the typical picture, according to which there is the omnipresence of the renouncer model with discussions of liberation and salvation through spiritual practice. Krishna argues that virtue, rather than birth, is how caste should be determined. In addition, he argues that Brahmins should not be thought of only as the priestly class. Instead, given Brahmins are immune from punishment, they should also be seen as having the duty to make sure rulers live up to the norms expected of them, as well as take on the duty to protect free speech. According to Raveh, Krishna also critically discusses an issue that bothered him a great deal: the emphasis in social and political philosophy on karma theory. Krishna holds that karma theory leads to moral monadism, the view that karma is only self-regarding and not other-regarding. Krishna spends a great deal of energy critically engaging moral monadism.

OVERVIEW

Raveh’s work is a helpful introduction to twentieth-century Indian philosophy and to Krishna in particular. While many scholars have focused on exploring the work of figures from prior stages of Indian philosophy, there is a dearth of scholarship engaging such works produced in the twentieth century. Scholars working in other traditions have risen to the challenge of doing so, and it is time for Indian philosophers to do the same.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

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APA Studies 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 American philosophy, to report on new work in Asian philosophy, and to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of importance to Asian and American philosophers and those engaged with Asian and American philosophy. We encourage a diversity of views and topics within this broad rubric. None of the varied philosophical views provided by authors of APA Studies 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 APA Studies. 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 American philosophy.

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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 *APA Studies* 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
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

It is on a bittersweet note that I present to you this issue, which is a critical engagement with Quill R Kukla’s groundbreaking book, City Living: How Urban Spaces and Urban Living Shape One Another. Bitter, since this will be my eighth and final issue as editor. Sweet, because, if I may say so, I’m going out with a BANG!

In what follows, you’ll find a précis of City Living, followed by six incisive responses—really, important philosophical works in their own rights—by a wildly diverse group of scholars working across a panoply of areas in philosophy and beyond. Shen-yi Liao, C. Thi Nguyen, Sharon Meagher, Alexis Shotwell, Simona Capisani, and Daniela Sandler have engaged rigorously and beautifully with Kukla’s book. This is philosophy at its finest: the authors intentionally transcend the boundaries of our field to show what’s possible when we venture with our body/minds into the crevices of cities and beyond, shaped by our own environments, embodiments, experiences, and emplacements.

True to form, Kukla packs a punch with their response. And just as exciting as the content of this issue is what’s left open for further discussion and debate. As Kukla notes, they were only able to engage with part of the rich questions, issues, and problems raised by the critics. It is my hope that this issue is just the beginning of many more fruitful and invigorating conversations about what makes a city, and how, and for whom.

Additionally, the issue includes a review of Carolyn McLeod’s Conscience in Reproductive Health Care by Caitlin Reichard.

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my last four years working as editor of the newsletter. I’ve had the distinctive honor and pleasure of collaborating with countless incredible, inspiring authors and thinkers. It’s been a joy to showcase their work, to learn from them, and to raise the profile of the newsletter. I’m delighted to introduce Ami Harbin (Oakland University) and Barrett Emerick (St. Mary’s College) as the new co-editors of this publication. Welcome, Ami and Barrett! I’m confident that you will improve and grow the publication in creative ways in the years to come.

I’m also happy to announce that in keeping with the high quality of publications that appear in these pages, the APA has renamed the publication to more accurately represent its content. Moving forward, we are now APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy!

Thank you to all of the authors, reviewers, and guest editors with whom I have had the pleasure of working and who, over and again, have reminded me of all that is good in our profession. Deep thanks and profound gratitude to Erin Shepherd, who has been, without question, the most competent, compassionate, lovely managing editor that any editor could ever dream of.

ABOUT APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

APA Studies 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.

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preparing 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 incoming editors, Ami Harbin (aharin@oakland.edu) and Barrett Emerick (bmemerick@smcm.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 incoming editors: Ami Harbin, Oakland University, at aharbin@oakland.edu, and Barrett Emerick, St. Mary’s College, at bmemerick@smcm.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.

ARTICLES

Overview of City Living

Quill R Kukla, Georgetown University

The central thesis of City Living, as its title indicates, is that spaces and dwellers quite literally make one another, and that this co-constitution happens in ecologically and phenomenologically distinctive ways in cities, and within that, in particular cities. I argue that we are ineliminably emplaced bodies: we are all constrained and shaped by the spaces we negotiate. But conversely, we exercise creativity and agency and shape the spaces we use to our needs. The book also has a central normative thesis, which is that what I call spatial agency is a fundamental need and right. Self-determination and justice require that people have access to places that suit their agency, and that they be able to shape space to their needs. Because we are fundamentally embodied and emplaced beings, where we can be and how we can move matter to us not just instrumentally (because these things affect other dimensions of well-being such as our health, safety, lifespan, and wealth) but as ends in their own right. In order to flourish, people (and non-human animals too) must have and be able to make territories: places where they belong and can express their agency and have it supported, places where they are insiders.

Chapter 1 is not specific to cities, but rather takes up the ontology and phenomenology of space and spatially embedded agency. It lays out a philosophical framework and builds a philosophical toolbox for exploring cities and city living. In this chapter, I argue against spatial voluntarism, which is the view that spaces are formed through the aggregation of the individual choices and preferences of agents, and spatial determinism, which is the view that spaces shape their dwellers’ behavior, preferences, and choices. Instead, I argue that spaces and dwellers co-constitute one another by building ecological niches. I defend the strong philosophical claim that as spaces and dwellers make one another, they also generate what I call ecological ontologies. Briefly, I claim that the kinds of real things that populate a particular environment are, in the most literal sense, to some extent constituted by the interactions between dwellers situated within that environment, and between dwellers and their environment. Real entities such as rush hours, boxing openings, and—importantly—territories only exist within ecological niches in which bodies use space in particular ways. I focus on how this process of co-constitution emerges out of what I call micronegotiations, which are the small, bottom-up motions of the body, such as gestures, posture, gait, direction of gaze, and other such miniature components of how we move through and use space.

In chapter 2, I turn to a philosophical account of what is distinctive about urban spaces and urban subjectivity. I propose four features distinctive of city life that concern dwellers’ bodies and how they use and move through space: (1) proximity and shared space with many people, including a wide and diverse variety of strangers; (2) unpredictability; (3) slow locomotion combined with (4) fast switching between skills, stances, and perceptual expectations, which requires a wide, fluid, and flexible set of meta-skills for moving between skill sets. Drawing on empirical sociological literature, I explore how city dwellers see and judge risk and safety, order and disorder. I also develop the notion of an urban territory, and explore how territory is claimed, used, and bounded through bodily micronegotiations. This chapter also discusses what makes a space alive or dead; the distinctive uses of space associated with tourism rather than territory; and the way nonhuman animals dwell in and territorialize urban spaces.

In chapter 3 I turn to gentrification, which is one of the most important ways in which urban spaces are transforming. Gentrification, as a phenomenon, is a powerful example of how dwellers and spaces change by shaping one another, and of the struggles and tensions that surround competing forms of agency that are simultaneously trying to establish territory in conflicting ways. In gentrifying neighborhoods, I argue, different territories for different groups of residents are often overlaid, with different groups struggling over the use and meaning of the same spaces. Moreover, gentrification almost always provides us with powerful examples of power differentials between dwellers, who are unequally able to exercise spatial agency or to enjoy a smooth fit between the spaces they inhabit and their own practices and needs. In keeping with the overall themes of this book, my primary method in this chapter is to look at gentrification through the lens of micronegotiations and movement through space. I look at how residents can be displaced from a neighborhood even if they don’t literally leave or lose their home, when the neighborhood ceases to be their place in concretely embodied ways. People can be displaced by losing their territory and spatial agency within a place, not just by being forced to leave. Drawing on my own field work, I use Columbia Heights, a gentrifying neighborhood of Washington, DC, as a case study in this chapter.
Chapters 4 through 6 comprise the empirical heart of the book. Here, I turn to what I call repurposed cities. A repurposed city is one that was built to support one form of economic, social, and political relations—a form that has now collapsed, so that the city has to accommodate radically new uses, users, and purposes; in turn, residents have to find ways of using and adapting a material city built for something quite different. In repurposed cities, new dwellers must find ways of tinkering with urban spaces and reinvesting them with new meanings in order to use them in new ways. Their uses are constrained by the material forms of the past order, while conversely, they creatively remake those forms. My hypothesis was that the close study of micronegotiations, territory, and spatial agency in repurposed cities would provide a kind of magnifying glass for viewing how urban spaces and urban dwellers made one another, because they would be spaces that especially mismatched their dwellers, calling for a particularly intense and fast process of co-constitution.

After introducing the notion of a repurposed city in chapter 4, I dig deeply, in chapters 5 and 6, respectively, into the repurposed cities of Berlin and Johannesburg, in which I did extensive archival and field work. Both Berlin and Johannesburg spent the period of time from roughly the end of World War II to the early 1990s as sharply materially divided cities, with material infrastructure that tightly controlled people’s use of space, separating them into groups, surveilling them, and shaping the flow of their movement. Both cities transformed radically when their respective social orders collapsed, through the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of apartheid. The residents of both cities—which in both cases included huge numbers of immigrants new to the city—had to find ways of using spaces built for the previous order and living in them in new ways. I explore particular repurposed spaces within both cities, looking at how the material past shapes those spaces but also at how people reshape them and exercise spatial agency within them. Despite deep parallels in the histories of the two cities, they have dealt with their pasts very differently, with different material cultures of mobility, surveillance, privatization, and occupation, for instance.

Finally, in chapter 7, I argue that inclusion in a city or neighborhood requires more than the right to physically reside in it; it requires what Henri Lefebvre, Don Mitchell, and others have called the “right to the city.” The right to the city is not just a formal right to be inside of a city without being thrown out; it should be conceived, I argue, as a right to inhabit the city. This requires that we have voice and authority within a city; that we be able to participate in tinkering with it and remaking it; and that we belong in it rather than just perching in it. I explore the complex relationships between public spaces, inclusive spaces, and the right to the city. I examine what sorts of territories city dwellers need in order to be able to have a flourishing urban life and to exercise their spatial agency. Drawing on disability theory and other anti-oppressive theoretical lenses, I look at some of the barriers that different kinds of bodies face to being included in urban spaces, and think about what it would take to build a more just and inclusive city.

Parks and Recreation

Shen-yi Liao
UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND

Slides are for sliding down, not for climbing up!

Over the last couple of years, I have heard this thought in my head more than a few times and even said it out loud . . . also more than a few times. Like many other caregivers (of, admittedly, a certain socioeconomic status), I have spent quite a bit of time with my children at playgrounds in parks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many other children, they do not always play with these objects and spaces in officially sanctioned ways. They like to climb up slides, they like to swing on their bellies, and they like to seesaw with their hands.

As a prescriptive rule, “slides are for sliding down, not for climbing up” is sometimes explicitly written on signs next to slides. It is also sometimes explicitly expressed by other caregivers nearby. More often, it is left implicit. Still, even when there are no signs and no other caregivers, I—and I bet many other caregivers too—hear it in our heads and tell it to our children. And we often do so relatively effortlessly, automatically, and unconsciously.

This rule is not merely prescriptive, but also constitutive. Not every sloped surface on a playground is a slide. A slide is—one might say, by definition!—a sloped surface that is to be slid down. Iris Marion Young says that “[t]he inert material things and constraints we encounter bear marks of past praxis, but we experience this praxis passively, as having objective properties of its own, which may or may not correspond to our current projects and goals.” A slide, however mundane, is no exception: there is this rule that’s embedded into this material thing, and we passively experience this rule as an objective property of it.

THEORETICAL TOOLS

Quill R Kukla’s City Living (2021) exceptionally combines an innovative and insightful theoretical framework with detailed ethnographies of three cities on three continents: Washington, DC; Berlin; and Johannesburg. It has given me the tools for thinking in a brand-new way about my own negotiations with objects and my own movements in spaces, even when I am doing something as ordinary as bringing my children to play at the park. Kukla’s careful attention to the ways that urban environments can enable agency for some dwellers while constraining others has also directed my own attention to everyday environments. Now, even when I am in a place as ordinary as a playground, I can’t help but think about who it enables and who it constrains.

In the two foundational theoretical chapters of City Living, Kukla sets out to explain how “cities and city dwellers make one another [. . .] at the scale of particular bodies making small movements through particular spaces” (3). They argue against two opposing views about the relationship between cities and city dwellers. A spatial determinist insists on the primacy of the material: the objects and spaces set the rules, and we must follow them. A spatial voluntarist
insists on the primacy of the psychological: we set the rules, and we can do what we want with whatever objects and spaces. Instead, they argue for a novel framework on which spaces and subjects “mutually condition, constitute, and accommodate one another” (17).

To emphasize, a spatial mutualist like Kukla does not merely claim that there are reciprocal causal interactions between spaces and subjects. To say that “our spatial agency is enabled and shaped by city spaces, and also that through our spatial agency we remake the spaces we inhabit” is to make both a causal and a constitutive claim such that “neither spaces nor their dwellers can be properly understood independently of one another” (15). On this framework, there is a co-dependence between social practices and material objects (38).

Kukla centers the final chapter of City Living on an explicitly normative aim: “a city that is for everyone will also have to be made by everyone” (257). While spaces and subjects make one another, they do not do so equitably. The same space can enable some subjects but not others to flourish. The same space can also be more accessible for some bodies but not others, depending on the particularities of different bodies.

In some cases, such patterns are merely spatial differences. However, when they are in congruence with other patterns of social inequality, then they become spatial inequalities. Moreover, depending on the particularities of different social identities, some people are more able to reshape, repurpose, and remake the same space than others. When that happens, the reciprocal causal interactions—and mutual constitutions—between inequalities at different levels end up sustaining oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, ableism, and classism.

Indeed, Kukla addresses the spatial inequalities that occur in congruence with racism, sexism, ableism, and classism. But I learned the most from their discussion of spatial inequalities that occur in congruence with ageism. In particular, I was struck by their observation of how teenagers are systematically denied access to third places, “a place that was neither our home nor our place of business (our work or school) but that was ours in a communal sense” (271). Kukla’s insight is that many so-called public spaces are not, in fact, for all. Through explicit and implicit markings, they are rendered more or less accessible by social identities such as race, gender, ability status, class, and—yes—age. In this respect, teenagers are often denied a territory, “a space in which a group of people feel at home and experience themselves as having voice and agency within and over that space” (59).

CHILDREN’S THIRD PLACES?
Where are children’s third places? Kukla rightly notes: “It is important to understand how few spaces there are in the neighborhood that are comfortable territory for children—spaces where they can enjoy spatial agency and territory” (110). In many cities (and suburbs, for that matter), playgrounds seem to be the exceptions—spaces that are more or less exclusively for children. Adults with their soccer league and adolescents with their football game might fight over who gets to use the same field in a park, but the only ones that are fighting with kids about who gets to slide, swing, or seesaw are other kids. Yet can children really claim playgrounds as their territory, within and over which they can exercise their agency? I am not so sure.

It might seem absurd to say that children exist in an oppressive relationship with their caregivers. However, in “Taking Children’s Autonomy Seriously as a Parent” (2020), Kukla argues that many culturally dominant conceptions of parenting, in fact, do not fully acknowledge children as full moral persons. Everyone acknowledges that caregivers have immense power over children because children typically do not yet have the full capacity to satisfy their own basic needs. However, not everyone acknowledges that many caregivers also think—as culturally dominant conceptions of parenting inculcate them—that “with this power comes the right to restrict our children’s mobility and their choices.”

Why is it wrong to climb up slides? A typical answer that you get is that it is not safe to do so: “parents need to protect their children!” This is an answer backed up by a deeply-felt, almost-instinctive emotion that I, like most other caregivers, understand well. There’s nothing wrong with this emotion. The danger, as Kukla points out, is when it produces behaviors that limit children’s exercise of agency.

Notice that there are two assumptions that lie behind the typical answer.

First, there is the assumption that children are not very good judges of their own safety. In my experience, this is most often not actually the case. Slides are most often not actually that unsafe to climb on, and children most often refrain from seriously unsafe behaviors on the playground. Moreover, we should also be suspicious of this assumption since analogous ones have long been used to justify the attribution of mere partial agency to people in oppressed groups and, in turn, justify paternalism by people in oppressive groups. Behind many calls to protect non-white people, women, disabled people, and the working class is the assumption that they, too, are not very good judges of their own safety.

Second, there is the assumption that safety is more important than other values. Adults typically do not make this assumption about their own lives. I play basketball at the park even though I might get injured. Other adults engage in other risky behaviors too. So even if it is actually unsafe to climb up slides (which, to reiterate, most often it is not), that alone cannot justify telling children to not do so. To take children’s autonomy seriously is to allow them to engage in some risky behaviors, just like you and me and other people.

Obviously, I do not think caregivers should never set any boundaries for children. But if Kukla is right that the culturally dominant conceptions of parenting do not take seriously children’s autonomy, then it is worth interrogating our emotional responses in this domain, even when—or perhaps, especially when—they are so deeply felt. Consequently, it is also worth interrogating whether the
boundaries we set are really the ones we should be setting. However well-intentioned, we caregivers can sometimes restrict our children’s mobility and their choices in the name of protecting them. That is, after all, the essence of paternalism.

Young says that “in the most general sense, all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings.”6 Playgrounds may seem insignificant because play may seem insignificant. But this is not true, as so many educators who emphasize the importance of childhood play would tell you. Children very much develop as agents at playgrounds: it is through play that they learn to make decisions about their own bodies, express their own values, and negotiate with others. So when caregivers inhibit their ability to develop and exercise these capacities, what should we call that but “oppression”? Indeed, the apparent absurdity of saying that children exist in an oppressive relationship with their caregivers might be itself symptomatic of the fact that adults routinely discount children’s testimony.6

If an oppressive relationship can exist between children and the caregivers who love them very much, it is unsurprising that it too can exist between children and other adults. Not only can other adults possess similar power over children, but they can also think that they know better about the safety of bodily movements that are not their own, and about the right balance of competing values that are not their own. It is not uncommon for me to observe at playgrounds other adults who restrict children’s mobility and their choices, even children who are not “theirs.” They don’t even have to yell, “slides are for sliding down, not for climbing up!”; a stern look or even an ominous presence can have the same effect. There is co-dependence between social practice and material object: the latent surveillance by adults enforces and reinforces the rule that has been built in.

Oppression is interlocking. So the power dynamic that exists between children and adults on playgrounds can be further exacerbated by how children are racialized, gendered, disabled, and classed. Even when adults, including primary caregivers, exhibit respect for children’s autonomy, they might only selectively do so for children who fit the norm. Conversely, they might selectively enforce the rule via surveillance—and, indeed, sometimes punishment—for children who do not. While many white boys get to climb up slides, many Asian girls get told “you can’t do that—it’s too dangerous!” Social and spatial inequalities can constitute self-amplifying feedback loops that sustain oppressive systems. Playground do not merely reflect the social fact that children’s autonomy is not always taken seriously, they also condition and constitute this social fact. Given that spaces and subjects make one another, playgrounds do not only shape children’s agency, they also shape adults’ cognition. I am convinced that we should take children’s autonomy seriously. Yet, when I am at the playground, I still—relatively effortlessly, automatically, and unconsciously—hear it in my head and say it to my children, especially when I notice other caregivers’ disapproving glances, “slides are for sliding down, not for climbing up!”

Maybe these ills are just symptoms of today’s hyper-anxious helicopter parenting (of, admittedly, a certain socioeconomic status). I remember, as a child in Taipei, going to local parks by myself with friends. Maybe we had more freedom and autonomy back then. But I don’t think the ills can be so easily explained away, at least not entirely. Just because my caregivers were not around doesn’t mean that there were no adults. And insofar as there were adults around, the same power dynamics—the same stern looks and the same ominous presences—may still be around. Furthermore, even when there were no adults around, the rules that adults wrote could still often be found on the adjacent signs, or internalized by other children on the playground.

Kukla cautions against spatial libertarianism as the solution to spatial inequality (284). Building an inclusive space requires deliberate effort. The fragility of children’s autonomy means that they demand active care. An inclusive playground is not one where no adults are around, but one where adults consciously check their impulses and constantly work to respect children’s agency. Only then can children have third places that they can claim as their own territories.

**GAMES OR TOYS?**

Will Wright, the legendary designer of *SimCity* and The Sims, has said, “People call me a game designer, but I really think of these things more as toys.”7 Games are structured by constitutive rules.8 Games give goals to players, designate abilities for them, and place obstacles in their way.9 In contrast, toys are environments that can afford different types of games. In the classic sense introduced by James J. Gibson, “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. . . . It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.”10 There is no one right way to play *SimCity*: you can meticulously plan the layout to maximize the population, or you can just turn on all the natural disasters to destroy everything. Neither the population-maximizer nor the city-destroyer is missing the point because neither population maximization nor city destruction is a constitutive rule of *SimCity*. These are simply two (among many more) ways that the player can relate to this toy, as Wright thinks of it.

A slide is a toy to children, but a game to adults. To the bureaucrats who wrote the rules on the sign or the caregivers with watchful eyes, slides are structured by a constitutive rule: they are for sliding down, not for climbing up. But this is not the case for children, who see multiple affordances
in the same material things. Slides can be for sliding down, for climbing up, for hiding under, for throwing pebbles on, and for so many other playful interactions. A slide is oppressive—in the sense that it becomes a component of an oppressive system that is psychological, social, and material—when adults insist that it is a game, with a rule set by them, and not just a toy. A different reality is possible: sculptor Isamu Noguchi’s ideal playground is constituted solely of a giant public sculpture, which he calls “Play Mountain,” that is variously described as “a cross between a Mayan temple and a mountain” or as “an asymmetrical Egyptian step-pyramid” with no rules built in.\(^{15}\)

To be clear, I am not arguing that toys are always better than games. While there are those who systematically champion free play over structured games, C. Thi Nguyen persuasively argues that games are valuable in fostering different modes of agency precisely because they impose restrictions and specifications.\(^{13}\) By communicating different modes of agency, they “offer a special path to enriching our long-term freedom and autonomy.”\(^{16}\) My point is only that games can only do so when playing is the player’s choice. Games might be agency yoga, but yoga only works when you move your body, and not someone else. A slide, as a game, is not exactly freely chosen when it is situated against the backdrop of an oppressive relationship between children and adults. By trying too hard to sculpt children’s agency, traditional conceptions of parenting end up limiting children’s freedom and autonomy.

Over the last few years, playgrounds in Taiwanese cities have undergone a dramatic change. The replacement of cookie-cutter playground equipment with multimodal ones came about because a grassroots organization called Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children has worked to defend children’s right to play, which is traditionally neglected everywhere, but arguably especially in Taiwan.\(^{14}\) As the name indicates, the organization’s guiding philosophy is that playgrounds are not only to be made for children, but also to be made by them. Although the implementation of this guiding philosophy is uneven in practice, in the best cases—exemplified by the design and construction of the playground at Huashan 1914 Creative Park in Taipei—children are consulted in the initial design of the park through multiple workshopping processes.\(^{15}\)

The involvement in the remaking of playgrounds surely improves the status quo. Yet it still seems to fall short of Kukla’s requirement that a space is only an agent’s territory if they can reshape or repurpose it. Perhaps the worlds of Minecraft are especially popular among children as virtual third places because they enable what the real world mostly cannot: the capacity to constantly “reshape space to [. . .] suit our needs and desires of the moment” (20). As things stand, playgrounds remain available only for children’s recreation, but not re-creation. Even at the Huashan 1914 Creative Park playground, slides are still for sliding down, not for climbing up.

Again, a different reality is possible: adventure playgrounds—sometimes also called “natural playgrounds” or “junk playgrounds”—do enable children to reshape, repurpose, and even remake the objects and spaces of play.\(^{16}\) Designated adults, called playworkers, are present but refrain from saying or doing things that might unduly constrain children’s mobility and their choices. Although the idea behind adventure playgrounds is nearly a century old, they remain hard to find in the real world. There are currently none in Taiwan, and not even Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children are vocally advocating for them yet.\(^{17}\)

In the meantime, caregivers like myself can bring the adventure spirit to the playgrounds that we do have. Unlike spatial voluntarists, we should recognize that our environments can shape us. Unlike spatial determinists, we should also recognize that we can shape our environments. We do not have to tear down every slide to modify its objective property; we caregivers can reshape the material environment, and invite our children to do so too, by reshaping our social practices.

Slides are for sliding down, and for climbing up!

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Figure 1. Twin Tower Slides at Huashan 1914 Creative Park in Taipei, Taiwan, which are partly designed by children through multiple workshops.

Figure 2. Signage at Huashan 1914 Creative Park in Taipei, Taiwan which illustrates and explains the workshopping process with children.
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**NOTES**

1. Iris Marion Young, "Structure as the Subject of Justice," 54.

2. Compare Shen-yi Liao and Bryce Huebner, "Oppressive Things": Shen-yi Liao and Vanessa Carbonell, "Materialized Oppression in Medical Tools and Technologies:"

3. To be clear, Berlin—one of the three cities central to City Living—is a notable exception. Thanks to its 1979 Children Playground Law, there are about 1m² of playground space per inhabitant in Berlin. Mitra Anderson-Oliver, "Play Matters: The Style and Substance of the Berlin Spielplatz."


5. Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression."


7. Will Wright, "Spore, Birth of a Game."

8. C. Thi Nguyen, "The Right Way to Play the Game."


11. 99% Invisible, "Play Mountain."


13. Nguyen, Games: Agency as Art, 76.

14. Disclosure: I provide a tiny amount of funding to this organization.

15. In 《公園遊戲力: 22個精彩案例 ∗ 一群幕後推手，與孩子一起翻轉全台兒童遊戲場 》 the members of Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children provide 22 case studies of their efforts to remake playgrounds across Taiwan. In 《遊戲場發生什麼事？》 the children in the preschool "Super Cute Koon" class illustrate their design ideas, some of which eventually went into the playground at Huashan 1914 Creative Park.

16. Tony Chilton, "Adventure Playgrounds: A Brief History."

17. There are discussions of alternative playground models and cases at the end of 《公園遊戲力: 22個精彩案例 ∗ 一群幕後推手，與孩子一起翻轉全台兒童遊戲場》. While some adventure playgrounds have existed in Taiwan, existing legal regulations—and perhaps the dominant parenting philosophy they embody—pose a challenge to their continuing operation.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**The Aesthetic Homogenization of Cities**

C. Thi Nguyen

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I’ve been noticing, in my life with cities, a steady drift towards aesthetic homogenization. Twenty years ago, if you dropped me at any random spot San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, or Brooklyn, I could have told you which city it was in a split second. The basic look, the feel—the whole aesthetic sensibility—were so different between the cities. Bone-deep different. It showed up in a thousand little ways, from the flow of the space, to the relative neatness or casualness of storefront displays, to the font choices of the signage.

This deep variation seems to be fading. The deep variation is certainly not completely gone—there are still plenty of wonderful holdouts. But more and more often, I have found myself exploring new cities and finding precisely same aesthetic sensibility. The storefronts, the restaurants, the fancy coffee spots so often have the same look and feel—the same clean modern fonts, the same clean modern seating, the same balance of light and space. You can show up in a hundred different cities and find basically the same clothing boutique. It’ll have that IKEA-but-pricier sensibility in its shelving and display units, with crisp geometric lines and subdued colors. There will be large white cubes, functioning as display tables, topped with carefully folded clothing. There will be subtly defocused white lighting, and carefully spaced clothes hanging on a spare number of racks. Sometimes you’ll get exposed brick walls, sometimes you won’t. But the core sensibility seems to be converging. Privately, I’ve been calling this the Pinterest Effect. (Seriously, go look up the “Clothes Shop” tag on Pinterest and have a scroll.) I’ve been quietly chewing away at what could possibly explain it. And Quill Kukla has recently given us an excellent explanation of this aesthetic homogenization in their lovely new book, City Living.¹

One of the central ideas of City Living is that rigid, top-down city planning can’t accommodate the diversity of needs and interests of the real-world city dwellers. In order for a city to function, it needs to be deeply responsive to its inhabitants’ varied needs. But the city can’t do this all through top-down pre-planning. So this spatial responsiveness requires, in many cases, that the city be open to being modified by
its inhabitants. Some features of the city will certainly demand some top-down city planning (ideally as part of a properly representative and democratic procedure). But a substantial amount of city design should be bottom-up, should bubble up from a process of particular redesigns, adaptations, and accommodations made by the inhabitants themselves. City dwellers, says Kukla, need a substantial degree of agency and control over the details of their living spaces so that they can tailor their urban spaces to their own particular needs. Kukla provides a bevy of examples: reconfiguring spaces with graffiti and street art, changing the flow of street traffic with sidewalk tables, repurposing burned-out buildings as communes. And a good city—an accommodating city—makes the space for such bottom-up spatial agency. It permits substantive spatial agency in law, and leaves room for it in the material. When spaces are “preplanned and resist reshaping, this can actually make them difficult to use, because they do not organically adjust to users’ dynamic needs and purposes” (44).

Here, Kukla is developing a key idea from Jane Jacobs. For Jacobs, many of the harms of urban planning came from the attempt to create an entire city from the top down, guided by a singular design sensibility and a singular design perspective. Some single urban planner, or small team of urban planners, thinks that they can rationally plan out an entire city, that they can plan for and accommodate all the various uses and needs of the city’s inhabitants, from their planning desk. In Jacobs’s era, her main target was often urban planners who thought primarily about how a city would look from above—the view from the blueprint, so to speak. These top-down planners cared deeply that a city might be divided into neat zones—all the homes here, all the factories there, all the shopping malls over here—so that it can be legible to the urban planner’s eye-from-above.

The urban planner’s eye-from-above will, thinks Jacobs, always be insensitive to any number of vital, small-scale considerations. People who live in a place, who spend their lives walking and using a space, understand the little details of that space, and the relationship of that space, that are invisible from the urban planner’s eye-from-above perspective. For Jacobs, for example, the eye-from-above misses so many details that are obvious from the ground. The eye-from-above often wants to separate the zones of the city into a residential zone and an entertainment zone to make for a neater blueprint. But the eye-from-above misses so many of the details: like the fact that late-night bars embedded in a residential neighborhood added to the safety of a neighborhood, by guaranteeing a steady stream of pedestrian traffic, and so a steady stream of observers moving through a street at night.²

Jacobs’s view is, I think, a deeply ecological one. (Jacobs doesn’t use the term “ecological,” as far as I know, but Kukla does in developing Jacobs.) A city grows organically. A city is an incredibly rich environment that has accreted layered functions over the years. And those accreted functions are complexly networked. A city should be respected, in Jacobs’s view, as the product of accreted evolution—as a carefully balanced complex organism, rich in peculiar adaptations to its particular time and place. Each element may participate in a hundred different functions, many of which look like unintended side-consequences. But these “side-effect” interactions deeply structure the way the city works. An example from Jacobs: the lack of stores around a particular park makes the park more insular, since the only people who can use it for any length of time are those who know somebody who lives in one of the surrounding houses. If there was any kind of store there—a café or little grocery store—then there’s usually a semi-accessible restroom and a public phone. But the lack of the semipublic space of a store changes things. Potential park users who don’t know anybody who lives in those houses have no place to use the restroom or make a call. So, for good or ill, that storeless perimeter of the park functions as an invisible filter, supporting local insider use and quietly deflecting outsiders.³

Re-designs from the eye-from-above, which have not taken the time to study the details and organic unity of a city, will trample on many of these subtle interactions. I particularly like Kukla’s summary of Jacobs on this point:

As Jane Jacobs (1961) explored at length, if a space is overplanned, it can strangle the room for creative uses, and no one has the opportunity to participate with agency in niche-building and place-making. The result is an alienating and sterile space—one that doesn’t feel like home territory to anyone, as none of its users participated in its making. (44)

Why does overplanning strangle a space? There are two (deeply interrelated) factors. The first, we might call the epistemic factor. That is, the distant perspective is unaware of the way the city works, and so will make poor decisions that don’t respect the particular details of the organism. The distant planner doesn’t have the requisite detailed, place-specific knowledge to accommodate for all the particular needs of local users. The second we might call the agential factor. Because the distant perspective is distant, then the people living in the space aren’t in direct control of many of the features of the space. So the changes made to the city won’t reflect the particular details of the inhabitants’ needs or values. Separating out the epistemic and agential factors here is something of an artifice. For one thing, the city is made up in part of its inhabitants and so having good epistemic access to the city involves knowing its inhabitants. And also, because exercises of agency from local inhabitants will typically express their contextual epistemic sensitivity. But I think it is somewhat useful to separate our knowledge of the details of the city’s complex ecosystem from our agency in producing changes to that ecosystem.

With all that in mind, let’s return to the opening question: Why does gentrification bring with it aesthetic homogenization? Let’s start with a slightly simplistic story, spinning off from the above analysis. Gentrification, we might say, involves the invasion of an outside perspective, in the form of the invasion of urban developers who aren’t city locals. So: such outsider gentrifiers enter a neighborhood with its own particular character and impose their sensibility, which doesn’t meet the needs of the actual inhabitants of the neighborhood.
But this can’t be the entire explanation, for a few reasons. First, it doesn’t explain the monotony that comes with gentrification. Different gentrifiers could very plausibly have different sensibilities, and transform spaces in different ways. These transformations may be insensitive to the needs of the people who already live there, but why think they’re monotonous? After all, rich people can have wildly different tastes. Some like Wagner, some Warhol, and some like Ikea minimalism. Think, for example, about the incredibly different aesthetic sensibilities on display in the various Las Vegas hotels—many of which are funded from different groups of external investors—from the cutesy faux-realism of Paris, to the overt luxurious classiness of the Bellagio, to the over-the-top baroque ridiculousness of Caesar’s Palace, including faux-Roman animatronic statues.

Second, as Kukla points out, gentrification is a complex phenomenon that involves both top-down and bottom-up gentrification. Top-down gentrification involves, say, distant developers coming and imposing development plans on a city, without particular knowledge of the city’s details. Top-down gentrification is clearly problematic, on Kukla’s analysis, because it misses out substantially on both the epistemic factor and the agential factors. Bottom-up gentrification, on the other hand, is often enacted by locals—sometimes from other parts of the city, but sometimes from the very same neighborhood in which they’re building their boutique coffeeshop. Consider a case of fully local, bottom-up gentrification, where the inhabitants of a particular neighborhood create boutiques and coffee shops in their own neighborhood to serve a hopefully increasingly gentrifying customer base. And I know that fully local bottom-up gentrification can yield the aesthetic homogenization. In my own (rapidly gentrifying) neighborhood, I know many of the store-owners. They live around the block—but they look to Pinterest when they design their stores.

Kukla suggests that “top-down gentrification tends to lead to a familiar constellation of chain stores, loft condos, pedestrian plazas, and the like, whereas bottom-up gentrification leads to ‘quirky’, ‘hip’ independent businesses and specialty stores” (96). But what’s important to me is that both forms of gentrification often lead to a homogenization, albeit homogenization of slightly different kinds. Top-down gentrification leads to large, sprawling mega-malls with the same Cheesecake Factories and P.F. Changs and Urban Outfitters. Bottom-up gentrification, on the other hand, may be the product of individual exercises of agency by a city’s inhabitants, but it still seems highly subject to the Pinterest Effect. At least in my own (non-rigorous and untrained, but very interested) observations from city-wandering, though bottom-up gentrification doesn’t lead to the kind of aggressively monotonous corporate chain-store effect, we still get something of a close cousin: a thousand independent coffee stores in a thousand cities owned by a thousand different owners, all city locals—but all with that same post-ikea clean look. We also get a thousand clothing boutiques whose shelves and spacing and lighting could have been cut-n-pasted from the same Pinterest photo gallery. (Kukla may be sympathetic to this observation. They did put scare quotes around “quirky” and “hip” independent businesses.)

And, if that’s right, then our simple explanation is inadequate. The simple explanation was that the aesthetic homogenization resulted from gentrification in the form of invading outsiders. But we’re also seeing aesthetic homogenization via bottom-up gentrification. If our indie coffee shops and clothing boutiques are the creations of people who live in the neighborhood and those shops qualify as exercises of the locals’ agency, where does the aesthetic homogenization come from?

Kukla’s analysis gives us a very good lead. Here is one of my favorite passages from City Living:

In the aptly named How to Kill a City, Peter Moskowitz argues that top-down gentrification of living neighborhoods disrupts their living ecology and the networks that allow citizens to participate in building the. “Gentrification is a void . . . a trauma, one caused by the influx of massive amounts of capital into a city and the consequent destruction following in its wake” (2017, 5). The problem with this kind of gentrification, from the point of view of its ecological integrity and flourishing, is that it redesigns a space, not for the people who are already using it, but for a hypothesized set of users who have more money, with the goal of maximizing the ability of the space to attract these rich users and then extract capital from them. Because this profit-maximizing goal has no particular connection or responsiveness to the ecology as it is found, such spatial repurposing with the goal of gentrification often ends up killing a place in the act of trying to pretty it up and make it ‘appealing.’ (45) [emphasis mine]

Here, now, is our explanation for how both top-down gentrification and bottom-up gentrification can both yield aesthetic homogenization. Even if the gentrification is bottom-up—even if a hundred different local business owners open their own independent boutiques and coffeeshops and vinyl stores—the aesthetic target has been homogenized. This is because the local gentrifiers are not trying to express their own aesthetic sensibility or meet the local aesthetic sensibility. Rather, they are trying to satisfy a “hypothesized set of users”—some imaginary set of rich folks. And I take Kukla’s suggestion to be that catering to a hypothesized set of users will involve catering to a generic taste. Even if you have your own aesthetic sensibility, if you’re trying to catch the globetrotting rich, you better adapt your aesthetic target to what you imagine they want.

This is something we know in our hearts. A tourist trap looks like a tourist trap. A tourist trap made out of independent local businesses might be a little more aesthetically varied than one planned from the ground up by a global development company, but it still smells of tourist trap. Because, I take it, a tourist is another hypothesized user, not somebody well-known to the local inhabitants. The tourist customer is a kind of abstracted and aesthetically generic target.
Here’s a similar observation from my days of scouting restaurants and food-writing. In LA, there was a lot of variance between the decor of different particular Mexican restaurants catering to the local Mexican community, and between different particular Chinese restaurants catering to the local Chinese community. But the ones that served Americanized food often looked much more similar, because they tended to use the same small cluster of outward-facing cultural signifiers (sombreros, chili peppers, and donkeys, in the case of Americanized Mexican restaurants; dragons, pandas, paper lanterns, and latticed wood, in the case of Americanized Chinese restaurants.)

Local gentrifiers aren’t subject to the epistemic problems of top-down planning. They live there, and they know the ground. What seems to be lacking is full spatial agency. This all suggests a quite robust notion of spatial agency. Kukla defines spatial agency thus:

Spatial agency, as I use the term, is our ability to autonomously occupy, move through, and use space, as well as our ability to mark and transform it in accordance with our needs and desires. (15) [final emphasis mine]

I take Kukla’s analysis of the bottom-up gentrification to really fill out what the last part of that definition means. The demand here is not simply that inhabitants have some minimal degree of autonomous control, but that they exercise their powers in response to their own particular needs and desires. In bottom-up gentrification, city inhabitants are exercising their agency while aiming at servicing an external set of needs and desires.

Kukla’s concern here runs interestingly into something I’ve been thinking about, from an entirely different angle. I’ve written about our demand for aesthetic sincerity. My analysis is trying to understand how we trust artists, and why we might feel betrayed by artists. In the normal moral analysis, philosophers have tended to think that we trust people when we think they have goodwill and are thus responsive to our needs. But, I suggested, something very different happens with artists. We trust artists, but not in the usual moral manner. That is, we don’t trust them to be kind to us, or to take our interests to heart. Instead, we trust them to be aesthetically sincere—to be true to their own aesthetic sensibilities. In fact, if they were trying too hard to be responsive to our interests, we would be disappointed. In aesthetic life, we often don’t want our artists to just give us what we want. We call that pandering. And I have suggested that one of the reasons we want that aesthetic sincerity is precisely because it fosters aesthetic diversity across an aesthetic community. Kukla’s analysis though, suggests an important amendment to my analysis: what matters often is not loyalty to one’s own sensibility, but to at least some known, lived, particular sensibility. The store-owner who expresses their own aesthetic sensibility, and the store-owner who is satisfying their neighborhood’s particular aesthetic sensibility, both partake in a kind of aesthetic sincerity. It’s the store-owner who tries to service that vague, generic target, that might seem aesthetically insincere.

So if you put Kukla’s analysis and mine together, you get a picture of the complex aesthetic downside of gentrification. Gentrification remodels a neighborhood, sometimes from the top-down and sometimes from the bottom-up. Bottom-up gentrification doesn’t generate the usual goods of spatial agency because it isn’t aesthetically sincere (and, we might think, insincere in some non-aesthetic dimensions too). It doesn’t seek to express the genuine sensibility and answer the particular needs and desires of the inhabitants. Instead, in bottom-up gentrification, locals aim to satisfy a generic eye. Even if the gentrification isn’t imposed from the top down, the eye of the outsider is modeled in bottom-up gentrification. And, crucially, it isn’t a particular outsider’s particular tastes, but some hypothesized outsider’s taste, that gentrification tries to meet. And this creates two problems. Locally, gentrification no longer serves the particular interests of the local community. And globally, it generates a profound lack of aesthetic diversity, as neighborhoods are reshaped—or reshape themselves—to satisfy some generic hypothetical eye.

NOTES


Anarchist Collective Practice for the Win

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City Living opens so many avenues for engagement—everyone who comes to the book will find a space for their abiding preoccupations. For me, these are questions of implicit understanding, the exercise of freedom in conditions not of our own choosing, and how to constitute collectivities that defy individualism and extractivism. There is so much fodder for these questions in this book! Quill Kukla’s work here dwells with the mutual constitution of cities and the beings who live with/in them, opening questions such as the following: If we shape cities and they shape us, how might we choose to shape our cities such that they make us into something we want to be? Do only cities have this capacity for co-creation? How do we decide what we collectively want to be?

I’m not a geographer, but some of the anarchists I most love are; I live in a city but have learned my most important lessons in political dreaming and organizing from people living rurally. In this short engagement I want to offer some threads of conversations from these spaces to the important issues Kukla addresses. City Living pushed me to think about what is beyond cities, to farmlands and server farms, the constitutive outsides of what Saskia Sassen thought of as “global cities”—metropoles in which traditional gentrifying elites have been replaced by international flows of capital, disconnected from people living in cities marked for profit.
It called me to think about what’s within the ambit of cities and how that matters politically.

I’ve lived in cities that are in the same general vibe/size category as two of Kukla’s examples, Berlin and Johannesburg (Montreal and New York City), and I could transpose much of the argument for *City Living* to those places. I’ve also lived in small cities (Boulder, Colorado; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Sudbury, Ontario; Santa Cruz, California) as well as rural places (Homer, Alaska; Barnet, Vermont). I live now in Ottawa, Canada, similar in some ways to their third exemplar city, Washington, DC, in that it is a capital city, but super different in every other way. I read *City Living* in conversation with the memories of these places. Pulling them along with me through this text, I remain uncertain about how to think about the space between Sudbury, ON, (population ~166,000) and Boulder, CO, (population ~105,000), for example. Sudbury is a working-class city bearing the ongoing depredations of nickel mining and currently having its university system plundered; Boulder is a rich university city enacting a kind of perpetual dispossession-by-gentrification Ouroboros loop. Neither of them have the exclusive nightlife or interesting graffiti of Kukla’s examples, but Boulder has quite a lot of shared space, not all of it commercialized. Homer, Alaska (population ~5,500) is vastly more racially complex than Boulder and with an infinitely wider class composition and cosmopolitan population, though many of the workers there are seasonal, undocumented, and precarious workers in the fishing and tourism industries. It too has many shared public spaces for encounter. So I got quite hung up on which of the cities, towns, and rural places I’ve lived in and loved “counted” for the purposes of *City Living*. I kept trying to decide if the cities I called to mind were cool enough to be interesting to this book, or if they’d be deemed too boring, small, dirty, or homogenous.

Then I decided this was silly. Kukla’s claims that places and dwellers are mutually shaped, producing ecological ontologies through micronegotiations that are themselves embedded in struggles against international flows of capitalism hold, even if we move these arguments into different places, including rural and suburban places. The polluted small city and the house without running water I lived in six miles down a road that literally just ends deserve the same kind of loving appreciation for the inter-being of self and place that Kukla offers DC, Berlin, and Johannesburg. This book could just be called *Living!* Indeed, shifting from trying to decide if something counts as a good-enough city to asking how all dwellers and places mutually constitute one another, and what it means to relate to the spaces of our lives as shared spaces, opens up more interesting normative scope than we would get from behaving as though Kukla’s analysis only applies to obviously cool cities. It gives us a way to critique what is wrong with suburbs and to value what might be nourishing about rural places. All spaces are shared, whether they’re shared with many humans or mostly with other fauna and flora.

There’s one hitch in my confidence that one can read *City Living* and apply its insights to thinking about everywhere: it might be that reading them this way wrongs Kukla’s evident love for cities. Kukla’s normative claims about what makes cities good—and how then to make them better—rest on the idea that there is a real difference between cities and not-cities. They characterize city living as fundamentally shared in ways rural and suburban lives are not: “While most urban dwellers have private homes, distinctively, urban life is life that happens in shared spaces” (258). This is meant to be a descriptive fact—that in cities, even rich people have to interact with other people more than they would if they lived rurally or in suburbs. So, for Kukla, sharedness is one defining characteristic of cities, with the implication that non-cities are not shared. They argue that shared space means that “[c]ity dwellers are constantly, as a matter of course, accommodating themselves to others” (258). They think this sort of accommodation work produces particular sorts of people—“more open-minded and flexible” people—arguing for the following position:

> Despite serious issues around exclusion and unequal agency in cities, it is well-documented that urban dwellers are consistently farther to the left politically, more tolerant of difference, and more positive about social diversity than suburban and rural dwellers. One empirical hypothesis is that living in a city in close proximity to many kinds of people, and needing to share and negotiate space with them, develops our skills at coping with complexity and difference. For city dwellers, complexity, unpredictability, and diversity are part of our home. (53)

Although they note that it is possible that people move to cities because they are already inclined to appreciate difference and proximity, Kukla is “attracted to the hypothesis that the causality is at least partially the reverse—that explicit openness to diversity and change begins at the level of prereflective bodily habit and skill development, developed and ingrained over the course of city living” (53). On this view, being skilled city dwellers makes us skilled at living with diversity. Let me detour for a bit and then come back to this claim.

I’m sympathetic to Kukla’s frequent attention to prereflective bodily habit and skill development. Actually, maybe it’s more honest to say that I’ve been obsessed for a long while with the political and epistemic salience of what I’ve called in my own work “implicit understanding.” It’s affirming to find a shared appreciation for more-than-propositional knowledge in *City Living*, and I agree with Kukla that “we don’t count someone as knowing a city unless they know how to negotiate it, how to move through it and use it and interact with it, from first-personal experience” (37). Kukla frames this sort of knowledge as know-how and also as something stronger than knowledge by acquaintance. They are interested in the ways that the forms of agency we practice in city living can be “habitual, unreflective, and nondiscursive” and “manifested at the level of bodily motion and gesture rather than in explicit decision-making or speaking” (76). They speak of the kind of knowledge necessary to being a city dweller as “explicit and implicit skills for competently negotiating urban spaces” (52), which they understand as developing “our skills at coping with complexity and difference” (53).
I have found it important to thematize the nonpropositional knowledge at play in our lives precisely at this transit point between how we might competently negotiate the shared spaces in which we live and how we might politically engage or delight in complexity. Focusing on the political dimension of transformative knowing, I’ve thematized implicit understanding as including “practical, skill-based knowledge; somatic or bodily knowing; potentially propositional but currently implicit knowledge; and affective or emotional understanding.” There’s a lot of overlap in the ways Kukla thinks practically about “bodily and effective knowledge of how to navigate a space—the kind of knowledge that accrues over years of practice” (95) in the context of cities and the ways I have written about the salience of implicit understanding to political transformation. And at precisely these sites of overlap, there may also be some friction.

Thinking on how racialized and gendered implicit understanding forms and transforms, I have come to believe that it’s important to name the multiplicity and incommensurability of different matrices of implicit understanding. Following Antonio Gramsci, Wahneema Lubiano, and Himanni Bannerji, we can identify the ways opposing, orthogonal, incommensurate, or mutually occluded common senses operate in the same places. Kukla explicitly discusses this, naming the ways that Berlin and DC and Johannesburg all contain multiple cities, crosshatched, to echo China Mieville’s phrasing—places that have “multiple place identities and place ballets simultaneously superimposed” (189). This can manifest, in DC, in Tubman Field being “contested territory” between registered adult soccer players who drive in to use it and racialized neighborhood kids who live near it, or, in Berlin, with Hermannplatz as a site where at least five different groups make “complex territorial claims” (185). One reason Kukla attends to cities is precisely because they are sites for this kind of complexity. It may be that in order to translate that complexity into political justice, however, we need more active work on the space between accommodating diversity and practicing joyful justice.

As Patricia Hill Collins argues in a long-ago symposium on feminist standpoint theory:

proximity in physical space is not necessarily the same as occupying a common location in the space of hierarchical power relations. For example, Black women and women of color routinely share academic office space with middle-class and/or white women academics. It is quite common for women of color to clean the office of the feminist academic writing the latest treatise on standpoint theory. While these women occupy the same physical space—this is why proximity should not be confused with group solidarity—they occupy fundamentally different locations in hierarchical power relations.²

I agree with Collins that proximity can’t be counted on to produce any particular politics. Anyone who’s struggled with NIMBY gentrifiers in their neighborhood knows this—a strong opponent to making my neighborhood more actively welcome drug users is a woman down the block who has lived on my street for many years. Rooming houses and drug users feel like good parts of my neighborhood to me; they feel dangerous to her. We have multiple, conflicting implicit understandings of the places we live, and complexity is as likely to produce injustice as justice.

Now, I think that Kukla would agree with me on the general claim that the same places can produce different matrices of implicit understanding and that those differences are political. Their book is consistently concerned with struggles over who is welcomed to practice agency, flourish, and be meaningfully at home in the places they live. Capitalists will always aim to develop versions of the city that reject and punish the poor, in tandem with racism and border militarization reaching to the school door where undocumented kids try to learn. Proximity, as Collins put it, should not be confused with group solidarity. But if this is true, simply living in a city will not change people’s politics through some kind of diversity osmosis. Rather, politics are a collective project and achievement, and the kind of city we have comes out of a struggle between ordinary residents and rich people, including social parasites from developers to landlords.

I think Kukla would agree with me also about the idea that pursuing the kind of place to live that we long for is an open project, ongoing, collectively built. They close the book with Henri Lefebvre’s formulation of what he called “the right to the city,” which is not about the formal rights the state accords official citizens, but rather the collectively achieved standing to meaningfully participate in the life of a place. Kukla cashes out a relevant part of the right to the city with Roy Oldenburg’s conception of “Third Space”—“a space for socializing, playing, and just existing together in a fluid and unstructured but patterned way” (271). For Oldenburg, the prototypical third place was the bookstore/café; Kukla expands his approach to theorize third places not along a public/private dichotomy but instead in terms of their “fluid, territorialized, and social character and their separation from work and home” emphasizing “They are their own kind of space, and they seem to be essential to flourishing urban life” (272). They emphasize that “Public space, in all its incarnations, has to be carved out and produced within urban life, and it is part of the distinctive ecological ontologies of cities. Often it is the product of struggle and conflict” (270). So the question then might be how do we decide who shapes the places we live?

Asking and answering this question requires talking about how we constitute collectivities, make decisions together, and enact iterative change. Kukla posits that there is a place for urban planners and users of space in this kind of thinking: “I strongly suspect that it is not possible to figure out all obstacles to inclusion and agency in an urban space a priori, either as top-down planners or as bottom-up users of space” (285). They frame the needed work as primarily about inclusion. In the final sentences of the book, they argue:

Urban planning must build in recognition of its own limitations; we need to design spaces that are made to be redesigned through their bottom-up uses, but a wide variety of users. Diverse city
dwellers need to make and remake the wide variety of spaces that constitute a flourishing city—a city that, as we have seen, makes and remakes us in turn. (286)

To close, I want to turn to some places where I see people moving beyond individual inclusion of diverse bodies exercising agency in remaking spaces and toward the collective deliberation about what those spaces should be. In some ways, what I’m yearning for here is City Living Part Two, a book that elaborates how people get together to make cities the way they are.

Some of this work is forecast in the examples of ordinary people resisting gentrification, which Kukla explores in the chapter on anarchist living and organizing in Berlin. The autonomous housing and cultural space they highlight, Köpi137, continues to be threatened with eviction so that developers can transform the space it holds. Kukla describes a founding member of Köpi, Frank, reflecting on how the photos they were allowed to take of the collective space would misrepresent what it is. Because they were not allowed to take photos of people, he said, “readers would wrongly think that Köpi is a lonely place” (168). I love this point because it illuminates that the built infrastructure of a place, necessary as it is to living, playing, and partying, is merely a trace of the social infrastructure that makes that place live.

The anarchism Köpi residents practice can be induced from looking at the material traces of how they live, but it’s just a trace of the collective work they do. Anarchism at Köpi is something other than how the building looks; it’s how the people in it work collectively. Kukla narrates a short window into Köpi’s collective process, through an account of the meeting they attended asking to be able to document the space for their book. As they write, “In the case of Köpi, the embodied details of their anarchist decision-making process are details about their uses of space and vice versa; the shape of the room and the furniture, together with the use of bodily timing and gesture, in fact constitute the decision-making process at the Hausprojekt” (167). But because Kukla (quite appropriately) leaves the meeting after making their pitch to be able to document the place, readers cannot access the ways Köpi is very much not a lonely place.

It is these forms of collective practice, of being not lonely, that matter most to the project Kukla is committed to, building the possibility of spatial agency “to autonomously occupy, move through, and use space, as well as our ability to mark and transform it in accordance with our needs and desires” (7). The our in this sentence matters a lot—we are not just collections of individuals who decide what we personally need from the places we live. Rather, if we’re going to build good places, we need to constitute collectivities that can make decisions together, directly, in a way that is mutually committed to collective flourishing. All autonomy must, in the end, be relational autonomy. How can cities be a site for practicing this?

Perhaps the most exciting place I’m seeing people ask this question is in the terrain of the new municipalisms.

Murry Bookchin’s work is one anchor for these movements, which have been active in Europe for some time and which are beginning to find footing in the US as well. Bookchin famously formulated the idea of social ecology, a way to collectively manifest freedom—that social organization which does not destroy the natural world, contests the power of the state and capitalism, and produces flourishing. His work has been central to the formulation of organizations pursuing what he formulated as communalism, a way out of stale debates between Marxists and anarchists about how to address state power. For Bookchin, the city has the potential to be a place for direct democracy and widespread social transformation. He writes:

If we are to recover politics, citizenship, and democracy, we need not only to recover our concept of the city as a place in which we work and engage in everyday consociation; we also have to see the city as a public arena, in which we intermingle to discuss public affairs, such as ways of improving our lives as civic beings.1

It’s important that when Bookchin thinks about the category “citizen,” he is not formulating that as a status granted to people by the state; rather, this names a practice of being together in the collective work of making our consociated lives.

Over and over reading City Living, I wanted to hear how Kukla would think of Bookchin and municipalism, especially in terms of what I believe might be shared views of what a city is and can be. Kukla writes about Berlin’s approach to holding its history in its present, writing “We are not seeing the city as it was but rather seeing the city as it is now, which is a way of being shaped by its own past” (144). Bookchin defines how he thinks of what a city is: “I view the city as the history of the city. That is to say, I view the city as the cumulative development—or dialectic—of certain important social potentialities and their phase of development, traditions, culture, and community features.” Municipalists are taking up this formulation of the city as the cumulative manifestation of all the history that has constituted it, and thus as a living thing that can be reconstituted by ordinary people working together.

Another concept that is helpful to bring into the conversation is that of intimate direct democracy, formulated by political theorist, social ecologist, and activist Modibo Kadielie. He says, “It’s the kind of life in which people can sit down, talk with one another and reach some kind of consensus about how they want to live, how they want to relate to their immediate environment and how they want to structure their institutions and carry on their history.” He continues: “If we believe in direct democracy that means that we must believe that ordinary people can create institutions to liberate themselves and drive history forward.” In imagining City Living: Book Two, I pictured Kukla taking up these anarchist and communalist approaches to ordinary people collectively shaping the conditions for collective and personal agency.

In his book Thirspace (not to be confused with third place), geographer Edward Soja recounts asking Henri
Lefebvre whether he was an anarchist. Soja writes: “He responded politely, ‘No, not now.’ ‘Well then,’ I said, ‘what are you now?’ He smiled. ‘A Marxist of course . . . so that we can all be anarchists some time in the future.’” There are as many sorts of anarchists as there are Marxists; staying committed to collective decision-making by the people affected by the decisions is one way to parse the sorts of political praxis that might be helpful for struggles over how we all live together. Wherever we live, I do hope we can all be anarchists in this sense some time soon.

Even though I’m excited about the new municipalisms and the ways that theorists like Kadalie and Bookchin have formulated the potential for direct democracy as the ground for new a polis for all, I return to the question of the rural and to thinking about places that are not cities. The places that are not cities, back to the farmland and the server farms, are in the city. We who live in cities cannot live in them without all the people who live and work elsewhere. We cannot breathe without the forests making our air. We cannot drink without the watersheds that flow into our cisterns. We cannot eat without the fields and the farmers. In writing about losing home, having to leave rural Port Orford, Eli Clare writes: “The people who are dying in rural towns and work minimum- or sub-minimum-wage jobs—not temporarily but day after day for their whole working lives—are working class and poor people.” He writes against the urban bias that animates much queer living, part of the assumption that in order to be queer you must move to the city. Clare quotes Suzanne Pharr’s brilliant words on why this matters:

“If we cannot do rural organizing around lesbian and gay issues, then rural lesbians and gay men are left with limited options: leaving our roots to live in cities; living fearful invisible lives in our rural communities; or, with visibility, becoming marginalized, isolated, and endangered. Not one of these options holds the promise of wholeness or freedom.”

I recognize these bad options from my limited experience being openly queer in the rural spaces and small cities I’ve lived in, where walking home from the gay bar hand in hand with a woman is very different than doing that same thing even in Ottawa. I believe that organizations like Oregon’s Rural Organizing Project (https://rop.org) can be a vital space for bridging the shared yearnings for a different world from the cities to the suburbs to rural places, and that we can tune those yearnings through the kind of intimate direct democracy that could truly manifest what Kukla names as those shared spaces that are “living and dynamic, in a constate process of remaking” (161).

NOTES

Re-Making the Territory of a Philosophy of the City

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Quill R Kukla’s book City Living navigates the treacherous territories of philosophy and the city. The publisher classifies the book not as a work of philosophy, but rather as “sociology, urban,” and only the first and last chapter explicitly develop philosophical concepts or make normative claims that many might recognize as falling clearly within the domain of philosophy. But I want to argue that the book IS philosophy (while also being “fundamentally interdisciplinary,” as Kukla claims on page 2), and makes important contributions toward an intersectional feminist philosophy of the city. Kukla’s analysis not only helps us claim a right to the city but also helps us feminists claim a right to philosophy.

In their acknowledgements, Kukla argues that they learned “to make a paradigm shift from thinking like a philosopher to thinking like a geographer, or at least a philosopher-geographer” (xvi). It is this blurred boundary designated by the hyphen that interests me, how the book straddles the line in ways that enrich our thinking about both cities and philosophy in ways that help us renegotiate space for thinking and inhabiting cities as well as the disciplines differently.
In the context of Kukla’s thinking about city living, a pivotal concept is “territory,” which Kukla defines as “a space in which a group of people feel at home and experience themselves as having a voice and agency within and over that space” (59). While Kukla is concerned with actual and not metaphorical space, I think we might extend the concept to disciplinary territories, as these spaces for thinking and writing have very real consequences for agency and voice. The territory of philosophy has not been hospitable to the city and few philosophical works on cities are counted as philosophy, that is, they are not read within the canon of philosophy (nor—as we see with Kukla’s book—are they classified as such in Library of Congress or marketing classifications). Although our numbers are growing, it is still safe to say that few academic philosophers read or teach philosophical works on the city such as those by Henri Lefebvre or Engels’s The Condition of the Working Class in Manchester in 1844. As soon as philosophers write about the city, they almost always are cast out of their territory into the domain of social science. Many of us have been engaged in recent projects that we call “philosophy of the city” and the Philosophy and the City Research group thrives. I see Kukla’s work as an important contribution to the project of reclaiming the territory of the city as an important subject of philosophical investigation, or to put it another way, of remaking the territory of philosophy to include the city.

Until very recently women, nonbinary persons, trans persons, and all those who engage in philosophy that aims to ground the work and make it more meaningful were likely to be cast out of the territory of philosophy rather than have a voice within and over the space. Feminist philosophical work has been precarious precisely because it aims to make philosophy speak to our embodied and lived experiences. Historically, feminist philosophers who engage in interdisciplinary thinking are often cast out of the discipline of philosophy. Iris Marion Young, one of the first contemporary philosophers to write explicitly about cities (and cited by Kukla, 48; 55–56), ended her distinguished career as a professor of political science at the University of Chicago without formal philosophy department affiliation. Young had some choices and chose to work in an intellectual context where she had a bigger voice and greater recognition than that accorded her within philosophy, but too many other feminist, BIPOC, and white, non-cis, male philosophers have simply disappeared.

While I argued then and still argue that we can and should respect those of us who choose to give up philosophical labels or affiliations, I still believe that those who can do so should push the boundaries of philosophy by rejecting the claim that whenever we make philosophy meaningful or relevant our work ceases to be philosophy. Kukla’s act of keeping the hyphen might have been born of a modesty that they have not yet mastered the territory of the urban geographer, but I hope that they will continue to think about how and why it is important not to cede the territory of philosophy to white, cis men who still patrol its borders. As Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay have argued, “In expanding the scope, method, and vision of philosophy, in allowing for a permeability of disciplinary boundaries, and in the active engagement of reflexive critique, the work of feminist philosophers has begun to overhaul our understanding of philosophy, even as it remains undeniably philosophical.” Their claim that feminist philosophy “remains undeniably philosophical” when in fact feminist work was (and sometimes still is) regularly denied to be philosophical is a performative act that we must continue to make “because it is at once both a political and philosophical act to claim a territory that is repeatedly denied to feminist philosophers and philosophers of the city. We must engage in a continued process of remaking the territory. I believe that it is important to map and remember this context for both feminist philosophy and philosophy of the city. Kukla does not dwell on these philosophical turf wars, but rather jumps fully into their investigation of city living, developing what they call a “philosophical toolbox” for asking how urban spaces and urban dwellers “make, shape, and change one another” (13). A key concept in that toolbox is the idea of “ecological ontologies,” which Kukla defines as “sets of real, concrete things and events that can exist only within an ecological system, made up of material space and its users in dynamic action with one another” (3). Kukla’s use of this term helps us think about how humans as well as nonhumans interact with each other and a given space. For example, Kukla provides detailed descriptions of the dog park in their neighborhood, documenting how neighborhood interactions and use of a space transformed the space into a de facto dog park (116–18). Elsewhere Kukla notes how dog walking affects where and how humans walk (as dogs stop to sniff, explore, and defecate), but also that humans control dogs’ wanderings too and that everyone’s walk is affected by the given space (73).

A second key concept that Kukla develops is “spatial agency,” which is defined as “our ability to autonomously occupy, move through, and use space, as well as our ability to mark and transform it in accordance with our needs and desires” (7). Kukla analyzes how those with privileged bodies can navigate and use space differently than those who do not have such privilege. When a person walks through a city park, for example, different people will have different levels of freedom. A woman might avoid the space for fear of being catcalled; a person in a wheelchair may not be able to access the park because the sidewalk lacks curb cuts. They also examine Elijah Anderson’s analysis of urban street culture and the micropractices of exchanges in an inner-city Black neighborhood, and
how those exchanges create social hierarchies and social identities that have material consequences for social and environmental interactions (52–53).

Kukla’s work integrates embodied observation and immersion in city living and with urban dwellers in ways that examine how ecological ontologies are created, maintained, and changed through the interactive forces of physical place and urban dwellers. As such, Kukla develops a sense of spatial agency that is both embodied and intersubjective. By focusing on city living, Kukla emphasizes the ways that cities concentrate and emphasize our interdependence—on one another and on the natural and built environments.

Kukla argues that “our ecosystem is our territory,” the space where we dwell and feel most at home, where we feel properly oriented and are able to move smoothly within it (27). Our home territory shapes our attention and perceptions, our embodied skills on how to respond to surroundings, and our moral responses that determine what we judge to be valuable or not (29). Kukla argues convincingly that cities have distinct ecosystems and much of their fieldwork involves documenting how territories “can be made real and given material shape through micronegotiations” (42). Territory, they note, “can be established top-down through policies and spatial divisions, but it is also powerfully produced bottom-up through bodily postures, gestures, gazes, marking of space, and the like” (42). In other words, we can be shaped by the physical plan of the city. Humans act differently in an urban park that only has hard, uninviting concrete surfaces and provides no protection from the sun than in one with grass and trees, buskers, and picnic tables. But humans also make the city, as they might occupy an otherwise empty concrete park, transforming the space by erecting tents and altering themselves by forming a community among strangers, as happened with Occupy Wallstreet in Zuccotti Park.

Although many urban planners, geographers, and philosophers share Kukla’s view, Kukla argues that they are striking a new middle ground between two dichotomous positions that they label as “spatial determinist” and “spatial voluntarist.” An environmental or spatial determinist often assumes that space is fixed and natural; determinists would argue that space shapes our choices and actions (14). The view that crime in public housing projects is caused by their project. At his most Platonic, Rousseau

Arguably, this view is much more nuanced views. If anything, Plato rejects environmental determinism. Famously, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is invited by Phaedrus to walk beyond the city limits and complains, “I am a lover of learning, and trees and open country won’t teach me anything, whereas men in the city do.” In this quote we might also hear a rejection of any physical place as determining the philosopher’s ideas, or we could read Plato as Kukla’s ally, arguing that there is something about the way that the city demands interaction and dialogue with the place and its inhabitants that gives rise to philosophical learning. In Plato’s *Republic*, when Socrates and his interlocutors build a city in speech, they focus on how a city grows precisely through the interaction of geography, trade, social customs, and economic need. In short, people both respond to the environment and, in turn, respond to their interactions with each other and the new social, economic, and behavioral norms that develop as a result of growth. Yet, later in that work, as well as in other dialogues, we might argue that Plato is the first in a long line of philosophers to reject the city and place as having real relevance. The analogy of the cave and Plato’s theory of the forms suggests that philosophical truth is independent from place, that philosophical truths are obtained through the escape of place that dialectical thinking affords, and then the philosopher returns to the city to offer that wisdom. And on these claims, Plato is very much at odds with Kukla, not because he is an environmental determinist, but one who rejects the very premise of Kukla’s work about what we can learn when we engage in urban living and reflect on it.

Plato is decidedly anti-urban, as is Rousseau. In most of his writings, Rousseau holds a romantic ideal for his home of Geneva and espouses an intense dislike for large cities such as Paris. But I do not think that that makes him an environmental determinist. In his “Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theater,” Rousseau argues against the building of a theater in his beloved Geneva, but the argument is not about the actual building or physical environment of the theater; rather, it is about the social interactions that go on in and about a theater.2 At his most Platonic, Rousseau criticizes the theater-makers for mistaking reality and illusion. But he further argues that the customs that emerge in response to theater—for example, competitions for fine dress among the theater-goers—not only reflect, but can produce greater social inequalities. Plato and Rousseau are but two examples of philosophers in the Western tradition who see no place for the city in philosophy, not because they are spatial determinists, but because they think philosophy can escape environmental influence entirely.

Importantly, Kukla’s thesis in no way depends on how we classify or understand Rousseau and Plato, but the misreading demonstrates how rocky the terrain of philosophy of the city is. And I am grateful that Kukla resists the common philosophical disciplinary practice of merely reporting on other books. A philosophy of the city calls for the philosopher to be in and for the city! That said, the very invisibility of much of philosophy of the city makes it difficult to sometimes navigate the territory and to recognize allies. The result is that Kukla sometimes misses important opportunities for dialogue that could advance their project.
The greatest missed opportunity for stronger solidarity with thinkers who precede them is when Kukla pigeon-holes Jane Jacobs as a spatial determinist (13–14). While it is true that Jacobs argued for specific city plans as the best ways to preserve city life, so, ultimately, does Kukla, focusing their concluding section of the book on urban planning and what we should build. Kukla argues for a built urban plan that allows for its inhabitants to tinker with it, and on this last point they squarely agree with Jacobs, approvingly citing Jacobs’s insight that “if a space is overplanned, it can strangle the room for creative uses and no one has the opportunity to participate with agency in new-building and place-making” (44). Indeed, Jacobs revolutionized American urban planning by opening up the possibility for grassroots planning, for including those who inhabit the city in planning right from its start.\textsuperscript{9}

Kukla further borrows from Jacobs’s observations about the ballet of place, and Jacob’s insights here are precisely those of interaction with others—including strangers—and our interdependence on one another and on our built environment. Without seeming to realize that David Seamon’s work is indebted to that of Jane Jacobs, Kukla borrows Seamon’s concept of “place ballet,” that is, ways that “place identity is essentially generated by . . . established routines and patterns of micronegotiations” (33). But Seamon argues that it is Jacobs who first described such a place ballet when she observed the complex interactions of neighbors and strangers on her Greenwich Village block.\textsuperscript{10}

Kukla’s claim to the middle ground of course means that there is learning they take from both of what they classify as the extremes. But in refusing to see more ways that Jane Jacobs is a tremendous ally, Kukla loses their way a bit, relying on a hard philosophical distinction that hinders rather than helps to make their point. Kukla does gain their bearings quickly, though, and their work helps push the boundaries of the concept of the “right to the city,” but in a way that builds on Jacobs’s insights rather than refusing them.

The term “right to the city” has been used and abused and appears in both activist and scholarly writings. It appropriately is credited to French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. His work initiates the idea of the right to the city as a right, and clearly defines it as a right to inhabit the city (rather than a formal legal right):

Reflective of his stress on the city as a space of politics, Lefebvre envisions a city where its inhabitants could properly participate in urban political life. This emphasis is most visible in the specific way he frames the right to the city. “The right to the city manifests itself,” argues Lefebvre, “as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the [city as] oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property) are implied in the right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1996: 173–4).\textsuperscript{11}

Kukla’s fieldwork and theoretical reflection help us better understand what it means to claim a right to the city as a right to inhabit, connecting Lefebvre’s insights to a feminist phenomenology of agency that is both embodied and interdependent. And it is city living itself—and Kukla’s reflections on it—that allow us to recapture and develop this critically important claim, helping us both understand the distinctiveness of urban embodied living and the right to inhabit the city. As Kukla writes, “City dwellers are constantly, as a matter of course, accommodating themselves to others. Living one’s life with these kinds of negotiations and intrusions makes for a distinctive kind of embodied existence” (259). Importantly, the book also transverses global North and South, thus further challenging the domain of traditional Western philosophy as well as most social science work focused on North America and Europe.

Kukla’s conclusion that the right to the city is a right to inhabit a shared space is an important contribution to philosophy of the city—as is the claim that the “right to the city includes not just access to suitable spaces that meet one’s needs and fit one’s activities, but also the ability to exercise agency not only within but upon these spaces” (260; italics in original). Kukla’s insights into what a claim to the right to the city entails allows for a more inclusive understanding of the injustices of spatial inequality as a matter of constricting access and embodied agency (261–63). By drawing on feminist disability theory and connecting it to both their fieldwork and their analysis of the right to the city, Kukla synthesizes disparate fields in a way that is more just, respectful, and inclusive. As Kukla writes, “Spatial justice requires that we work to make sure that everyone, with every kind of body, be able to participate fully in urban life” (266).

Kukla not only connects feminist disability theory, but also feminist critiques of the Western dichotomy between the public and private, arguing that the analyses of the right to the city by Lefebvre and others assume that dichotomy. In contrast, Kukla argues that the conditions required for spatial justice include the creation and maintenance of “third spaces,” that is, communal spaces that blur the boundaries of public and private but that can be territorialized and remade by those inhabiting the spaces. This is a very rich area that invites more research and thinking on the right to inhabit and remake spaces that challenge the public/private dichotomy. There is much work that can and should be done to connect Kukla’s work with that of others where there is fruitful dialogue; a feminist philosophy of the city depends both on continued fieldwork of the sort that Kukla engages in and models for us as well as more dialogue between those engaged in philosophy of the city. I think, for example, of the promise of connecting the work of Margaret Kohn’s \textit{The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth} with that of Kukla.

Kukla’s book comes full circle, starting with the quote from Jane Jacobs’s \textit{The Death and Life of Great American Cities}—“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”—and ending with an argument for a similar type of urban planning that allows bottom-up
micronegotiations. But it is a circular map that opens new points of connection and dialogue between and within the disciplines and between and within urban dwellers. Kukla’s book City Living provides us with a map that can be used to guide an interdisciplinary feminist philosophy of the city as we chart out better understandings of cities and more just forms of urban living.

NOTES


Spatial Agency in Climate Adaptation

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In their book City Living: How Urban Dwellers and Urban Spaces Make One Another, Quill R Kukla artfully brings together several modes of inquiry to explore the relationship between urban spaces and the people that dwell within them. Kukla’s work is an example of interdisciplinary excellence—they draw upon phenomenological and conceptual analysis and weave their philosophical inquiry together with theoretical tools in geography as they engage in careful ethnographic fieldwork and archival research.

The central object of Kukla’s investigation is the embodied uses and materiality of urban spaces. They illuminate how relationships of power and people’s agency are supported or limited by urban spaces. Kukla is interested in the processes by which spaces shape such behavior and agency, but they also illuminate the ways that dwellers shape and remake spaces into niches that satisfy their needs as occupants. Kukla argues that these reciprocal processes yield real, material things in the world. Kukla notes that plenty of real things, which have concrete impacts on the world, exist because of the social practices that produce them. Their reality and meaning are tied to particular social institutions. For example, paychecks influence material things in the world in virtue of social institutions such as wages and banks. Even if a paycheck is not itself a material object or has no distinctive physical properties, its reality cannot be questioned. Having or being denied a paycheck is sufficient to encounter its reality, even if such a reality is dependent upon social practices and institutions. Similarly, Kukla argues that such things as neighborhoods or rush hours are the sorts of real things that exist only in cities because of the specific ways that city dwellers use and engage with urban spaces. Kukla’s materialist approach to cities is an important divergence from more common analyses of city life which tend to focus primarily on the subjective experience of individuals in urban spaces. Instead, Kukla argues that the way people use space, and the way space shapes people, produce concrete things that exist within the context of these particular relationships.

Specifically, through micronegotiations—the daily interactions and small movements in city spaces—such material things are produced. Kukla argues that micronegotiations play an important role in the construction of city dwellers’ embodied habits, identities, moral judgments, perceptual skills, and capacities for risk assessment. However, such impacts are not limited to individuals; these micronegotiations and practices shape urban spaces as well. Kukla is specifically interested in how territories—understood as real, concrete things in the world—are produced through these micronegotiations. Territories, according to Kukla, are spaces where people experience having agency over and within such spaces. The dynamic, co-constitutive relationship between material spaces and the material movements and transactions of dwellers produces territories which are themselves material realities that are key to city life. For example, they delineate outsiders and insiders and establish and regulate norms of how urban spaces are used. They are key to cities because they are the spaces within cities that people’s agency is expressed and experienced.

Kukla stresses the importance of recognizing that urban spaces, and the territories produced by people’s micronegotiations in cities, are mostly shared spaces. They argue that it is the shared nature of city spaces that make them distinct from non-urban spaces. Such spaces are used in conjunction with others and this joint use of space entails constant negotiations (not all of which are conflictual). Kukla’s main task is to elucidate the various forms of
sharing urban spaces and how people and such spaces are co-constituted. While this task is primarily descriptive, it is not without normative implications. Through an attentive examination of the co-constitutive material relationship between city dwellers and urban spaces, Kukla illuminates the way in which cities can be both places of change that can generate opportunities for flourishing as well as environments that reinforce and entrench injustices.

This in-depth philosophical and interdisciplinary analysis of cities and their dwellers, as well as Kukla’s account of spatially embodied agency, their analysis of gentrifying spaces as contested territories, and their exploration of repurposed cities could not come at a more crucial time. Today, four billion people, roughly 55 percent of the world’s population, live in cities. \(^1\) The trend towards increased urbanization coincides with estimates that seven out of ten people in the world will live in a city by 2050. The speed and scale of urbanization presents its own range of challenges such as the need for infrastructure, affordable housing, and efficient transportation systems, and the potential impact and needs of growing urban populations is significant. However, these challenges are even more pressing when understood in the context of anthropogenic global climate change.

Cities are both impacted by and exacerbate climate change. Cities account for more than two thirds of the world’s energy consumption and more than 70 percent of emissions. They are also sites of great exposure to slow and rapid-onset climate impacts. For example, a significant number of urban residents occupy coastal areas. Even though such communities are increasingly at risk to the impacts of rising sea levels and storm surges, the trend of urban expansion is also accompanied by the fact that population in vulnerable and hazard-prone areas—such as coastlines—is increasing. \(^2\)

Furthermore, according to the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, there is high confidence that future urbanization will amplify air temperature changes in cities despite background climate conditions. \(^3\) Furthermore, given the increased frequency and intensity of extreme climate events such as heatwaves, cities will experience increased heat stress. This is due in part to the geometry and material of urban spaces, where tall, closely built buildings absorb and store heat while decreasing opportunities for natural ventilation. This phenomenon, referred to as the urban head island effect, is further exacerbated by the lack of green spaces and bodies of water in cities. \(^4\) Additionally, the heat released due to human activities such as industrial heating and cooling systems are factors that contribute to making cities hotspots of climate change. \(^5\) While successful in situ adaptation decreases risk, failures to adapt in place may prompt mobility-based outcomes that can increase risk in cases of displacement or forced relocation. Failures of in situ adaptation can also give rise to immobility where agency in decision making is decreased. \(^6\) Place-based attachment and identity are often central to well-being and factor into the decisions people make in the face of climate impacts. \(^7\) However, the relationships between dwellers and the spaces they constantly negotiate can also contribute to maladaptation. This gives rise to questions of justice and legitimacy regarding proactive adaptive behaviors and interventions in the face of climate-related risks and increased vulnerability.

While Kukla does not specifically address climate-related mobility outcomes or climate vulnerability in the book, their discussion of displacement in the context of gentrification and their attention to spatial agency offers resources for answering challenging normative and practical questions regarding climate-related displacement, immobility, vulnerability, and adaptation. Their account of spatial agency helps to illuminate ways in which harmful climate mobility outcomes can be understood as wrongs warranting address and can help clarify the content of our obligations to those who are vulnerable.

Most notably, in chapter 3 of the book, Kukla makes the case that urban dwellers can be displaced without actually leaving their neighborhoods. While they argue this in the context of gentrification, Kukla’s insight that residents can lose their territory even before they have physically left has important implications for understanding the nature of our obligations to support in situ adaptation. Let me explain.
Kukla argues that people lose their ability to be at home—and even to know their own neighborhoods in locations that have been gentrified. This is because people’s spatial agency (and authority) has been decreased in the space they otherwise recognized as their home. For Kukla, to know a place is to know how to negotiate, use, interact with, and move through a space. In other words, knowledge of a territory is gained when people have developed skills and positionalities that permit them to have agency within a given space. As Kukla argues, “we know a city when we understand how to perceive and respond to it well, and when we have developed the embodied feel of using it and moving around in it competently” (37). When neighborhoods and territories are altered physically, in cases of gentrification, for example, residents’ territorial skills are destabilized or rendered meaningless in the altered space. Certain changes to the material spaces people occupy can thus create disruptions to people’s very identity. The very ecology of their neighborhoods is shifted to the point that they can no longer impact spaces and spaces can no longer accommodate them in the ways that garner meaning and literal material functioning.

How might this understanding of spatial agency and the way it is disrupted in the context of displacement be applied to the context of climate-related vulnerabilities? In cases where climate impacts increase the need for spaces to be altered and adjusted to protect and address the shifting needs of vulnerable dwellers, dwellers may work to adapt to changes in their material environment, but they may lack the agency to shape the spaces they occupy. While people may not have physically left or been pushed out of the climate-vulnerable spaces they occupy, they no longer have a place in their previously known and occupied territories. In other words, physical displacement need not occur for people to be alienated and excluded from the territories they occupy. The skills that otherwise served them, that helped dwellers perceive, respond to, and move through spaces, may not be enough to enable competent use of such spaces. Consequently, people may be cut off from meaningfully accessing place identity.

Elsewhere I argue that people who are at risk and vulnerable to negative climate mobilities have a claim to a right that the international state system ought to protect: the right to a livable locality. I argue that climate-induced displacement, migration, and immobility do not emerge as some natural phenomenon, but rather arise due to organizational features of the global territorial state system, understood as a social practice. When understanding the state system as a social practice, we can evaluate whether this decentralized organizational structure is justified in light of these purported aims. In this work, I argue that for any objective one might ascribe to the state system, having a secure right to be somewhere livable is a necessary condition for its attainment. Being in a livable space is instrumentally valuable in this way; it establishes conditions that enable opportunities to pursue various activities, participation, and ways of being in the state system that are relevant for one’s well-being.

The notion of livability I defend also captures the constitutive, embodied, relational element of existing as a person within a territorial state system. When the right to a livable locality cannot be effectively claimed because one’s home is uninhabitable, one is left with nowhere to effectively “be” in the system in this relevant embodied, relational way. I understand “being in a livable space” in a phenomenological sense. People are spatially located within a social practice that is territorial in nature. People are not merely existing in some static way within a space that provides opportunities for life. Rather, they are already occupying livable spaces in a relational way, adapting both their bodies to the spaces as well as the spaces they occupy. I argue that protecting the right to a livable locality is a normative principle that emerges for and from the social practice of the territorial state system. As such, it serves as a legitimacy condition of the practice. I argue that the obligation to protect the right to a livable locality includes both ameliorative immigration practices as well as the facilitation of in situ adaptation.

Kukla’s account of displacement as a loss of agency and authority within territories helps to characterize the nature of exclusion people face when their right to livable spaces is compromised. Thus, it also helps to account for the moral wrong of exclusion which undergirds the obligation to protect the right to livable localities. Furthermore, by articulating the active and embodied way people come to “know” the places they occupy, Kukla’s account helps to illuminate epistemic deprivations that contribute to make spaces uninhabitable. The knowledge that has been gained in the active relationships to these spaces may be lost or rendered ineffective for the purposes of adaptation. Such conditions can be understood as a deterioration of the mutual constitution between embodied people and place. Stated differently, the relationship between people and places is unidirectional: the spaces people occupy constrain their actions and choices, but the space is no longer responsive to previous micronegotiations that enabled people to shape and come to know the spaces and territories they occupy.

To further illustrate this epistemic deprivation, we can normatively evaluate unsuccessful cases of in situ climate adaptation where people are rendered immobile against their choice. While not physically excluded, people suddenly find themselves without any place to meaningfully “be” and thus are unable to participate in the production of their valued, place-based identities. Even worse, if spaces are changed without taking into consideration the impacts of dweller’s ability to navigate and epistemically engage with infrastructural change, such changes may amount to maladaptation and increased vulnerability to impacted dwellers. For example, the city of Miami continues to spend a significant amount of money on infrastructure to protect against sea-level rise. However, some of these interventions risk impacting property markets, which can contribute to forms of climate-based gentrification and the further displacement of vulnerable communities. This has moral relevance for a social practice whose legitimacy is constrained by its capacity to remedy or protect against territorial exclusion. If such conditions of exclusion persist, the obligation to protect the right to a livable locality has not been discharged.
In the context of climate change and the increasing impact on urban spaces, city dwellers may recognize that adaptation is necessary. However, given the significant importance of place in identity formation and understanding, successful in situ adaptation will require, in part, people’s ability to transform the spaces they occupy in ways where they can continue to develop place-related identity and meaning. Kukla’s attention to spatial agency provides us with a metric by which we can evaluate interventions focusing on adaptation and risk reduction. Even if people recognize adaptation as necessary, if their spatial agency is diminished by governance processes, then dwellers can rightfully claim that such interventions are not justifiable. Rather than rectifying conditions of inclusion, such interventions can further disrupt the ability of urban dwellers to cultivate the territorial skills and understanding required to transform or evolve place-based identity in the context of adaptation.

This does not mean that adaptation requires the preservation or conservation of the exact characteristics of current ecological systems. Rather, it requires supporting dwellers’ ability to negotiate changes in meaning by facilitating their ability to impact the spaces they occupy. In other words, supporting in situ adaptation requires supporting the possibility for mutual constitution between people and place. This includes supporting a community’s ability to create new meaning or integrate local knowledge as the physical spaces around them shift due to climatic change.

In order to guard against the forms of exclusion that may occur, we cannot simply examine whether people have been physically displaced. We also must examine the extent to which their place-based identity and knowledge of space has become inaccessible. Kukla’s analysis provides us with a metric by which we can evaluate the legitimacy of climate adaptation policies. We can examine whether the agency of dwellers has been enhanced or further compromised by a particular policy proposal or adaptation strategy. To correct and guard against furthering such forms of exclusion, policies and strategies to facilitate in situ climate adaptation must be inclusive. Policy and planning procedures that protect and increase the agency of urban dwellers most vulnerable to climate risks ought to value and integrate local knowledge and ought to expand the participatory nature of deliberation and decision making.

A recent study has found that spatially heterogenous exposure patterns to extreme heat illuminate an urgency for adaptation mechanisms that are locally tailored to the diversity of spaces within cities and across the world’s varied urban centers. Given the heterogeneity of exposure patterns and the heterogeneity of climate mobility outcomes, urban adaptation planning will require a multifaceted approach that is contextualized by specific localities. The legitimacy of approaches can be determined, in part, to the extent to which they enhance the spatial agency of vulnerable urban dwellers in those localities. Furthermore, we need not wait for instances of physical displacement to occur in order to determine whether the right to a livable locality is threatened. Relevant forms of displacement and exclusion can occur even when physical exclusion is absent. Consequently, we have ex ante reasons to implement early proactive adaptation strategies. Such strategies allow for the transformation of spaces voluntarily and can support and integrate transformation of spaces in a way that recognizes dwellers themselves as agents and partners in adaptation planning.

In the final chapter of the book, Kukla argues that a right to urban spaces or a right to the city involves “access to and agency within different kinds of territories and public spaces” (283). They note that diverse city dwellers should be enabled to remake the diverse array of urban spaces needed for a city to flourish. Doing so does not require making all spaces inclusive for all types of bodies, nor does it involve pre-planning spaces for people. Rather, Kukla argues, we should focus on expanding marginalized people’s spatial agency so that they can meaningfully participate in territory creation. I contend that we should carry over this concern for spatial agency in our normative arguments regarding climate adaptation. Under conditions of climate change, diminishing spatial agency can be an indication that people’s right to a livable locality is vulnerable. Participatory adaptation planning that integrates local knowledge can enable urban dwellers most at risk to have an opportunity to continue to shape their identity and maintain a co-constitutive relationship to the spaces they occupy. This is vital to guard against the foreseeable exclusion that can result in the social practice of a territorial state system under conditions of climate change. A shifting climate niche demands that people are not solely responsible for adapting. Rather, urban spaces also must adapt to meet the needs of the expanding number of people negotiating their lives within them.

NOTES


10. McLeman et al., “Conceptual Framing to Link Climate Risk Assessments and Climate-Migration Scholarship.”
Flesh-and-Blood Scholarship
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In *City Living*, Quill Kukla unfolds the thesis that "urban dwellers and urban spaces constitute one another" (121), that is, people who live in cities transform and act upon their environments, while they are also shaped and limited by the social and material conditions in these environments. And they do so not only through grand designs or top-down plans, but also in and by quotidian acts: personal interactions, microexpressions, stances, gestures, how their bodies move around each other and in space, language, art, and other ways of marking, making, and reproducing territories linked to specific groups and identities.

This is an alluring argument, not only because it beckons with the possibility of bottom-up agency and emancipation in unequal cities, but also because it refuses to place that possibility in an ideal, utopian horizon. It is precisely because Kukla acknowledges the limitations and constraints of agency that this proposition becomes tantalizingly attainable. Kukla takes us through the myriad ways in which residents of DC, Berlin, and Johannesburg have tinkered with, adapted to, gradually transformed, and survived in hostile or precarious settings. Through attentive, heartfelt accounts of case studies, Kukla demonstrates the real, existing power of individual actions and social interactions to create more just and inclusive urban spaces.

As Kukla develops their book from explanatory theory to critical case studies into a broader theoretical narrative, the spatial analyses, with evocative descriptions of places, buildings, and people, remind me of Michel de Certeau’s systematic phenomenological account of space as perceived and lived by a sensing body—except that Kukla politicizes phenomenology by considering the messy tangle of financial, material, political, memorial, and ideological interests that cut through individual and group uses and perceptions of space. Kukla also attends to a variety of perceiving and living bodies beyond just their own (rejecting any universal perceiving subject). These bodies are presented as dynamic, consequential in their actions, communicative in ways that can be at least partially decoded and understood, but also ultimately resistant to full knowledge or control (whether by the state, by other social groups, or by scholarship). We glimpse moments, sequences in developing stories that are always much bigger than what scholarship can contain. What of class or national belonging, how we pass each other on the street, whether we linger or hurry, stare or avert our eyes. This happens at all scales—in shared spaces such as the squares, streets, and buildings Kukla analyzes, in our workplaces, bus rides, grocery runs, sites of entertainment, doctor visits, even inside our own homes. If we are complicit with the reproduction of social space even in our smallest behaviors and gestures, then we also have the power to critique and change such space.

The power of *City Living* lies not only in telling, but also in performing an engaged, inclusive urban theory. This is a visceral text. It engrosses, amuses, and pulls the reader into urban realities. I find myself laughing out loud at Kukla’s account of the rules for being admitted to Berghain, an exclusive nightclub in Berlin (154–55); cringing at a passive-aggressive racist episode in an Ethiopian restaurant in Johannesburg (248–49); and sharing in Kukla’s shock when they hear a man refer to homeless people as obstacles to be "stepped over" in DC (108). It is not only that Kukla brings to life complex social and urban environments—which they do, vividly—but, crucially, they convey a sense of their own lived experiences as a researcher. Sure, many scholars acknowledge their place in discourse and in fieldwork, but there is something different here as Kukla brings us along for the ride, sharing their sensorial experiences, gut reactions, physical navigations, tastes, smells, hesitations, swear words, and their palpable excitement at fieldwork breakthroughs. This is a kind of flesh-and-blood scholarship, and I am not sure my single, short essay can do justice to its potential unfoldings, as both a writing genre and as a method.

As for method, Kukla opens up a world of possibilities for understanding social and spatial environments. They set out to "read urban spaces as saturated with meaning," but avoid inferences "about individual psychological contents or reactions" (3). This translates into a threefold method: first, minutious analyses of people using and interacting in places; second, a consideration of broader historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts that help Kukla interpret and situate those uses and interactions; and third, the incorporation of concepts from a wide range of disciplines related to space and society, which emploin the critical case studies into a broader theoretical narrative.
As these two very different texts resonate, they point not just to mutually constitutive elements, but also to possible futures. This phenomenon does not need to conform to a tight telethical arc for the sake of argument; instead, it recognizes the incompleteness and inconsistencies of both scholarship and reality. Kukla observes how the Maboneng Place neighborhood was “paradoxically” designed from the top-down so as to nourish bottom-up and “unpredictable uses of space” (242–43), resulting in an island of racial diversity and safe coexistence separated from the deeply segregated rest of Johannesburg through gentrification and hipster culture. This paradox does not invalidate the real existing achievements of Maboneng Place, nor does it excuse its shortcomings. And in Berlin, Kukla reveals how territory-making can easily go from the inclusive, cacophonous sharing of space by different groups in Hermannplatz (179–89) to “pernicious” gatekeeping, as in the somewhat sadistic admissions ritual to the Berghain nightclub (157). Kukla also dwells in the more ambiguous case of Køpi, where the self-preservation of a radically autonomous and leftist community entails rigorous exclusion of those perceived as outsiders, even when they are sympathetic or interested (157–70). Kukla’s politicized phenomenology allows for the productive study of these and other perplexing examples, not despite, but because of their contradictions.

This acknowledgment of the messiness of reality might be related to Kukla’s focus on things as they are—the material conditions of the production of urban and social space. I use these words intentionally, as I hear other echoes of Marx in Kukla’s work: “dwellers are not simply determined by spaces, but rather exercise creative agency within them. This is not unfettered agency, but agency that is thoroughly spatially embedded and constrained” (30). Marx had put it, in the context of what he saw as a retrograde revolution (Louis Bonaparte’s 1851 coup d’etat): “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” As these two very different texts resonate, they point not just to mutually constitutive elements, but converge upon the hope of agency, imperfect as it may be. Where Marx had dreamed of a revolutionary end goal, Kukla highlights many ongoing rebellions, drawing from recent history, observing contemporary cities, and pointing to possible futures.

Kukla’s method resolutely centers on what can be observed, refusing to speculate on psychological motivations and inner emotions. But at points, the book scrapes just below the surface—alluding to the adventurous millennial vibe of guests at a fashionable South African dinner club located in a neighborhood considered unsafe (224–27); discussing the meanings of recent history, memory, and the official discourse on reconciliation in Constitution Hill; a multipurpose site devoted to South Africa’s history of racial violence (227–33); or critiquing the ersatz setup at the former Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, now widely derided as a kitschy tourist trap and noted by Kukla as “very un-Berlin” (189). Kukla’s rich observations are evocative of so much more than meets the eye, but they stop before delving too deeply into cultural interpretation. To be clear, Kukla’s theory and method do recognize that such cultural forces are at play, as “cultural patterns” associated with “how a space functions” (3), or as the social saturation that shapes and constrains people’s spatial agency (17).

I suggest—with an eye to how I may apply Kukla’s method to my own research—that this can be pushed further; that is, cultural meanings might work as a third element alongside space and social agency, rather than an aspect attached to either of the two terms. Collective symbolic constructs, visual and literary representations, and social imaginaries—many of which happen not only at a broad, societal level but also in the fine grain of micro-interactions—work in tandem with the “materiality of spaces and their embodied uses” (3). People can inhabit a space symbolically, virtually, or in their imagination; they can envision and change spatial meanings through language, art, music, mass and social media. Those interactions might take place outside of particular places, in other materialities, or they may even be immaterial, but they still help shape physical places and the people who inhabit or act upon them. For example, in São Paulo, young male Black residents of low-income areas at the margins of the city, who are usually stereotyped as criminals, have reshaped public perceptions of themselves and their neighborhoods through a steady production of rap, hip hop, literature, and slam poetry since the 1980s. Their work thematizes life in these peripheral areas, laying bare their challenges as well as their creativity and humanity. Not only has this artistic output changed residents’ views of their own neighborhoods (instead of shame, they feel pride), but it has also diminished their stigma among residents of wealthier areas. The peripheries started to be seen as centers of art and cultural production rather than mere reservoirs of cheap labor, poverty, and crime. This change in social perception reverberated through concrete changes, ranging from self-built improvements done by residents of those neighborhoods (such as gathering spaces for music and poetry) to broader political support for these areas (in the form of municipal laws and public funding for cultural projects). As I write this, it feels like an idea best saved for a real-time exchange rather than a soliloquy, so I will leave this question open, somewhat unanswered, curious as to what Kukla might make of it. Regardless, Kukla’s analyses of gestures, behaviors, and micro-interactions foreground aspects often overlooked by other approaches, even thick descriptions and ethnographies, offering a novel and productive method for observing and understanding urban space.

Kukla also develops a transdisciplinary theory of city living, which brings together conceptual affinities among various fields: geography, history, philosophy, urbanism, architecture, heritage and memory studies, anthropology, sociology, feminist theory, disability theory, language studies. Kukla’s own propositions transit fluidly among these other disciplinary voices, resulting in a framework that attends to multiple aspects of city living while returning the reader to the main point: the dynamic, mutually constitutive relationships between cities and people. Within this
framework, Kukla gives new life to established concepts, such as gentrification, community, and public space.

Their take on public space is particularly helpful, as they reject the “public/private dichotomy” and focus instead on “shared spaces” (259) and on the slippery, multiple definitions of public (267–71). They point out that significant social interactions involving communities, individuals, organized groups, and other assemblages that make up an urban “public” take place in spaces that are not officially public—inside privately owned buildings, homes, and establishments, or in liminal areas that tread the line between publicity and privacy, such as Tempelhofer Field in Berlin, which contains a lively public park, the “eerie” half-empty former airport terminal, and a camp for Syrian refugees (171–79). Other case studies present fuzzy examples of legality, ownership, and right of occupation, which defy conventional (capitalist) assumptions about privacy and publicity—this is the case with the hijacked buildings in Johannesburg's Central Business District (201–02), or the formerly squatted Kapi, which has continued to survive thanks to Berlin’s strong tenancy laws and an unusually low rent (158–59).

Blurring the lines between public and private, and in fact focusing on the blurriness itself, makes for a complex account of urban space that works alongside Kukla’s consideration of “third places” (271–74). These are places outside of work and home, which can acquire their own identity (or multiple identities) and may function as “niches” for groups to interact and inhabit, such as coffee shops or hangout spots at subway stations. These places further dissolve the dichotomy between public and private. Here, Kukla joins forces with other scholars who have critiqued the idea of a universal public sphere or universally public spaces, instead acknowledging that any notion of the public (or private) is complicated by a consideration of varying degrees of publicity, social diversity, contested meanings and uses of public space, parallel publics, and alternate categories such as the “commons.”

Kukla’s nuanced account of the public feeds into their vision of what an inclusive city should be:

Supporting every city dweller’s right to the city does not mean giving everyone access to and agency within every part of the city, but rather making sure as best we can that everyone has this within a wide range of spaces sufficient to support a flourishing urban life. (266)

A flourishing urban life, as Kukla points out in the book’s conclusion, includes not only the right to a home (private space) or infrastructure (public space), but also places for leisure, socialization, self-realization, protest, and dissent. Such a city would allow people to exercise political and material agency, and—crucially—to tinker with and adapt spaces to their own (often unpredictable) needs. Kukla even opens up the possibility for such agency to include not only humans but also non-human animals (71–76). In light of climate change, the Anthropocene, and the ethics (or lack thereof) of human action, Kukla's argument might reasonably be extended to other agents such as different kinds of living organisms (plants, fungi) and even non-living elements such as geological forces.

Kukla recognizes that, on the one hand, it is not possible to plan for all of these needs and elements in advance because they are necessarily dynamic, not determinable a priori, and constituted out of individual circumstances (for example, bodies with different physical and mental abilities) as well as unfolding social interactions. On the other hand, Kukla points out that top-down planning is still necessary to balance socio-economic and political inequalities. In their words, “If a space is a ‘free for all,’ then those with more voice and social power already will disproportionately colonize and remake the space” (284).

I think about this as I write this essay from the other side, so to speak. Kukla finished their book manuscript in spring 2020, while they acknowledge the uncertainty posed by COVID on the very kind of city living they write about, their manuscript understandably could not fully incorporate the repercussions of the pandemic. And not only the pandemic—there were the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among other African Americans; the spring and summer of Black Lives Matter protests, and the toppling of monuments to slavery and colonialism; there were the turbulent 2020 presidential elections and the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021; and as I finish this, there is now the war in Ukraine and the Tigray War in Ethiopia, adding to many other ongoing conflicts, refugee waves, and immigration crises.

Back amid the lockdowns of early 2020, Kukla wondered if the pandemic might mean a fundamental change in the way people relate to cities, or just a temporary pause (7). If, in some aspects and at least for some time, the pandemic altered our relationship to fellow city-dwellers, shared spaces, and community, it does not seem to have irrevocably changed us. Millions of people never had the luxury of staying home and continued to share dense urban spaces and infrastructures in large cities, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Protesters put fears aside and masks on to demonstrate in support of Black Lives Matter. Pandemic fatigue also spurred a yearning for normalcy, and even those with a choice have been choosing to return to crowds, cafes, plazas, streets, schools, churches. The sharing of urban spaces and resources that Kukla analyzes lives on, and their arguments and conclusions endure.

We are thrust together again, still dealing with an active pandemic, political distrust and divisions, and the mass destruction of entire cities. What do we owe each other, as individuals and communities, in our present circumstances? What kinds of agency do different people have when SARS-CoV2 is still circulating and mutating, and not everyone is equally immunized or impervious to serious disease or death? How do we navigate our local spaces pervaded by systemic racism, or national and international spaces attacked by reactionary forces? These frays in our mutual trust return us to our mutual dependency and make Kukla’s book timely—perhaps even more timely now than when it was written. Kukla’s vision for a kind of flexible but thoughtful planning that redresses injustices is needed.
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more than ever. So is their paean to urban life, which reminds us of the best that can come out of living together in contemporary cities.

NOTES
1. I use wishful to indicate Kukla’s concluding proposal for how cities should be—although they describe their conclusion with the usual scholarly terms normative and prescriptive, I find these two words at odds with the radically inclusive, open-minded approach of their book.


Rethinking City Living
Quill R Kukla
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

I want to begin by gushing a bit. All six of the authors who have engaged here with my book, *City Living*, are intellectual heroes of mine. I have studied and admired and been inspired by the work of each of them. Moreover, all of them have read the book generously, carefully, charitably, and with their distinctive minds on display. I am so grateful for this gift, and it is an almost indescribably deep and delightful privilege to converse with them here. There is no chance that I can respond to all of the rich issues they have raised in one short essay. I have had to content myself with picking out one or two points from each response to discuss further. But these engagements have given me excellent fuel for multiple future developments of the work that I did in *City Living*.

Shen-yi Liao and Thi Nguyen both focus their comments on specific sorts of urban niches, looking at ways in which they fall short of supporting and expressing spatial agency. Liao picks up on my discussion of the fact that children have very few territories in cities, and argues that even playgrounds, which seem like paradigmatic territories for children, don’t really support children’s spatial agency, given the norms we enforce for how to use them. Nguyen focuses on gentrified spaces, writing from his distinctively aesthetic point of view, and developing my suggestion that these are often homogenized and hostile to spatial agency.

I adore Liao’s focus on children’s agency, which is a topic I mention several times in the book but don’t develop. I am planning an in-depth exploration of children’s agency in a future work, and I am so grateful to Liao for helping me think more about it. Liao argues that adults impose unnecessary norms on children for how they should use and interact with space, and police their use of space, even within their “own” places, for instance by insisting that slides are “for” sliding down, not climbing up. Adults control the “proper” use of spaces earmarked for children. As Liao nicely puts it, bouncing off Nguyen’s work, we make spaces for children in which they can play games, that sculpt and constrain their agency in ways that are designed top-down, but we deny them spaces to be used as toys, which would allow creative free play. It is not unreasonable to do some sculpting of children’s agency, to help them develop into adults who can competently navigate and feel at home in adult spaces.

But we should explore the ethical limits of adults’ desire to shape and discipline their children into specific sorts of people.

I’ve argued that spatial agency—the right and capacity to move through, occupy, and creatively shape space—is its own, independent axis of justice. Spatial agency is important instrumentally, because where we are located and where we can go shapes other goods relevant to justice such as our health, income, and lifespan. But one of the central points of *City Living* is that, as embodied and spatially embedded beings, the ability to use, be at home in, and move through space is valuable to us for its own sake. We all need territories, mobility, and spaces that we can creatively use and shape to our needs. We all need to be able to express ourselves in space. Against this background, Liao’s discussion points to what I think is a deep ethical problem with how adults generally treat children: we routinely deny children this spatial agency, almost completely. As a culture, we don’t take their need for territory or their right to mobility as values at all. We think it is routine and appropriate that adults get to decide where children go, how they use their bodies, and how they interact with space. We exercise extreme spatial apartheid, separating adults’ and children’s spaces. We create spaces for children, such as playgrounds, theme parks, science museums, toy stores, and schools, but all these spaces are highly choreographed with rigid place ballets. “Well-behaved” children keep to this choreography, and their “mis”-uses of space are coded as transgressive and unruly. Children are not allowed, generally, to pick where they go.
or how they get there, or what they do in and to space. I'd like to suggest that this is a legitimate human rights violation. Freedom of movement and the ability to exercise creative agency in and over space is a basic human need and good.

Children's use of space often feels disruptive to adults. One interpretation of this disruption is that children "don't know how to behave" yet. We may be tolerant of or annoyed by this lack of discipline, but either way, we take it as a lack, as something to be minimized and overcome. But another interpretation of their spatial disruptiveness is that they have radically different perceptions of salience and different affordances than adults do. In City Living, I argued that dogs (and even more so) cats have different relationships to space than we do: for them, territories and places worth attending to may be defined by smell and texture; small, high spots may show up as good places to sit and nap; and so forth. Given that such relationships to space are variable, would we expect young children to share saliences, affordances, and spatial values with adults? And if we acknowledge that these things are shaped differently for children, then isn't it a fundamental challenge to their embodied autonomy to choreograph their movements according to adult standards?

Children need to be kept safe within reason, but as Liao nicely points out, we tend to apply stringently low-risk tolerances to them that we don’t apply to ourselves, and to be far too willing to compromise their autonomy in doing so. We in fact weaponize our responsibility to keep kids safe, turning into a tool to constrain their mobility and agency and to make their bodies convenient for us. We need to take it as a value in its own right to let children move through, territorialize, and creatively use and remake space. This does not mean that children should be able to use any space however they want, or even that adult-only spaces are uniformly inappropriate. As I argued in my book, spatial agency and the right to the city require access to a wide range of different kinds of territories, not access to or freedom within all territories. We need to take children's need for and right to spatial agency as seriously as their need for and right to being kept safe.

Nguyen builds on my claim that gentrification tends to homogenize spaces, by designing them for hypothetical users with money, rather than letting them be responsive to and shaped by the needs and agency of actual residents. He is certainly reading me right when he suggests that my reference to "quirky" coffee shops and the like was ironic; the same basic "quirky" aesthetic is now depressingly reproduced in gentrifying neighborhoods around the world. Gentrification, as Nick Smith argued, is a globalizing force, eliminating difference and creating a bland, universalized landscape of consumerism. I love Nguyen's suggestion that sites like Pinterest are co-constitutive with this aesthetic. These homogenized spaces are depressing and do not scaffold agency, and this is true not just for their users but for their creators. Such spaces are the material manifestation of no one's dream or vision; they are created to generate a market, not to express a passion. This homogenization makes it hard for them to be grippy as territories. There is nothing here to hold us in a place, to make us feel like it is our place. When "everyone" is an insider, no one is, as there is nothing distinctive here upon which to build embodied community.

It is worth noting (and fully consistent with Nguyen's discussion) that what we count as a "neutral" aesthetic, designed to extract money from any "hypothetical" user, is in fact marked not only by class, as is obvious, but also by race, ability, and norms of gender conformity. We should reflect on whose tastes and comfort we take as "neutral" and who we are ultimately building landscapes for. The Ikea-like aesthetic that Nguyen describes strongly signals whiteness and Eurocentrism. "Neutral" environments may (or may not) be technically accessible to wheelchair users, but regardless, they are built around the proportions, affordances, and capacities of standard, normative bodies. Some of these spaces are marked as masculine (sports bars), some as feminine (typical clothing boutiques), and some as scrupulously neutral (coffee shops), but they are generally not queer or challenging in any way of gender norms. When we build landscapes in which "anyone" (with money!) will be comfortable and will want to consume, we remove the possibility for the generation of creative spaces that can be territories for people with non-normative bodies, social identities, or even aesthetics.

Alexis Shotwell provides an anarchist vision of how to collaboratively and collectively create cities and build the right to the city, which is fully in line with my vision in City Living and which extends that vision in exciting ways. To her points about the collaborative production of spaces, I just want to add that the causal arrow goes both ways here; in order to engage in this sort of anarchist organizing and creating, we need the right sorts of spaces that make these kinds of interactions possible. Part of what was exciting about a place like Köpi, which I explored in the book, is that it made this sort of collaborative anarchist work possible through its material infrastructure. Privatized suburbs shaped around isolating domestic spaces, at the other extreme, throw up physical barriers to this sort of coming together and nonhierarchical interaction, although the rapid rise of virtual spaces on the internet goes some distance toward overcoming such barriers.

Shotwell describes a serious limitation of my project, with which I really need to grapple in my future research. She asks whether my analysis applies to places other than big cities, and takes me to task (gently and kindly) for my lack of attention to smaller cities and towns and rural spaces. To an extent, I feel able to answer this challenge. The general philosophical framework, which is the focus of chapter 1, concerns how agents and spaces constitute one another in general. Here, there is nothing specific to cities. My analyses of ecological ontologies, niches, territories, and stances, for instance, are meant to apply to any agents, all of whom are spatially embedded, even including nonhuman animals. So I do think that I have not ignored non-city spaces in this sense. Meanwhile, my analyses of the phenomenology and agential consequences of proximity, pace, etc. are specific to fairly large cities, because I am trying to get at the particularized ways in which urban spaces and urban dwellers distinctively make one another. And my analyses of Washington, DC, Berlin, and Johannesburg are in no way
intended to generalize beyond those specific cities. I don’t see this as a limitation of the book, but as an outgrowth of my commitment to dwelling in the empirical specificity of particular spaces and exploring their embodied logic. I write about big cities, not to philosophically or practically devalue other spaces, but simply because they are what I love, and my methodology, which involves dwelling and lingering in spaces and trying to get a feel for their place, is essentially one of loving attention.

But in another sense, the responses I just gave to Shotwell’s challenge are too quick and easy. Her call to extend my account to other spaces is important, because cities and other kinds of spaces, including ex-urbs, farmlands, and industrial towns, for instance, are themselves deeply co-constituting. It is a major methodological and theoretical commitment of my book to think ecologically, but just as human and nonhuman dwellers are ecologically embedded in niches within cities, cities themselves are ecologically embedded within larger networks of places. I cannot really claim to be satisfactorily capturing the logic of a city unless I explore its relationship to these other sorts of spaces, without which it would take a very different form, and which it reaches out and shapes. One cannot thoroughly understand city space without understanding how it has mutually dependent relations with farmlands, industrialized border towns, exurban office parks, and so forth. Cities are not isolated or self-supporting entities driven by an internal logic, and treating them as such recreates something like the city-as-organism view that I critique in City Living. Hence it is a real limitation of my book, I think, that it fails to explore these connections and dependencies. My methodology involved extended immersion in the spaces I studied, and I had neither the resources nor the temperament to do this for villages, exurbs, and the like. As my interests turn more and more towards nonhuman agency, I do hope to have a chance to do this kind of immersive work in rural spaces, at a minimum.

I certainly agree with Sharon Meagher’s push against allowing anyone, especially those traditionally in power, to gatekeep what counts as philosophy. I do take my project to be a philosophical one, in the context of which I bring the tools and sensibilities and the concern for empirical detail and fieldwork of geographers to bear, in order to illuminate what I take to be philosophical questions about agency, territory, ontology, and spatial logic.

The divergence between Meagher and me that seems most worth exploring to me here is in her reading of Plato and Rousseau. Meagher reads both philosophers as ultimately thinking that we can transcend place, and that philosophical thinking is place-independent. I see both philosophers as crucial sources of and predecessors to my commitment to the idea that there is no such thing as thinking independent of place, and that philosophy is fundamentally emplaced. (Indeed, I originally planned City Living to open with a chapter on Rousseau and the ineliminability of place to thinking in his writing.)

Meagher writes, “The analogy of the cave and Plato’s theory of the forms suggests that the philosophical truth is independent from place, that philosophical truths are obtained through the escape of place that dialectical thinking affords.” But this seems wrong to me. When the philosopher escapes the cave, he doesn’t leave place altogether. Rather, it is absolutely essential that he moves to a place with a certain kind of sunlight. It is the place itself that enables him to see. It’s not as though the inside of the cave is a place and the outside is not, nor as though a barrier-free view is less materially specific than a barred view. And this insistence on the relevance of place and how it shapes philosophical thought carries itself throughout the dialogues, with the sites of thinking and philosophizing usually much better developed. Plato always embodies his philosophy; he writes not in an abstract and impersonal voice, but in the voices of particular people, who are handsome, ugly, strong, young, old, or whatever it may be. But even more relevantly, these bodies are always placed: in the jail, at the market, at a drunken party, at the port. These settings invariably shape what is said and the structure of the conversation. So I see Plato as a critical ally in my quest to reveal the ineliminability of place to any agency, including the agency of thinking and talking about philosophy.

I am at least as suspicious of Meagher’s claim that Rousseau thinks that “philosophy can escape environmental influence entirely.” Rousseau thinks that people from different climates will always think differently, that walking structures reflection, and that the truly free man [sic] must be raised by being immersed in a series of highly controlled environments that have been designed in painstaking detail. I take Rousseau as a paradigm of someone for whom thinking is routed in the sensuous and in the body, and for him, bodies and wills are fundamentally shaped by the climate, pace, crowdedness, and access to nature afforded by a place. Rousseau and Plato, along with Descartes and the Marquis de Sade, are among the philosophers who I believe understood that thinking could not be separated from its emplacement.

Meagher is right, of course, that Rousseau in particular was deeply suspicious of the city as a site for philosophical thinking; he believed that cities, like theaters, obfuscated truth and led thinking astray. My book remains neutral on whether cities are in general especially good places in which to do philosophy. However, City Living itself is a work of philosophy (as Meagher herself insists), and it is one that could only have been formulated and developed in cities. So at least in my case, the urban setting was essential to my own philosophical thinking. I thus disagree with Meagher’s suggestion that philosophizing in general transcends place, and I disagree with Rousseau that cities are distinctively inhospitable to philosophical thought.

Daniela Sandler and Simona Capisani each push me to think harder about how material threats to cities—particularly COVID and climate change—affect the picture of city living that I develop in the book.

Capisani reminds us that cities are both vulnerable to and a source of climate change, and that vulnerability to harm from climate change is heavily racialized and otherwise tracks other axes of oppression. This is a pressing dimension of the materiality of cities that I did not address in the book. As
she points out, Capisani has elsewhere defended the idea that people have a right of access to livable space, and that climate change is threatening this right, ultimately for all of us but especially for those vulnerable to environmental injustice. Capisani’s environmental lens is a crucial one, and her point about the right to livable space serves as an important enhancement to my own emphasis on spatial agency, spatial justice, and the right to the city. I argue in the book that the right to inhabit space is a basic human right. Capisani generously suggests that my “account of spatial agency helps to illuminate ways in which harmful climate mobility outcomes can be understood as wrongs warranting address and can help clarify the content of our obligations to those who are vulnerable,” and this seems both right and important. Climate change threatens to make many people’s spaces unlivable, both in the biological sense that they may cease to support human life, and in the human sense closer to what I explore in the book, that they may cease to be usable territories that support agency.

But (as Capasani would surely agree) merely moving people to less vulnerable areas or radically reshaping spaces without community involvement will also undermine people’s spatial agency, taking away their control over where and how they live. This suggests that the development of sustainable neighborhoods and the quest for climate justice need to center community involvement and community input for how to protect neighborhoods and make them more sustainable, while retaining their ecological character as territories for those who live there. To put the point starkly, simply tearing down urban ecosystems and replacing existing neighborhoods with gleaming LEED® buildings designed in a corporate office is not a just or humane solution to the environmental crises and inequalities facing cities. It is worth noting that social cohesion in a neighborhood is one of the best protections against the effects of natural disasters, so strategies that do not work to preserve and enhance social cohesion are far from optimal.

Finally, Daniela Sandler’s exceptionally generous reading of my book was seriously moving to me. She does a better job than I have done myself of articulating my method, values, and intellectual commitments in writing. Sandler challenges me to think about how “social meanings” work in concert with spaces and social agency to create spatial meanings. She points out that people can resignify space, for instance, through musical traditions or through virtual habitation. I think this is right, and important. Think for example of the rich tradition in Black geographies of reading the Blues as giving form and meaning to spaces in the American South through a “Blues epistemology.” I would argue that such social meanings still ultimately shape spaces in material and embodied ways. Even when things like art and music do not happen in the spaces they shape, they do their shaping in part by inflecting how those in the spaces experience, move around in, use, and occupy them. I am not sure we would count these interventions as shaping or signifying space if there weren’t material consequences for the spaces themselves. That said, Sandler is certainly right that attending to these sorts of aesthetic and cultural imaginings of space can enrich our understanding of the significance and logic of a space. Sandler asks me, “What kinds of agency do different people have when SARS-CoV2 is still circulating and mutating, and not everyone is equally immunized or impervious to serious disease or death?” This is such a crucial and pressing question. In a recent article, I explored the impact of the early pandemic on urban space. But there, I was exploring how cities had become fragmented, unspontaneous, and regimented by pandemic mitigation measures. Now, in the summer of 2022, we have a quite different problem, which I am eager to explore in near-future writing. Much of city life has returned to its pre-pandemic form, but COVID has created new fragmentations in who can access spaces and who can claim territory where. Most city spaces have become long-term unsafe for immunocompromised and elderly people, and for those who care for them. In many different countries, there is now a stark social division of people into a majority who have decided to return to pre-pandemic embodied life and just accept the ongoing increased morbidity and risk, and a substantial minority who have had to retreat, in a seemingly permanent way, to isolated spaces, often building new forms of community online or through small-group interactions with different rules for how to use space.

In City Living, I argued that spatial justice does not require that everyone have access to or feel at home in every space, since territorialization can be valuable. Rather, a just city owes all of its residents a wide range of diverse spaces and territories, sufficient to enable a well-rounded and flourishing life. It seems to me that it is not a realistic goal, at this point, to remake all city spaces in the COVID era so that everyone can be safe in them. There is genuine value to the return of crowded dance floors, bustling restaurants, and the buzz of a full and uncontrolled urban space. However, it is simply not acceptable to reintroduce these things and tell the many people who really cannot risk using them that they must fend for themselves in their homes or online, or figure out how to build safe spaces in cracks with no support. We must put our resources and our creativity into building a wide range of safer and more controlled spaces, even while we let other spaces return to their crowded pre-pandemic chaos. We also need to make basic services safely available to everyone. Just as doctors’ offices, city courts, and the like must be wheelchair accessible, they should also now be accessible to the immunocompromised. The fact that there is value to allowing people to dance up against one another at concerts is just no reason at all to not require KN95 masks and social distancing and outdoor waiting areas in spaces providing basic civic services.

People tend to talk about pandemic measures in universalist terms—some people argue that “everyone” should be masked and avoid indoor shared spaces, shaming those who are less risk averse; others argue that any such restrictions have outlived their time and are unjust impositions. I think we need a more fine-grained approach, with different norms and practices and place ballets for different spaces. We need to make basic services relatively safe. But we also need to create and protect spaces of joy, celebration, protest, socializing, and so forth for people who need enhanced safety. Moreover, these safer spaces should be appealing and lively enough in their own right
that we do not institute a kind of age- and immune-system-apartheid, but rather make them worth spending time in for a wide range of people. We can have packed concerts and outdoor book groups, indoor restaurants and socially distanced outdoor patios. Partly, I think this vision involves permanently reclaiming huge amounts of outdoor space as for people and city living, rather than for cars or as buffers around privatized spaces.

Sandler and Capisani point us to the inescapable truth that climate change and the pandemic have and will continue to shape urban spaces, and more specifically, they are almost certain to enhance power dynamics and inequalities within urban spaces and to introduce new ones. I hope that I provided useful tools in City Living for thinking about how to make cities more just and inclusive, and for taking the ethics and politics of spatial agency seriously in the face of such challenges. But this work remains to be done.

NOTES

BOOK REVIEW
Conscience in Reproductive Health Care: Prioritizing Patient Interests
Reviewed by Caitlin Reichard
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In Conscience in Reproductive Health Care, Carolyn McLeod responds to the growing global trend of health-care professionals refusing to provide legal and professionally accepted reproductive services on the grounds that it conflicts with their conscience (International Women’s Health Coalition, 2017). These services include conducting or providing abortions, emergency contraception, and even in vitro fertilization (IVF). She develops her central thesis from legal theorist Paul Miller’s (2011) conceptualization of a fiduciary relationship, and argues that because health-care providers are gatekeepers to health-care services, they are fiduciaries to patients and public health with a duty to prioritize the best interest of their beneficiaries over their own interests or beliefs. She calls this the “prioritizing approach” and argues that it should guide policy and regulations on conscientious refusals. She narrows the scope of her argument to “typical refusals,” which are “refusals that target requests by patients for a service that, in the mind of the objector, threatens unborn life” (9). Yet, throughout her book, McLeod humbly acknowledges the moral complexity of conscientious refusals and does not think that it is as simple as telling health-care professionals to “park your conscience at the door.” Thus, she does not say that all conscientious objections in health care are morally unacceptable but holds that most of them should be severely restricted.

Carolyn McLeod is a professor and chair of philosophy at Western University in Canada. She is an expert in applied ethics, feminist philosophy, and moral philosophy. Her philosophical research centers on pressing issues in public policy, particularly matters that concern the creation or dissolution of families with children. She’s been directly involved in policy discussions in Canada about the right of health-care professionals to make conscientious objections, public funding for IVF, and improvements to adoption systems. She received financial support from the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) grant, which allowed her to establish the Conscience Research Group and to host educational events, including one where she and her colleagues were educated by health-care policy makers from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Canada. In her acknowledgements, McLeod mentions that she was first inspired to investigate conscientious refusals while teaching in Tennessee, after a health-care professional informed her of a case in which a patient was afraid to return to a physician who had conscientiously refused her request for an abortion.

The structure of the book is divided into two parts. The first part considers whether conscience has value in health care in order to understand what is at stake for health-care providers (who object on its behalf). In chapter 1, McLeod asserts that conscience has value in health care as it allows health-care professionals to have moral integrity. This itself has personal and social value. However, McLeod offers a novel, alternative interpretation of “moral integrity” than the common interpretation in bioethics, which has been that it promotes “inner unity.” Instead, according to McLeod, the value in conscience lies in encouraging us to “take our moral values seriously and to revise our values when they do not fit with what we actively endorse” (20). She calls this the “Socio-political, Dynamic view” of conscience (21). This question is foundational because if conscience has no value, then health-care professionals should not be able to refuse providing legal services to protect their conscience.

The book then shifts to considerations of the patient for the remainder of the first part. Chapter 2 takes head-on the argument that patients are merely inconvenienced by conscientious refusals since patients can simply receive services elsewhere. McLeod argues that patients are actually deeply harmed by these typical refusals. She supports her claims by considering the power dynamic between health-care professionals and patients and the well-documented stigma that patients experience when they request services like abortions or emergency
contraceptive. Thus, she claims that typical refusals are likely to cause harm by threatening patients’ moral identity, sense of security, or reproductive autonomy (55). Chapter 3 narrows in on the consequential damage to patients’ trust in health-care professionals and health professions, more broadly. McLeod argues that damage to trust from typical refusals is very likely to occur as it undermines the key features of trust: reliance on the competence, goodwill, and an expectation of shared values of the health-care professional (68). While Lynch (2008) proposed a system of “Morals Matching”—an institutional compromise in which licensing boards enable ethical “subspecializations” and help patients match with physicians with similar moral values—McLeod points out that this is founded only on trust as an expectation of shared values, but does not ensure the competence or goodwill of the health-care provider (79). Therefore, avenues for distrust remain. The first part of the book concludes that important interests are at stake for both the objectors and patients in regulating refusals in reproductive health care.

Naturally, one might think that devising a compromise between the parties would be a promising solution to the problem of respecting both patients’ interests and providers’ conscience. However, in the second part of the book, McLeod rejects this approach and defends her central thesis—the prioritizing approach—which claims that health-care professionals as fiduciaries must prioritize the interests of their patient and the public. Chapter 4 is where McLeod critiques the compromise approach. The conventional compromise in conscientious refusals is that the objector will provide a referral to a health-care professional that is willing to honor the patient’s request. However, McLeod’s analysis of compromise theories indicates that the conventional compromise is unlikely to be a “good” or even a “true” compromise for many objectors in typical refusals, in which the objector is trying to protect the life of the unborn. An additional criticism McLeod makes of the compromise approach is that it presents the interests of objectors and patients as being equal, which fails to recognize the professional role and fiduciary duties of the objector. Thus, she proposes and defends the prioritizing approach in chapters 5 and 6. In doing so, she enlightens the bioethical issue of conscientious objection with a novel contribution by legal scholarship on fiduciaries. Chapter 5 considers cases where the request for the offending service comes from a current patient, someone with whom the objector is in an established fiduciary relationship, while chapter 6 considers cases where the request comes from a perspective patient, someone who is a member of the public that the objector is licensed to serve.

McLeod makes three claims in chapter 5: (1) Health-care professionals are fiduciaries while serving a gatekeeping role. (2) Therefore, they have a duty of loyalty to their patients, and (3) this duty prohibits them from making typical objections that jeopardize the health interests of their patient. She notes that the fiduciary duty of loyalty to patients does not permit health-care professionals to misuse their power to further their own moral integrity by invoking a conscientious refusal. She then tackles the scenario where the objector believes they have two patients’ interests to consider: the one requesting the service and the unborn fetus or embryo. Here, McLeod frames the argument in terms of who grants health-care professionals authority to intervene on behalf of patients. In the case of competent patients, it is determined by the patient. In the case of incompetent patients (like an unborn fetus/embryo), this is determined by the law. She contends that “the law or the state would not have conferred it on [the health care provider] either, since it permits the service that the objector refuses to provide” (143). (By definition, a conscientious refusal asks for protection to object to a legal, professionally accepted service.) In this scenario, while the objector may think they are prioritizing one of their patient’s interests, this authority actually falls outside of what has been bestowed on them by the patient(s) or law. This chapter defends the prioritizing approach to regulating conscientious refusals by health-care professionals. It highlights that they are gatekeepers to medical services, which makes them fiduciaries who must be loyal to and prioritize the interests of their beneficiaries.

Chapter 6 focuses on the broader duty that health-care professionals have to the public and fidelity to certain abstract purposes: promoting public health and equitable access to health care. McLeod explains that this duty is a type of fiduciary duty as health-care professionals have discretionary authority over the practical interests of the public and the public is structurally vulnerable to them abusing this power due to the dynamics of the clinical relationship. She notes that the fidelity to purposes, instead of an individual, makes health-care professionals’ duty to the public unique from that they have to a patient. Because of this duty, health-care professionals’ freedom to choose prospective patients on the grounds of conscience must be significantly restricted, according to McLeod. In conclusion, the second part of the book argues that the prioritizing approach to regulating typical refusals is morally justified. This is true regardless of whether the patient could access services elsewhere and whether the refusals occur at the individual level of patient-physician relationship or at a more macro level. Finally, she argues that regulations and policies should prioritize the interests of patients and the public over the conscience of health-care professionals as this recognizes the fiduciary duties that health-care professionals owe to these parties due to the power they have over them.

The book offers strong, important messages in its themes of procreation, power, and prestige. McLeod chose to evaluate conscience refusals in reproductive health care, though refusals also occur in areas regarding end of life, such as Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS). She narrowed her scope to typical refusals, which are refusals to provide services that the objector believes threatens unborn life. This scope was important as it allowed her to respond to a prevalent, worldwide problem. This allowed her to make specific claims that could also offer general insight on how to regulate other refusals. Her scope highlighted a mechanism that restricts individuals’ right to not reproduce, which speaks to how society values and regulates those with the capacity to become pregnant. Finally, the prioritizing approach is also more provocative when applied to reproductive health care as opposed to other conscientious refusals. For instance, the “mere inconvenience” argument would
not be posed in the case of PAS since those requesting such services are undoubtedly accepted to be suffering. Yet, emergency contraceptive and abortions allow us to have a more nuanced conversation as controversy arises over the direness of unwanted or unexpected pregnancy. It also allows us to scrutinize how conscientious refusals in reproductive health care are directed at certain types of people, not just the health-care service. This occurs as refusals may discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals and cisgender women if an aspect of their identity does not suit the objector’s conception of appropriate morality, sexuality, and gender norms. Essentially, highlighting procreation promotes a multidimensional discussion on contemporary, sociopolitical issues.

Power is intertwined in conscientious refusals as it is always held by the objector. McLeod chose to focus on health-care professionals because they are the gatekeepers to health-care services, which bestows them with power. They have the discretion of whether or not to provide a service, which is a choice to either work for or against their patient’s interests. McLeod highlights physicians and pharmacists throughout her book, but also suggests that mid-level providers (physician’s assistants and nurse practitioners) and midwives can hold this role. While some of these positions come with social power, such as prestige and high income, all of them have power as fiduciaries for their patients and the public. McLeod contributes to bioethical discussion about conscientious refusals by emphasizing the power of health-care providers, particularly physicians, which has been underexamined in previous conversations. Drawing from legal literature, she explains that fiduciaries hold a special kind of power, which comes with moral responsibilities. For these reasons, it is important to severely restrict when protection is given to objectors on behalf of their conscience.

Finally, McLeod’s central thesis is one about priority. While she acknowledges that both parties’ interests are morally substantial, the interests of the patients should take priority because of the fiduciary duties that conscientious objectors owe to patients. She would agree with accommodations for conscientious objectors only when it would pose no threat to patients’ health-care interest. However, in the case of abortions or contraception, McLeod showed that in all likelihood, protecting objectors’ conscience will set back patients’ health interests, even if patients could go to another professional nearby to obtain services. Conscious protection in these cases is therefore morally problematic, and the primary objective of regulating refusals should be to protect patients.

This book is written for scholars, activists, and any reader who may have specific questions about the morality of conscientious objections in reproductive health care. McLeod uses philosophical support to offer a moral framework upon which future policy and activism can engage to provide socially just health care. Each chapter is thoroughly written in a way that allows it to stand alone as a reference, and I found the writing to be largely accessible, being a reader outside of traditional philosophy scholarship myself. After reading this book, the prioritizing approach clearly stands above the compromise approach as the more moral and just approach for those with the capacity to become pregnant. Especially in the current time where Roe v. Wade is being challenged in the United States, health activists should embrace McLeod’s thesis to fight for policies that take seriously the misuse of power that occurs in most conscientious refusals.

CONTRIBUTORS

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FROM THE EDITOR

Lori Gallegos
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

One of the jobs of philosophers is to reveal important truths that have been, incidentally or intentionally, covered over. Each of the four authors in this issue take up the task of excavating and interpreting histories, influences, and identities that have been erased, ignored, or hidden.

The issue begins with an essay by Eric Chavez that resists an essentializing historiography of some of the most important Mexican philosophers of the early twentieth century, the Flores Magón brothers, whose work and political movement—the Partido Liberal Mexicano—helped to inspire the Mexican Revolution. The essay, titled "(Re)covering the Indigenous Affinities of the Partido Liberal Mexicano," explores Indigenous cultural influences—largely unacknowledged in the scholarly literature—on the Magón brothers’ writing and political work. Chavez invites us to examine these “Indigenous affinities” with a critical lens so as to avoid applying overly simplistic categorizations to the Magón brothers’ work. The publication of this essay coincides with the one hundredth anniversary of the death Ricardo Flores Magón (1873–1922).

The second article in this issue, written by Alexander V. Stehn, resists the suppression of the linguistic identities of his students at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. In the essay, titled “Philosophizing in Tongues: Cultivating Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy in an Introduction to Latin American Philosophy Course,” Stehn argues that the Anglocentric monolingualism that structures most educational institutions in the US fails to recognize, honor, and engage the bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy of students like his. He argues that although his bilingual students are a large numerical majority, monolingual educational programs unfairly minoritize them. In response to these concerns, Stehn shares his bilingual course design, his experiences in teaching philosophy bilingually, and his students’ reflections on their experience in his course.

This issue concludes with two short essays in conversation about how best to interpret the significance of recently recovered writings by the Cuban thinker and national hero José Martí, which appear to contradict some of his previous work and challenge standard interpretations of his political philosophy. The author of the first essay, Jorge Camacho, argues that these writings reveal that Martí had a vision of society that was hierarchical and ethnocentric, leading him to support policies in the interest of the white, Western, modernizing state. Susana Nuccetelli argues to the contrary that we should continue to see Martí as committed to rejecting racism. She proposes that we draw a distinction between what Martí said in particular writings and what he should have said in light of his own philosophical commitments to Krausism.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the fall 2023 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic of style as it relates 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.

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 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

The deadline for the spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. The 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

The APA Studies 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

ARTICLES

(Re)covering the Indigenous Affinities of the Partido Liberal Mexicano: Kneading Spivak into the Philosophy and Writings of the Flores Magón Brothers and the PLM

Eric Chavez
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

The Flores Magón brothers are undoubtedly some of the most contested figures in the history of the Mexican Revolution. Scholars such as James D. Cockcroft categorize them as intellectual precursors to the Mexican Revolution. Other scholars such as Juan Gómez-Quijones deem the magonistas “sebradores,” or sowers of seeds, not just for the Mexican Revolution, but—given the transnational persecution and character of the magonistas—also precursors to the Chicanismo Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet other scholars like Mitchell Cowen Verter and Colin M. MacLachlan place greater emphasis on the European anarchist influence upon the principles of the magonistas and their political movement, the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM). What is troubling is that neither the historiography nor the historical memory produced by this literature seriously considers the Indigenous influences on the Flores Magón brothers or the Indigenous presence within the PLM. The Indigenous influence and presence within this revolutionary movement have been neglected and conceived within a European paradigm of liberalism, anarchy, or communism.

In this essay, I argue that this negligence by historians of the PLM’s Indigenous affinities creates a kind of epistemic injustice against Indigenous groups while simultaneously reifying an Eurocentric perspective. By exploring these Indigenous affinities within the PLM’s praxis, this essay aims to uncover an untapped emancipatory potential of the PLM’s philosophy beyond the trappings of a single ideological register. This is important because Indigenous peoples are systematically erased from our shared knowledge of history. When indigeneity is mentioned, it remains a mere backdrop and a counterpoint for a Eurocentric narrative of progress. Therefore, any attempts at decolonization without critically examining our Indigenous past, as well as our Indigenous present, will undoubtedly revert to a neo-colonizing project.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I will utilize Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of a shifting representation between Darstellung and Vertretung to trace the Indigenous affinities within the PLM and their praxis of liberation. Spivak’s postcolonial approach generates a critical lens for examining the PLM’s Indigenous affinities. For instance, when uncovering how the PLM represented an Indigenous heritage in their writings and rhetoric, this representation of indigeneity also enacts a shift in political representation from proxy to portrait: from Vertretung to Darstellung. Spivak defines Vertretung as treading in someone else’s shoes, “as much a substitution as representation.” Spivak defines Darstellung as a “placing there” and as the “concept of representation as staging.” In other words, there are two types of representation, one done by proxy or by substitution, and another done by creating a re-presentation or a portrait of those we claim to represent. Importantly, Spivak notes that both kinds of representation cannot be done without essentializing the constituency we claim to represent. As Spivak stipulates, “It is not possible to be non-essentialist . . . the subject is always centered.” She continues to clarify this inherent relationship between representation and essentialism by saying that “the relationship between the two kinds of representation brings in, also, the use of essentialism because no representation can take . . . place without essentialism.”

With this warning, Spivak helps us maintain a critical attitude and leads us to ask if the PLM, by representing Indigenous notions of communalism, land, and liberty, was not simply essentializing Mexico’s Indigenous past as a mere instrument for the party’s propaganda or more truly representing their political ideals from an Indigenous heritage.

LIBERALISM AND THE COLONIAL STATE IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, agreed upon in the Plan of Iguala. However, French intervention did not allow the Mexican nation-state to be run by a Mexican-native leader until Benito Juárez defeated Emperor Maximilian in 1867. From 1524 to 1867, Mexico’s territorial and political landscape gradually shifted from an Indigenous social polity to a European-Catholic society under the auspices of the Constitution of 1857 and the Laws of Reform. The concept of property, of course, was key to implementing liberal reforms during Juárez’s administration. Mariano Otero, a young, liberal politician and jurist during the 1840s, quickly identified the acquisition of private property as the “generating principle” of Mexico’s future society. This “generating principle” became the antithesis of the traditional communal way of life practiced by most Indigenous people. Collective access to lands, not the private holding of land, was how Indigenous peoples understood and navigated the world.

Mexican anthropologist Benjamin Maldonado explains the notion of territory among Oaxacan Indigenous tribes as follows: “This territory is the domain of the community, composed of interrelated families mediated through ritual ties and a community life based upon reciprocity.” This notion of territory based upon reciprocity and community entirely runs counter to the liberal ideals of individualism, social progress, and economic development. The notion of reciprocity and community, foundational to Flores Magón and the PLM, was one way to enunciate an Indigenous way of life—an alternative third space—within Porfirio Díaz’s regime, which began in 1876.
The period from 1867 to 1876 in Mexico is known as the "Restored Republic," when Juárez and his successor, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, expanded the state’s presence. Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau explain that “the Restored Republic began reorganizing the educational system, emphasizing mathematics, science, and ‘pragmatic knowledge’ over the humanities.”12 Joseph and Buchenau conclude that “the Restored Republic paved the way for a more muscular centralized state, albeit one clothed in the guise of liberal federalism.”13 Thus, when Díaz rose to power, he not only inherited the liberal tradition created by Juárez but also inherited an established system of centralized government based on European models.

Even though Díaz was Lerdo’s nemesis, Díaz promoted himself as Juárez's rightful heir in the liberal tradition. According to Charles A. Hale, a renowned historian of Mexican liberalism during the nineteenth century, “The political thought of the era is best characterized as a triumphant and official liberalism, in contention with positivist concepts and yet gradually transformed by them.”14 In other words, as Hale argues, “Liberalism after 1867 became transformed from an ideology in combat with an inherited set of institutions, social arrangements, and values into a unifying political myth.”15 This appropriation of liberalism—this pre-established unifying ideology—to fit positivist ends served Díaz to justify his ascendancy to the presidency in the wake of the Battle of Tecoac and the Plan of Tuxtepec during the winter of 1876, where Díaz’s forces roundly defeated Lerdo’s claim as the rightful inheritor of the Juárez regime.

In a tragic sense of historical irony, both Juárez and Díaz were born in the state of Oaxaca and came from Indigenous lineage. Nevertheless, both regimes systematically appropriated native communal lands to fit their idea of historical progress. Under the Juárez regime, the Ley Lerdo transferred many communal ejidos into private holdings. Under the Porfiriato, these communal lands were sold to foreign and Mexican investors. The Indigenous notion of comunidad ran counter to the modernization projects of both the Juárez and Díaz regimes. The Indigenous peoples who resisted the implementation of the Ley Lerdo, such as the Mayan in Yucatán and the Yaqui in Sonora, faced violent repression and wars of attrition by the Díaz regime. Although Díaz had agreed on the Plan de Tuxtepec to redress Indigenous peoples’ grievances, the Plan instead served as a political ploy to discredit President Lerdo and justify Díaz’s overthrow of the government. Articles Two and Three of the Plan de Tuxtepec directly attack Lerdo’s legitimacy as president.16 This intense suppression of Díaz’s opponents—Indigenous and liberals alike—allowed Lerdo to assume and consolidate power quickly. Following a desire for the Europeanization of Mexico under the tenets of order and progress, Díaz and his científicos further expropriated Indigenous communal lands, a political process that had begun with Juárez and Lerdo, yet intensified under the Díaz regime. It was in this socio-political context that we witness the emergence of the Partido Liberal Mexicano.

### BIOGRAPHY OF THE FLORES MAGÓN BROTHERS AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF PLM

By looking at the early life of the three Flores Magón brothers—Ricardo, Enrique, and Jesús—and their proximity to an Indigenous way of life, we can see Spivak’s notion of two kinds of political representation: Vertretung and Darstellung. Ricardo—the best known of the brothers—was born to a lower-middle-class mestizo family in the heavily Indigenous state of Oaxaca, in the small town of San Antonio Eloloxchítlan, in the district of Teotitlán, on September 16, 1873. His father, Teodoro, knew how to speak Nahua and was said to have been a descendant of the first Nahua people that migrated into the Cañada region of Oaxaca. Some scholars also state that Teodoro was a Zapotec or a Mazatec, but in any case, it was clear that Teodoro came from a poor, multi-ethnic family. According to biographer José C. Valadés, “Don Teodoro belonged to a very poor family . . . Doña Margarita [Ricardo’s mother] was mestiza, her grandfather was Spanish, possibly Carthaginian.”16 Although Teodoro came to be known as “tata” to their Indigenous neighbors, a prominent symbol of higher-class status and reverence, his respect for the communal way of life espoused by his Indigenous neighbors was seen in the philosophy he shared with his sons. A military veteran of the war against French intervention and then the War of Reform as a liberal fighting the conservative faction, Teodoro was able to live modestly from a military pension. Even though he was more financially stable than his Indigenous neighbors, Teodoro still significantly identified with the Indigenous communal life. According to Enrique Flores Magón’s recollection of his father’s teachings, “All of the lands around every one of our neighboring towns belonged to the community. Every morning we would go out and work the fields. . . . It raises our spirits to know that the work an individual does is for the benefit of all.”19

Another way we can see an early appreciation for an Indigenous heritage is that Ricardo and Enrique adopted the nickname “Guachita” when referring to their mother, Margarita. This nickname can be interpreted to refer to both Margarita’s character as a fiercely loyal mother and a mestiza, a mixed person of Spanish and Indian heritage.20

In a letter from Ricardo to Enrique dated September 24, 1899, Ricardo laments that Guachita was sick with the flu. In this letter, Ricardo connects his mother’s poor health with the horrid working conditions of campesinos and workers in the tobacco fields in the Valle Nacional of Oaxaca. He interprets bad working conditions accompanied by bad health as systematically done by corporate interests to keep the poor masses in a state of servitude:

That is the fruit of the season, added with pneumonia, typhus, and other herbs; those ailments that the inhabitants of Mexico are so accustomed to that they do not even take notice anymore . . . more so the workers from the Valle Nacional, being mistreated and malnourished, do not have the necessary strength to resist these ailments . . . . Those people from the Valle Nacional, Valle Real, Usila, Osumacín, and all those tobacco fields suffer more than being in hell itself.21
The connection between something so personal (your mother getting the flu) and the plight of the working-class Mexican masses displays the deep affinities between the Flores Magón brothers’ upbringing and the oppression of Indigenous campesinos in the fields of Oaxaca.

To be sure, modernity under the Díaz regime was a brutal colonialist project. Indigenous people were supposed to assimilate into the national mestizo imaginary and lose vestiges of pre-modern “savagery.” According to Mexican scholar Benjamin Maldonado Alvarado, “At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a population of about 12 million inhabitants in Mexico of which the majority were Indigenous people living in small rural communities and on haciendas.” In Oaxaca, the Flores Magóns’ home state, most people were Indigenous. According to Francis R. Chassen-López, “In 1878, of the state’s 753,540 inhabitants, approximately 77 percent were Indigenous, 18 percent mestizo, 3 percent black, and 2 percent white. In 1890, the Indigenous population was 78 percent and the black population 1.25 percent.” Just by sheer numbers and proximity, the Flores Magón brothers undoubtedly were exposed to many of the ideologies of communal and reciprocal labor espoused by Indigenous groups in Oaxaca. Such ideology of collectivism would later develop into an entire political movement against the exploitation of Mexican workers by the Porfiriato and foreign capital, as well as a basis for their modification of European models of anarchist and communist thought to fit Indigenous campesinos’ demands for land and liberty.

Still another marker of higher-class status in comparison to their Indigenous neighbors was that the Flores Magón brothers were able to attend school in Mexico City. In 1883, the Flores Magón family moved to Mexico City where Ricardo was able to attend the Escuela Nacional Primaria. Although all Flores Magón brothers would attend law school, only one of them, Jesus, became a lawyer by profession. During their time in Mexico City, however, Ricardo and Enrique openly embraced anti-Porfirián politics and were exposed to communist and radical thinkers from abroad. Thus, given that the Flores Magón brothers did not spend too much time in Oaxaca growing up, many scholars have dismissed any Indigenous influence stemming from their childhood. However, these scholars completely ignore how the Flores Magón brothers understood class antagonisms in Oaxaca and Mexico City, not in the European sense of a homogenous mass of an industrial working class, but in terms of the exploitation of the Indigenous campesino. Their formal education in Mexico City and their communal upbringing in Oaxaca made the Flores Magón brothers acutely aware of the inequalities plaguing both Indigenous campesinos and urban workers.

In a letter from Ricardo to Enrique on September 17, 1899, Ricardo urges his younger brother to take his education seriously: “Begin by reading history, geography, physics, and natural science, Castilian grammar, and only then can you begin to understand philosophy, which is extremely beautiful.” Ricardo and Enrique were positioned to comprehend the reality of oppressed Indigenous people while also having the intellectual faculty to adapt radical philosophies from abroad to fit local needs. Mexican historians Juan Carlos Beas and Manuel Ballesteros argue that “Magonismo is nourished fundamentally by three currents: Mexican liberalism, European anarchism, and Indigenous communalism.” This ability to navigate between their Indigenous influences and Western European philosophies proves how the Flores Magón brothers enacted a dialectics of representation between Vertretung and Darstellung. However, collapsing the Flores Magón brothers to either of these representations would only partially describe their historical experience. Seriously examining the Indigenous affinities in the writings and philosophy of the Flores Magón brothers and kneading these writings with Spivak’s dialectic between Vertretung and Darstellung can help us expand our analytical horizons based on European standards of indigeneity.

**PLM and Its Indigenous Affinities**

What is the PLM? The Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) began as a reaction to the increasing power of the Porfiriato, which completely gutted the liberal Constitution of 1857 and allowed for indefinite reelections. During their time at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City, the Flores Magón brothers joined the “Centro Antireeleccionista Estudiantil” and began to passionately protest against Díaz’s third reelection as president. By creating their own oppositional parties and publications of political manifestos that would accelerate their exile into the United States, the early radicalization of the Flores Magón brothers can be seen as an enactment of the dialectics of representation in the dual sense of treading with and portraying Mexico’s Indigenous campesinos. By forming this dialectic between Vertretung and Darstellung (i.e., the proxy and the portrait), the Flores Magón brothers were able to create a third space of resistance and emancipation from the colonial grip of modernity and European models of anarchism/communism.

The Flores Magón brothers, via liberal clubs, were creating their own identity and third space within the Díaz regime. By the end of the century, Ricardo and Enrique were well-established members of liberal clubs in Mexico City. One of those liberal clubs where Ricardo and Enrique made their mark was the Club Liberal Ponciano Arriaga. On February 5, 1901, the Club Liberal Ponciano Arriaga and other liberal clubs around the nation gathered in San Luis Potosí for the first Gran Congresso Liberal. At this Congress, various local and regional liberal clubs represented fourteen states. The purpose of this Congress was to create the Junta Organizadora to better coordinate anti-reelectionist efforts across the nation. At the same time, the PLM was created as the umbrella organization that would coordinate local liberal clubs under the auspices of the Junta. The Junta, in 1906, was composed by Ricardo Flores Magón, Enrique Flores Magón, Antonio I. Villareal, Práxedes G. Guerrero, Manuel S. Vásquez, Agustín Pacheco, Francisco Manrique, Filiberto Vásquez, Abraham Rico, Teléfesforo Viguerrilla, Felix Rubalcaba, and Cenobio Orozco. Since the Club Liberal Ponciano Arriaga was the most robust and active liberal club at the time, this first coordinating Junta was composed of these select members. Following a communal spirit, the Junta would regularly rotate its members via annual open elections. This way, leadership was not limited to an elite group, with hierarchies minimized and accountability based on a collective sense of agency.
Examining how the PLM identified itself as a political group in opposition to the Díaz regime and how it represented its Indigenous constituency, Spivak’s distinction between Vertretung and Darstellung can be illuminating. It is important to note that using the term magonismo to describe the PLM and its political praxis is a misnomer that counters the PLM’s and the Junta’s philosophy of collective action and communal autonomy. This philosophy of collective action and communal autonomy indicates an Indigenous heritage. It demonstrates how the PLM navigated the relationship between its Indigenous constituency and the Junta Organizadora, treading the line between Vertretung as a proxy and Darstellung as a portrait of indigeneity. To be sure, the principle of communalism was foundational for the PLM. The very first resolution of this Gran Congreso Liberal, a meeting of oppositional parties from all over Mexico that would give official birth to the PLM, reads, “The Congreso Liberal formally declares that it has no personalistic goals, nor alliances of any kind with the more or less salient personalities of the current militant politics of the nation.” Understanding how labels and categories such as liberal, anarchist, and magonismo encapsulate the PLM into a particular ideology, instantiating certain ulterior political motives is crucial. Instead, scholars should try to grant a more complex and organic evolution of the PLM than is usually relegated.

The way the Díaz regime suppressed the PLM and forced them into exile in the United States demonstrates how tenacious and ever-evolving this movement was. The Díaz regime would quickly suppress any opposition, yet the perseverance of the PLM is admirable. Every time the Díaz regime would suppress and imprison the Flores Magón brothers or any other member of the Junta, the PLM’s propaganda would defiantly publish a new journal, albeit under a different moniker. For instance, one of the first newspapers that the Flores Magón brothers edited was El Ahuizote. Díaz quickly suppressed this newspaper, but it was soon revived under the new name of El Hijo del Ahuizote. Predictably, state censorship suppressed this journal as well. However, as a symbol of open defiance, the PLM would further change the name of its newspaper and continue to publish El Niño del Ahuizote, then El Bisnierto del Ahuizote, and so on. This stubborn and adaptable resistance would characterize the Flores Magón brothers until Ricardo died on November 21, 1922, in a prison cell in Leavenworth, Kansas.

This stubbornness and adaptability to oppression is also a shared characteristic with Indigenous ways of communal living and resistance. As Beas and Ballesteros state regarding the role of Indigenous people throughout Mexico’s history: “The Indigenous nations that since ancient times have inhabited the current Mexican territory have been direct actors of the great social convulsions that have shaken the country. From that moment when the first Iberian conqueror laid his foot, cross, blood, and gunpowder on these lands, most of the Indian peoples offered a necessary, tenacious, and violent resistance whose purpose was, and has been, to conserve and recover lands, forests, customs, and life itself.” This recovery of “lands, forests, customs, and life itself” aligns perfectly with the foundational document for PLM’s praxis: the PLM’s official political program signed by the Junta on July 1, 1906.

Thus, using Spivak’s dialectic of representation, I argue that the PLM showed their affinity to Indigenous principles by proxy and portrait. For example, the PLM’s Political Program and Indigenous principles of communalism have similar goals. Notably, Section 48 and Section 50 of the PLM Political Program explicitly demand “protection of the Indigenous race” and the restitution of communal lands, “especially for the Yaquis, Mayas, and other tribes, communities, or individuals their territory they were displaced from.” Land and Liberty! Tierra y Libertad! This was the signature motto that the PLM utilized as they took a more radical turn following the incarceration of Ricardo Flores Magón, Librado Rivera, and Antonio I. Villareal by the Furlong Detective Agency in collaboration with the Los Angeles Sheriff Department on August 23, 1911.

Some scholars argue that the PLM used this slogan before Emiliano Zapata used it as his own and that both the PLM and the Zapatistas had delegates in communication using this motto as a common ground. Yet, calling this a “radical” turn is still maintaining the framework of analysis under a Eurocentric gaze. Ricardo took as inspiration the philosophy of communalismo, characterized by the communal lifestyle he experienced while a youth in Oaxaca. In an article, “El Pueblo Mexicano es Apto Para el Comunismo,” Ricardo states:

> In Mexico, there are about four million Indians who, until twenty or twenty-five years ago, lived in communities, possessing common lands, waters, and forests. Mutual support and reciprocity were the rule of these communities, in which authority was felt only when the agents who would collect tribute made their periodic appearance or when the rural police arrived in search of men to force them into the army. . . Everyone had the right to land, water for irrigation, forest for firewood, and wood to build huts.

Although this article was published in Regeneración in September 1911, Ricardo is recounting his memories of his own experience with his local Indigenous neighbors from Eloxochitlán and finding common ground for a multiethnic social revolution nationally.

In practice, the PLM had military alliances with Indigenous tribes who were also in arms against the Díaz regime. In the northern state of Sonora, PLM members could forge alliances with the Yaqui people, who were already in a lengthy confrontation against the so-called yoris. In 1875, the Captain-General of the Yaqui, Cajeme, led a confederation of Sonoran natives to recover communal territories they had lost as a consequence of the Ley Lerdo of 1856. In this quasi-permanent war, the Porfirián army was about to exterminate Cajeme and his people. Besides sharing a common enemy, the PLM also shared with the Yaqui people the signature motto of “Land and Liberty.” In a speech given on May 31, 1914, condemning the US occupation of Tampico, Veracruz, Ricardo urges his audience to
Remember Rio Blanco, remember Cananea, where the bullets from the government soldiers smothered in blood, in the throats of the proletarians, the voices that asked for bread; remember Papantla, remember Juchitán, remember the Yaqui, where the machine guns and rifles of the government decimated the energetic inhabitants who refused to deliver to the rich the lands which gave them subsistence.  

This juxtaposition of the strikes in Rio Blanco and Cananea by miners (many of whom were Indigenous as well) along with the brutal suppression of Indigenous peoples throughout Mexico shows how Ricardo and the PLM were highly conscious of the deep affinities between oppressed peoples in Mexico, regardless of their ethnicity, class, or cultural background. For Ricardo, the category of the oppressed proletarian was not exclusive to urban industrial workers. However, given the geography and demographics of Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an Indigenous person in Oaxaca, per se, also shared similar experiences of exploitation as a miner in Sonora or an industrial worker in Mexico City. In short, the PLM realized that the proletarian was not a homogenized mass but varied from region to region. However, the mechanisms and structures of oppression—namely, the Díaz regime—remained constant.

CONCLUSION

The PLM and the Flores Magón brothers never explicitly labeled themselves as an Indigenous movement. However, even though they did not share the same Indigenous blood, the PLM and Indigenous groups in Mexico shared the same experience of state-led oppression. So, how do we impose an identity upon the PLM? How did they identify themselves? Were the PLM liberals, anarchists, communists, or Indigenous? Using the theoretical framework of Vertretung and Darstellung given to us by Spivak, we can better highlight and critique the essentializing historiography of the PLM and the Flores Magón brothers into an academic category that reifies the Western imperative towards private and individual ownership; that is, towards a neocolonialism. Thus, if we are to investigate the role of the PLM before and after the Mexican Revolution, we must first problematize such essentialist interpretations and critically examine the dialectics between indigenismo, magonismo, and European anarcho-communism. In other words, by considering the dialectics of representation highlighted by Spivak—the representations between Vertretung and Darstellung—and the way in which the PLM broadcasted their Indigenous influences by proxy and by portrait, we can become resistant to the neocolonialist historiography of the Flores Magón brothers and their political movement.

NOTES

7. Spivak, “‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’” 73.
15. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico, 3.*
17. For instance, Article Two of the Plan the Tuxtpec capture Díaz’s battle cry against Lerdo: “no reelección.” Following the Plan of Tuxtpec, Article Eight reads: “Those who morally and pecuniary, directly or indirectly, cooperate to support the Government of Mr. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada will be held accountable….”
20. “Gauchita,” in Latin America today, popularly refers to a well-respected and good-looking woman. Gauchita can also be interpreted as a diminutive of the masculine word, “gaacho,” whom, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, “were usually mestizos (persons of mixed European and Indian ancestry) but sometimes were white, black, or mulatto (of mixed black and white ancestry).” For more, see https://www.britannica.com/topic/gaacho.
Philosophizing in Tongues: Cultivating Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy in an Introduction to Latin American Philosophy Course

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The European university must bow to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught in clear detail and to the letter, even if the archons of Greece are overlooked. Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours. We need it more.

- José Martí, “Our América”

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Imagine yourself teaching the English translation of the Cuban philosopher José Martí’s “Nuestra América” to a classroom full of undergraduates in a general education course. Imagine further that the majority of your students spoke Spanish before they spoke English and still speak Spanish much of the time, but that the existing system of “bilingual” education in US schools “successfully” transitioned them to English-only classes within the first two to three years of their academic careers. Would teaching Martí’s essay to them monolingually in English contribute to their academic success and pique their interest in Latin American philosophy? Or would it effectively fail to communicate Martí’s famous identification of “Nuestra América” with what we now call “Latin America,” fail to engage their Spanish-speaking reality, fail to explore the Americaness of their “Hispanic” or “Latinx” identities,¹ and fail to philosophically challenge the widespread assumption among English speakers that “America” is a country rather than a continent?

When I was hired in 2010 as an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Texas–Pan American, which became part of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in 2015, I began teaching philosophy courses monolingually in English to bilingual students like the ones I just asked you to imagine teaching. It took me a few years to realize how bilingual my students were, in part because I am not from the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), but also because I was simply doing what was expected of me. This article describes why I used to teach Introduction to Latin American Philosophy monolingually in English, why I stopped, and how I am now teaching it using a flexible bilingual pedagogy,² also sometimes called a translanguaging pedagogy,³ that has been transformative for my students and for me. By drawing upon the ventajas/assets y conocimientos/knowledges of our richly varied bilingualisms and biliteracies,⁴ the revised course contributes to the B3 (bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate) vision of UTRGV. Students have the opportunity to honor, theorize, and cultivate their bicultural identities by “philosophizing in tongues”⁵ rather than being forced to assimilate to the monolingual ideology that prevails across both mainstream Anglophone philosophy and the system of higher education in the United States of America.

WHOSE UNIVERSITY? WHOSE LANGUAGE, PHILOSOPHY, AND CULTURE?

José Martí argued for the need to create a university that would truly serve the diverse peoples of “Nuestra América” by teaching the Indigenous histories and philosophies of the Incas, Maya, and Aztecs—to name only the most well-known “archons” of what we typically call “Latin

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¹ See, for example, Fernando Zertuche Muñoz, “Programa del Partido Liberal,” July 1, 1906, reprinted in Beas and Ballesteros, Magonismo y Movimiento Indígena en México, accessed from http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/2.html.

² See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, “El Magonismo y el Movimiento Indígena en México,” in Beas and Ballesteros, Magonismo y Movimiento Indígena en México, accessed from http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/1.html.

³ See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, Regeneración (no. 27) February 28, 1901, in Regeneración 1900–1918, 96.

⁴ For example, see Ricardo Flores Magón, Los Enemigos De Siempre, September 2, 1911.


⁶ See, for example, Práxedis G. Guerrero y la Junta Organizadora del Partido Liberal Mexicano, “Delegados al Primer Congreso Liberal,” 90–93.

⁷ See, for example, Práxedis G. Guerrero y la Junta Organizadora del Partido Liberal Mexicano, “Resoluciones,” 96.

⁸ See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, Magonismo y Movimiento Indígena en México, accessed from http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/1.html.

⁹ See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, Regeneración, September 2, 1911.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, “El Magonismo y el Movimiento Indígena en México,” http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/2.html.

¹¹ See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, “El Magonismo y el Movimiento Indígena en México,” http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/1.html.

¹² See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, Los Enemigos De Siempre, accessed from http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/beas/1.html.

America”—even if it meant displacing the Greeks or the Western canon. Martí’s philosophy of education is deeply relevant to contemporary scholarly debates about what it means for today’s institutions of higher education to become true Hispanic-serving institutions rather than mere Hispanic-enrolling institutions. Any US institution of higher education that has at least 25 percent Hispanic undergraduate enrollment will be designated by the federal government as an HSI, but this is not enough. A designation comes from the outside; an identity must be assumed from within. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students must work together to build a Latinx-serving organizational culture and institutional identity that 1) helps Latinx students experience a sense of belonging on campus; 2) develops and reinforces a positive ethnic identity among Latinx students; 3) connects Latinx students with faculty and staff on campus who speak Spanish; 4) offers ethnic studies curricula and other courses with culturally sustaining pedagogies; and 5) supports faculty, staff, and administrators who both serve as role models and agents of change who “disrupt barriers to success for Latinx students.”

As a faculty member at UTRGV, where our vision is to become an authentic HSI by becoming a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) university, I am deeply committed to this work. The question I have asked myself repeatedly while redesigning PHIL 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy as a bilingual course is ¿Que es nuestra América? especially as it appears from the perspective of the RGV, where more people speak Spanish than English. But before we get to the RGV, we should consider the system of higher education across Texas, where Introduction to Latin American Philosophy is rarely or never offered. In contrast, Introduction to Philosophy is offered at most two- and four-year public institutions, listed as PHIL 1301 in the Texas Common Course Numbering System, and is part of the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” area of the General Education Core Curriculum—i.e., the forty-two Semester Credit Hours in “liberal arts, humanities, and sciences and political, social, and cultural history that all undergraduate students of an institution of higher education are required to complete before receiving an academic undergraduate degree.” In our pluralistic world of languages, philosophies, and cultures, the singular nouns that name the Foundational Component Area “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” hint at the Anglocentric ideology pervading the history of higher education in Texas: the language is English, the philosophy is European, and the culture is Anglo. Rarely is the point put so flatly today, but it would have certainly been clear to the authors of the Texas Constitution of 1876 who called for the establishment of “a university of the first class” to serve “the people of Texas.”

But what would “a university of the first class” look like if it was deliberately built to serve “the [Hispanic] people of Texas”? When UTRGV was founded in 2015 it became the largest HSI university in Texas and the second largest nationwide, with 29,001 “Hispanic or Latino Origin” students constituting 90.8 percent of the total student body of 31,939 as of fall 2021. HSIs do not collect data on the linguistic abilities of their students, but consider the bilingual language profiles that I gathered from my students just before the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, my students started learning Spanish 1.3 years before they started learning English and thus reported that they felt comfortable speaking Spanish before they felt comfortable speaking English. Yet they reported very little instruction (less than four years) in Spanish from elementary school to college, whereas they reported an average of twelve years of schooling in English. In a normal week with friends, students reported speaking Spanish roughly 30 percent of the time and English roughly 70 percent of the time. This also matches the level at which they reported thinking in Spanish (30 percent of the time) and English (70 percent of the time). However, in an average week with their families, they reported speaking more Spanish (60 percent of the time) than English (40 percent of the time). On average, students rated their ability to understand English as 10 percent higher than their ability to understand Spanish, rated their English-speaking ability as 20 percent higher than their Spanish-speaking ability, and rated their ability to write in English an average of 35 percent higher than their ability to write in Spanish. Most students also reported that they felt more like themselves when speaking English. But they nevertheless identified more with Spanish-speaking culture, and they were slightly more desirous of being perceived as native Spanish-speakers than as native English-speakers. Although a more extensive university-wide survey is still needed, my small survey clearly indicates the bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy of students that my original English monolingual course was failing to recognize, honor, and engage.

Tragically, it took higher education in the Rio Grande Valley almost a full century to stop denigrating Spanish—the predominant local language as well as the dominant language of Latin American philosophy—and begin treating it as a valuable academic language. Edinburg College was founded in 1927, became Pan American College in 1952, Pan American University in 1971, University of Texas—Pan American in 1989, and merged with The University of Texas–Brownsville to form the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2015. Part of UTRGV’s new vision was to become a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) university by offering courses across the entire university curriculum in English, in Spanish, and bilingually. This represented a major attempt to institutionally reverse course from what the philosopher and Pan American University alumna Gloria Anzaldúa analyzed in her groundbreaking chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Anzaldúa and other Mexican American students were forced to take a “speech test” and “speech classes” at Pan American College/University from the 1950s to the 1970s to get rid of their Mexican accents and underscore Anglo-accented English as the only acceptable academic language. Anzaldúa powerfully summarized these attempts to academically enshrine an Anglocentric monolingualism as follows: El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua. This is precisely what was and still is happening across Texas and nationwide insofar as educational institutions fail to academically respect, engage, and build upon the varieties of Spanish spoken by so many students and their families.

When I first offered Introduction to Latin American Philosophy at the University of Texas–Pan American
in 2011, I did what was expected of me by teaching it exclusively in English. So even though I was doing something rare and good by introducing Latinx students to Latin American philosophy, I was still contributing to the ongoing minoritization of bilingual students in the RGV. Far from being a neutral language of instruction, English is effectively weaponized when it functions as the only acceptable academic language, an act of "linguistic terrorism" that Anzaldúa pointed out by quoting Ray Gwyn Smith: “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?” From the perspective of the dominant raciolinguistic ideology of Anglocentric monolingualism that structures most educational institutions in the US, the RGV is full of minorities. But from a more critical, historical, and place-based perspective, the Mexican and/or Mexican American people in the RGV who speak Spanish are the overwhelming majority, even though they have been minoritized for over a century, making them a "historically minoritized population." Data from the American Community Survey across the RGV for the 2014–2018 period shows that a minority (21.1 percent) of the five years and over population speaks only English at home, whereas the vast majority (80.7 percent) speaks Spanish at home. Since 92.6 percent of UTRGV’s student body in 2020–2021 enrolled from the RGV—where, again, 80 percent of households speak Spanish—our bilingual students do not constitute anything close to a numerical minority, but they have been unfairly minoritized by monolingual educational programs and schools.

At the PK–12 level, 95.9 percent of the 422,858 students enrolled in the Region One Education Service Center area that contains the Rio Grande Valley are classified by the state of Texas as Hispanic, which means that at least 95.9 percent of these students and their families can reasonably claim a right to a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) heritage and future. Yet only 7.5 percent of students in Region One are enrolled in a dual language bilingual education program that can be said to serve B3 goals. In other words, the overwhelming majority of Spanish-dominant students who enter RGV schools are placed in “bilingual” and ESL programs with “transitional” (read: monolingual English) academic aims, whereas the Hispanic students who enter RGV schools speaking English never even receive the false promise of “bilingual” education. It has been more than twenty years since Angela Valenzuela incisively criticized the process of “subtractive schooling” by which US-Mexican youth progress through schools designed to make them less rather than more bilingual and bicultural, but it is still the dominant paradigm in the RGV today, as well as nationwide.

During the Chicano/a or Mexican American Civil Rights movement, activists and scholars began to imagine and demand experimental additive bilingual education programs, which began to receive some support in a handful of local schools and at our university in the early 1970s. But the overall legacy of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and its subsequent development was subtractive and assimilationist so that “thousands of teachers and school leaders have been trained to implement bilingual education not as a means to raise bilingual or biliterate children, but rather to create English-speaking and English-literate children.” Contrast this with the exciting B3 alternative envisioned by UTRGV:

After decades of submitting to the assimilationist impulses of the Bilingual Education Act, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has committed itself to a sustained analysis of the history of bilingualism in this region. During the past decade, faculty and administrators have gradually built a Center for Bilingual Studies, a Center for Mexican American Studies, and an Office of Translation and Interpreting, all of which are overseen by a B3 (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate) Institute. The B3 Institute’s broad goal is to create a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate institution (see De La Trinidad et al., 2017). This falls in line with UTRGV’s inaugural strategic plan, which calls for the development of a bilingual university that also values biculturalism and biliteracy. From a historical standpoint, the explicit call for bilingualism directly counters the spirit and purpose of the speech test and the intentional work to “tame the wild tongue” of Mexican-American students.

From a historical standpoint, UTRGV’s B3 vision should be understood as organically related to some of the most important demands made by local high school and college students participating in the Chicano/a movement. For example, the Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout of 1968 took place less than fifteen miles east of UTRGV’s Edinburg campus. Some of the estimated 192 students who participated in the walkouts had been in conversation with members of Pan American College’s chapter of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO). Two of the fifteen demands they shared with the Edcouch-Elsa school board on November 7, 1968, are especially resonant with UTRGV’s B3 vision:

8. That, as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties,

9. That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the Southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican history and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses.

For our purposes, it is important to note that these two demands are practically and conceptually separate. The right to speak Spanish without being punished is presented alongside the demand for courses in Mexican and Mexican American history and culture, but there does not seem to be any explicit demand that these courses be taught in Spanish or bilingually. In an educational context where students were routinely humiliated and physically punished for merely speaking Spanish, it would have certainly been difficult to even imagine much less demand that these courses be taught in Spanish or bilingually.
This same lack of imagination, which I suffered from the first time that I taught Introduction to Latin American Philosophy, pervades the subdiscipline of Latin American philosophy in the United States, but there are signs that it may be changing. Consider, for instance, APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy (formerly the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy), which has been publishing articles on how to teach Latin American philosophy at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for the last twenty years. There are outstanding discussions of course design, including possibilities for course content (books, articles, films, artworks, etc.), innovative assignments, alternative grading structures, high-impact pedagogies, and more. There is also a consistent stream of laments that more materials are not available in English translation, but only recently has the possibility been explicitly raised that Latin American philosophy courses in the US could be taught bilingually or in Spanish. In fact, the fall 2021 issue on Education and Pedagogy contains an outstanding article on bicultural/bilingual philosophy in the US-Mexico Border by Manuela Alejandra Gomez and an excellent article about teaching a core philosophy class in Spanish by Minerva Ahumada. In contrast, across the previous twenty years and volumes, only two articles—one by Cynthia Paccacerqua and the other by Mariana Alessandri, both faculty at UTRGV—explicitly characterized some of the American college students being taught Latin American philosophy as bilingual, bicultural, or biliterate. Consider Paccacerqua’s description:

This syllabus was designed with a particular student population in mind; as a professor of philosophy at UTPA, my students are predominantly Mexican-American and are mostly from the Río Grande Valley. This means, among other things, that my students are to a large extent bilingual (in varying degrees); have a good understanding of the history of US-Mexico relations; are aware of the nature of generational differences among members of the Mexican-American community (i.e., among the Mexican people who have always resided in Texas and the subsequent arrival of Mexican peoples by crossing the later established border); have the lived experience of the political, cultural, and social dynamics of border life; live in what is perceived as a relatively culturally homogeneous Mexican-American community; have a rather strong identity attachment to the idea of mestizaje.

Paccacerqua’s characterization of our students is refreshingly focused upon their experience, upon who they are and what they know rather than upon merely what they lack. But only very recently did our university begin the process of systematically building upon our students’ bilingual experiences, identities, conocimientos, and ventajas. As a Rio Grande Valley native, alumna of Pan American College, and participant in the Chicano/a movement, Anzaldúa beautifully expressed the linkage between bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy and imagined a future in which she and other bilingual students could more fully and proudly participate in the educational system:

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

Anzaldúa pushed me to redesign my course to affirm Spanish as philosophically, linguistically, and culturally valuable in order to contribute to the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” section of our undergraduate core curriculum in a way that decolonizes the Anglocentric ideology that frames higher education in the United States. I am still wrestling with how best to do it, but I am at least prepared to give a preliminary report based on teaching increasingly B3 versions of PHIL 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy over the last three academic years.

A BILINGUAL INTRODUCTION TO LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY FOR UTRGV STUDENTS

When my children were born in 2012 and 2014, I began to experience the difficulty of raising them to be bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate in an Anglocentric educational context. Without this lived experience, which Anzaldúa theorized as conocimiento, I probably would not have realized how wrongheaded it was to teach Introduction to Latin American as a monolingual English class to predominantly bilingual students. Fortunately, the birth of UTRGV and the first formulations of its B3 vision followed directly upon the early joys and problems of raising my children in Spanish along with my wife and colleague Mariana Alessandri. In her article thinking through what kind of world we should be building for our children and our students, she wrote:

Whether Anzaldúa meant her speaking Spanish in the classroom to be a political act, it was likely taken as one. Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, code-switching, bilingualism, diglossia—however one wants to refer to the multilingualism that is present here in the form of English and Spanish—is still considered dangerous today; Spanish and Spanglish are contentious in and outside of the classroom. I suggest that we can use this to our advantage; since using a border tongue is already read as a political act, we should use it for political purposes. Speaking a border tongue says that atravesados are legitimate, that the tongue spoken here—the otherwise “secret language”—is to be made public rather than kept private, affirmed instead of denied.

I have thus designed three subsequent iterations of my course (2018–2021) to be progressively more bilingual.
If we momentarily pretend that "course content" is language-neutral, my redesigned course remains quite similar to the small number of other Latin American philosophy courses offered by institutions of higher education in the US, since much of my course was designed by borrowing from my professional peers, and my commitment to offering all texts in both Spanish and English means that I am still limited by the relative lack of texts available in English translation. Nevertheless, in one sense, redesigning my course to be bilingual was as simple as providing the Spanish originals of the texts I was already assigning as English translations. In a few cases, I also needed to provide additional Spanish translations of the Nahautl, Latin, or Portuguese originals. Here is the resulting list of Spanish-language texts along with their original dates of publication (as well as the original languages of publication when they are translations):

1. Julio Cortázar, "Axolotl" (1956)
3. Miguel León-Portilla, La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes (1956)
4. Bernardino de Sahagún, Alonso Vegerano de Cuauhitlán, Martín Jacobita, y Andreés Leonardo de Tlatelolco, Los diálogos de 1524: Coloquios y doctrina Cristiana con que los doce frailes de San Francisco, enviados por el papa Adriano VI y por el emperador Carlos V, convirtieron a los indios de la Nueva España. En lengua mexicano y española (facsimile edition published in 1986 from the 1564 Nahautl and Spanish original)
5. Bartolomé de las Casas, Apología o declaración y defensa universal de los derechos del hombre y de los pueblos (Spanish translation of the 1550 Latin original)
6. Bernardino de Sahagún y sus colaboradores indígenas, El Códice Florentino o Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (Spanish portion of the 1577 Nahautl and Spanish original)
7. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz" (1691)
8. Simón Bolívar, "Carta de Jamaica" y "El Discurso de Angostura" (1819)
9. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Facundo, o civilización y barbarie (1845)
10. Juan Bautista Alberdi, Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina (1852)
11. José Martí, "Nuestra América" (1891) y "Mi raza" (1893)
12. José Carlos Mariátegui, "El problema primario del Perú" (1924) y "El problema del indio" (1928)
13. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Hacia una teología de la liberación" (1968)
14. Enrique Dussel, Filosofía de la liberación (1971)
15. Paulo Freire, Pedagogía del oprimido (Spanish translation of the 1968 Portuguese original)
16. Rigoberto Menchú, Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia (1982)

This reading list points to the plurality of places and languages—and thus the plurality of philosophies and cultures—throughout Latin America. In my previous monolingual English Introduction to Latin American Philosophy course, it was easier to miss the significance of the fact that the philosophies we study were originally published in Nahautl, Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, and Tex-Mex.

The philosophies, languages, and cultures covered in an introductory course can never hope to be exhaustive or even comprehensive, but I aim to make them representative. Nahautl represents Indigenous philosophy; Latin represents the importance of the Medieval Christian worldview, scholasticism, and its impact on the Americas through European conquest and colonization; and Spanish represents the bulk of the Latin American philosophical tradition, with the major exception of Portuguese, which represents Brazilian philosophy. The language of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work is contentious to name, but it is the closest to the bilingual tongues and bicultural identities of my students, which she invites her readers to approach with an open heart and mind in the last paragraph of her preface to Borderlands/La Frontera:

The switching of “codes” in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahautl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurring out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you—from the new mestizas.
I am not Hispanic or Latinx by birth, but I am a cultural and linguistic mestizo by choice in the sense that Anzaldúa develops in “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness.” My course tries to meet Anzaldúa and my students—most of whom are Mexican, Mexican American, Latinx, or Hispanic by birth—halfway by making our classroom a place where we philosophize in tongues, discovering and/or uncovering the Spanish (and the Nahua) in the Spanish) that lies just underneath or outside the monolingual English classrooms that have colonized the RGV. In the process, we can discover and/or uncover more than five centuries of Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and Pan American roots that make us who we are and our campus in Edinburg, TX what it is.

Ordinarily, a philosophy course taught in the US would provide all the course readings in English, covering over the roots of any ideas, concepts, or texts that have their origins in other languages. But when I provide all the course readings in a Spanish course pack (as well as an English course pack), students can plainly see that almost all the readings were originally published in Spanish. With three types of exceptions—students who are Mexican nationals, or who were educated at least partially in another Spanish-speaking country, or who were fortunate enough to have participated in a dual language program that ran all the way through high school—most students have never been encouraged to read difficult academic texts in Spanish. Many are surprised and excited to discover that they can do so. If they report back that they have trouble reading the Spanish, I explain to them that they will most likely have trouble reading the English as well because philosophy is hard to read in any language, especially at first! But I also explain that they are better prepared to understand the course readings given their degrees of bilingualism and borderlands experiences than the students I used to teach at Penn State.

My larger aim is to encourage students to go from being ambivalent about their bilingualism and bicultural identities to being proud of their bilingualism and bicultural identities. The path to achieve this is theorized best by Anzaldúa in the readings we discuss near the end of the course, but the whole course is structured historically to explore how our identities and worldviews have been shaped by European colonization and Indigenous resistance across the Americas. The course develops the basic thesis that most Americans (North Americans and Latin Americans) are in fact mestizos—complex mixtures of the languages, philosophies, and cultures that have mixed in the Americas since 1492—but that our diverse heritages have been systematically covered over by the Eurocentric and Anglocentric education system so that we have trouble recognizing the “Latin American” side of “American” history and identity.

This “covering over” is theorized by Enrique Dussel as el encubrimiento del otro as part of what he calls la invención de America.44 Challenging the simplistic narrative that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492, Dussel argues that Columbus invented the Indians by projecting an Asiatic character onto them because he wrongly believed that he had arrived in the West Indies. The Spanish conquistadores y colonizadores who came after him followed suit by violently “covering over” the Indigenous peoples rather than truly encountering them as human beings. In an analogous way, the Spanish-speaking and Mexican or Latinx cultural characteristics of our students are typically “covered over” by Anglocentric educational ideology and practices. In other words, our students have been academically taught to disassociate themselves from Spanish and their Mexican, Latin American, and/or Latinx identities.

To help students begin to reflect on the history of this encubrimiento and how it might still haunt us, I have them prepare for our discussion of Dussel’s work by conducting a self-quiz. I ask them to take out a blank sheet of paper and list the names of as many Latin American countries as they can think of. I also ask them to list as many Latin American languages as they can. Emphasizing that this activity is not for a grade, I have students report how many countries and languages they were able to name. The following pattern consistently emerges: the vast majority of students cannot name more than two or three Latin American countries (besides Mexico, no country shows up consistently on their lists). At most 5 percent to 10 percent of the students can successfully name more than five Latin American (or Caribbean) countries. There is usually some discussion about whether Puerto Rico is a country, which leads to a broader conversation about whether Latin America includes the Caribbean. I then show students the list of thirty-three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean according to the United Nations, and I ask them to brainstorm reasons that might explain why we as a class can name so few of them. Inevitably, someone will point out that they have been taught nothing (or almost nothing) about Latin America in school. As for Latin American languages, students can only consistently name Spanish. One or two might name Portuguese. Most semesters, no one names an Indigenous language like Quechua, Mayan, Guarani, Ayamara, or Nahua (to name only the top five language groups among approximately thirty million speakers of Indigenous languages in Latin America). At this point, I think students expect me to shame them for their ignorance following the deficit model, but I instead point out how these results illustrate Dussel’s thesis that the Indigenous languages, philosophies, and cultures of the Americas have ironically been “covered over” rather than encountered in the “discovery” of America. As we proceed to further discuss how America was invented (rather than discovered) by Columbus and other Europeans, I ask students to consider the possibility that Latin America—and by extension their Latinx heritage—has been “covered over” by the fact that they are not taught about it in school. In other words, their “ignorance” does not reflect their identity; it is rather something they have been taught! The very same public school system that has labeled them as “Hispanic” or “Latinx” or “English Learner” was carefully designed to prevent their encounter with the ongoing history of colonization and resistance in the Americas that makes them who they are.

In fact, most Latinx students have been taught that assimilating to an “American” way of being and doing things is the only way to succeed, but this “American”
identity has been invented in a way that covers over many Americans. In contrast, my course highlights multiple ways of being American, including bilingual and bicultural ways, so that students gain a philosophical perspective that enables them to embrace both the US-American aspects of their culture and identity and the Mexican or Latin American aspects of their culture and identity. I frame this by saying that the course will offer them the opportunity to discover Latin American philosophy and reflect upon how it is related to their past, present, and future.

**EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE BILINGUAL TEACHING STRATEGIES**

I am always nervous on the first day of class, and speaking Spanish with anyone besides my own children makes me even more nervous. So I begin introducing myself and then the course description in English. Here is the first paragraph of the course description from the English version of my syllabus:

To get an idea of how this historical Introduction to Latin American Philosophy will work, let’s think critically about what people mean when they say that Christopher Columbus discovered America. Could Columbus truly discover a “New World” if roughly 50 million people already lived there (about the same number of people who lived in Europe at the time)? Instead of speaking about the “discovery” of “America,” should we conceptualize these events and their legacies as: 1) the European invention of America, 2) the European conquest of millions of native peoples, and/or 3) the European colonization of more than one quarter of the Earth’s lands (none of which were called “America” by the various peoples who had lived there for at least 15,000 years)? What then is America (or Latin America)? Who are the Americans (or the Latin Americans or Amerindians)? What are their philosophies? Is the story of America (or Latin America) a story of civilization and progress, a story of colonialism and violence? What does Latin American Philosophy have to teach us here today in the South Texas-Northern Mexico borderlands? These are the kinds of questions that we’ll think through carefully as we study over 500 years of Latin American Philosophy.

When I get to the end of the first page of the syllabus, I switch to Spanish and begin referring to the Spanish version of the syllabus that is part of the Spanish-language course pack. I explain (in Spanish) how it makes me uncomfortable to speak Spanish, but that I also think it is a beautiful language, that I had to learn it in order to become an expert in Latin American philosophy, and that I am so dedicated to my children growing up bilingually that I spoke with them exclusively in Spanish until my first child, Santiago, was five years old and his brother, Sebastián, was three. Después de contar esa historia personal, explico por qué la visión B3 de UTRGV, e invito los estudiantes hablar English, Español, o Esanglish como quieran. Entonces empiezo a filosofar en español, preguntando a los estudiantes: ¿Quién descubrió América? A veces alguien contesta que era los vikingos, pero normalmente me contestan: Cristóbal Colón descubrió América. Entonces sigo con otra pregunta: ¿Se puede descubrir un lugar donde ya viven 50 millones de personas? If everything goes well, students begin to argue with me and each other about the philosophical definition of discover. If everything goes really well, the discussion takes place in Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex. For the rest of the semester, we use the bilingual course readings to explore core issues of Latin American philosophy, especially as they pertain to language and identity.

Getting each student to use their full language repertoire can be challenging. Many find it difficult to speak Spanish in the classroom, even though they might find it perfectly normal to speak Spanish with friends or at home. But that just gives us more to talk about as we explore why and how this happens. The linguistic foundation of the course is the fact that all readings are provided in both Spanish and English, and I refer to both versions of the text in every class, using mostly Spanish when discussing the Spanish text and mostly English when discussing the English. Some days, when I am feeling brave, I try to challenge myself by teaching more in Spanish than in English, but I rarely succeed. In any case, I try to respond to students in whichever language they address me in, or to translanguage with them if they translanguage with me. I like to think that being open and vulnerable about my own linguistic abilities, limitations, and desire for growth helps encourage students to step outside their own linguistic comfort zones, or perhaps more accurately, to expand their sense of where they feel en casa to our classroom and the university.

Of course, some students never choose to read, speak, or write in more than one language, and I make it clear that they will not be penalized. They can earn an A in the course using just one language. Instead of trying to force a language policy on them using some kind of stick in the tradition of linguistic terrorism, I offer them carrots by continuously incentivizing the use of more than one language with bonus points. For example, if they choose to take their first quiz in English, they can earn bonus points for writing even one of their answers on the second quiz in Spanish or for taking the Spanish version of the quiz but writing their answers in English. I use the same basic incentive structure for the course’s three major essay assignments: a student who writes their first essay in English can receive points for writing their second essay in Spanish or even for writing a paragraph in Spanish or Spanglish if writing their whole 1,500-word essay that way is too daunting. Students have multiple options for their final exam, but one of them includes producing a three- to five-minute digital testimonio that relates one of the topics discussed in class to their own experiences or those of their family. I often find that students who did not feel comfortable with texts in Spanish nevertheless find it natural to narrate their testimonios in Spanish or by translanguage. Regardless of what we are doing inside or outside of class, my aim throughout the course is twofold: to encourage bilingual and biliterate practices and, in doing so, to help students recognize these bicultural aspects of their identities as valuable and worth cultivating even though most have been trained not to do so in academic settings.
An anonymous written comment in response to the question “How has this class changed the way you see yourself?” illustrates the best of what I can hope for, and what I am always trying to redesign the course to achieve more fully:

Mi perspectiva cambió. Ahora veo al mundo con otros ojos. Piensas más al fondo las cosas, recapacite, encuentro estrategia para solucionarlo y ya no sentir esa pena como con mi native language dónde no quería ni hablar en español por el miedo de ser avergonzada por mis compañeros, pero ya no, porque Texas era antes territorio mexicano, so why feel pena?

In the words of another student:

I had always been ashamed of the Mexican part of me. At a young age I witnessed how my kind of people were treated and it just made me want to hide my Spanish, but now I see myself as unique for being able to have two languages, or even three.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR BILINGUAL AND SPANISH COURSE SECTIONS

The first two times I offered this course bilingually, in spring 2018 and fall 2019, there was no official “X” designation for bilingual course sections. When UTRGV first began piloting sections of formally designated bilingual course sections in fall 2016, bilingual or translanguageing sections were labeled with the letter “E” for español. Spanish-only or at least Spanish-dominant courses did not have their own designation.\(^{37}\) Then, to more clearly mark which sections were Spanish-only or Spanish-dominant, the registrar decided to designate these Spanish sections with an “E,” temporarily leaving translanguageing or bilingual sections like mine unmarked. But in fall 2020, the registrar implemented the current arrangement of “E” for español and “X” for bilingual courses, and my course sections received a formal bilingual designation for the first time.

I mention this transition in labeling course sections to illustrate the challenges UTRGV has faced even in establishing the basic infrastructure for bilingual courses. Another major hurdle, especially for my colleagues who teach Spanish-only or Spanish-dominant “E” sections, was getting UTRGV’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology to create a fully Spanish user interface and course shell to use on Blackboard, or getting UTRGV’s Office of Faculty Success and Diversity to update and distribute a Spanish syllabus template each semester. To this day, the software used by the registrar’s office cannot handle accent marks, so a student whose last name is Peña will appear on my course roster as Pena, a microaggression that completely changes the meaning of their name. But at least anecdotally, I noticed a considerable shift in how much Spanish my students were using after my course was formally designated by the registrar as bilingual. The “X” designation effectively conveys UTRGV’s formal academic recognition of the equal legitimacy of Spanish for course purposes, and I think it emboldened more students to speak, read, and/or write in Spanish or Spanglish. At the end of the semester, students anonymously completed their standard course evaluations, but I also recently added these optional questions:

This X course section was taught bilingually (English and Spanish). Do you think UTRGV should offer more bilingual classes?

98 percent of respondents (fifty out of fifty-one) answered “Yes.”

What recommendations would you give Dr. Stehn to improve the bilingual aspects of the course?

The responses varied, but every single one cast the bilingual aspects of the course in a positive light. A few students mentioned that keeping up with our Spanish conversations was difficult but worth it. Others pointed out ways that the course still had more English than Spanish and that the radical idea of offering only offering the standard Introduction to [Anglo-European] Philosophy makes sense, but the radical idea of offering PHIL 1305X: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy as a bilingual course makes even more sense. Unfortunately, the educational system in the RGV, Texas, and the US is still designed to encase students, including emergent bilinguals, in an English monolingual shell. For some, this eventually becomes academically comfortable, and speaking Spanish in academic contexts becomes strange, undesirable, or even unthinkable. A miniscule number of these students will enroll in PHIL 1305X: Introduction
to Latin American Philosophy. Those who do will learn to differentiate between the monolingual academic shell that was imposed upon them and the bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate identity that they might choose to cultivate academically in order to push back against the hegemonic monolingual, monocultural, and monoliterate ideology that has structured their schooling.

As a university, we need to continue increasing the number of courses and course sections being offered bilingually or in Spanish. But if UTRGV's B3 vision is to become a reality, we will need far more feeder schools with dual language programs from Pre-K to Grade 12 throughout Region One with the broader support of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education and the Texas Education Agency. UTRGV will also need to cultivate more partnerships with local parents, community organizations, and school districts; improve our bilingual teacher education program, especially the portions designed to facilitate teaching in Spanish for dual language programs, and offer more professional development opportunities for UTRGV faculty who would like to teach their courses bilingually or in Spanish. There is much work to be done, pero como dice Gloria Anzaldúa, vale la pena.  

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**NOTES**

1. Originalmente publicado en La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York, Estados Unidos, el 10 de enero de 1891, y en El Partido Liberal, México, el 30 de enero de 1891.


3. I place the federally recognized term “Hispanic” and the neologism “Latine” in quotes for their first use because their appropriateness is frequently contested by people who prefer other ethnic labels (e.g., Latino/a, Mexican American, Mexican, Chicano/a, Chicancx, etc.) or reject ethnic labels altogether. Throughout the remainder of the article, I typically use Mexican or Mexican American because they are typically favored by my students or Latinx for the reasons outlined by Robert Eli Sanchez, Latin American and Latinx Philosophy: A Collaborative Introduction (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019).


10. There is no master catalog of courses across institutions of higher education in Texas, but UTRGV is certainly the only institution to offer an Introduction to Latin American Philosophy as part of the general education core curriculum. A few other Texas institutions—e.g., University of Texas at El Paso, Texas A&M University, and Texas State University—offer advanced courses in Latin American philosophy.


17. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera, 76; Italics in original.

18. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera, 75.


25. One other article thoughtfully discussed the importance of teaching bicultural students bilingually, but it is focused upon a program designed for children: Yolanda Chávez Levy and Amy Reed-Sandoval, “Philosophy for Children and the Legacy of Anti-Mexican Discrimination in El Paso Schools,” APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy 16, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 17–23. The article’s conclusion would nevertheless apply equally well to college students: “importantly, engaged in philosophical dialogue with children and youth in both Spanish and English (that is, using both languages in a single session) not only responds to local historical resistance to anti-Mexican linguistic discrimination, it also expands kids’ opportunities to engage philosophically” (21).
José Martí and the Indigenous Population of the Americas

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José Martí, the Cuban patriot and national hero, has been the subject of endless debate and scholarship in Cuba and abroad. When he died in 1895, at age forty-two, battling against Spanish troops in the West of Cuba, he left his fellow citizens to put together his massive collections of chronicles and poems, disseminated all over Latin America and deciphering his vision of the nation. That vision was supposed to be one of the “sacred pillars” of the republic. So it is no surprise that successive interpretations of his work have emphasized his constructive, fulfilling, and inclusive views of Cubans. Such political drive behind his work has led his fellow citizens to idolize him, avoiding the rough contours of his philosophical vision. So far, critics have interpreted his work within the intellectual framework of four main traditions: Kraussism, American transcendentalism, liberalismo, and positivism. In my books, I acknowledge the impact these traditions on Martí. Still, I emphasize texts written by him, previously marginalized by scholars, which would not situate him among Krauss’s and Emerson’s most spiritualist followers. Instead, I position him among the liberal intellectuals, or “civilizing politicians” such as Faustino Domingo Sarmiento, aristocratic liberals such as John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, or closer to the positivists in México.1

These thinkers underscored the importance of science and progress for their societies and the need to acculturate large sectors of the population that were illiterate or belonged to different ethnic groups. For these reasons, I pointed out Martí’s troubling perspectives on Indigenous and black people in his “North American Scenes,” to his personal diaries, and his essay “Nuestra América [Our America]” that most critics read as a staunch defense of these countries’ sovereignty and of unprotected populations. In these texts, Martí supports Indigenous acculturation, and their confinement in the American reservations.2 He praises the Carlisle Indian Industrial school in the United States where the objective was to “kill the Indian and save the men,” and he shows his fear of black people for what they could “inherit” from their ancestors in Africa.3

These views, I argue, were standard among Eurocentrists and white supremacists that valued Western education, civilization, and whiteness over non-whiteness and “savagery,” and wanted to bring Latin America closer to Europe. In several of my articles and my book Etnografía, política y poder, José Martí y la cuestión indígena, I show that Martí’s ideas of cultural superiority had concrete manifestations in his writings, particularly in his support of General Julio A. Roca’s military campaign in La Pampa and Patagonia, where thousands of Amerindians lived and were captured, killed, dispossessed of their land, and their children distributed among the wealthy families.4 In his newspaper articles in La América of New York, written while holding the post of “chancellor” of the Argentinian
In the same manner, he hailed the arrival of families from Italy, “poetic Italian workers,” that were coming to replace the native population in the newly “conquered” territories, whitening the country and building a modern European agricultural infrastructure with fast communications. In his chronicle of 1883, Martí writes: “Where the invading Indians ran on fantastic horses, the railroads run today as spokesmen of the new times.” His only wish was that Buenos Aires “does the same campaigns in industry . . . worthy of those marvelous and centaurean ones, which gave the appearance of gods to men.” According to the Buenos Aires press, the justification for the “conquest of the desert” was the incursions of the indigenous people on the border. These indigenous people were accused of stealing cattle for which they went to jail, but according to Milcíades Peña the real justification was money: to make those lands available to foreign capital, the Creole oligarchy, cereal production, and grazing.

Thus, even if Martí criticizes Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his famous essay “Nuestra América” for opposing “civilization” to “barbarity,” in other articles he praises the Argentinian government for carrying out this policy and he expresses his admiration for intellectuals such as Estanislao S. Zeballos (1854–1923), showing his full agreement with the “magnificent generation” that had turned Argentina into one of the most developed nations in Latin America in the early 1890s, rivaling, as he said, states such as Massachusetts in the number of schools. No wonder, in “Nuestra América,” Martí alerts Latin America’s ruling class of the need to give a space in their republics to the masses of black people and Indians that were discriminated against and to be on guard for the “incultos” or illiterates that could destroy the institutions created by the State. It was his admiration for the “magnificent generation” of the 1880s that led him to translate a book where the Argentinian government gives its reasons to annex one of the territories of Misiones, in the northern part of Buenos Aires, that was inhabited by Guarani Indians. Martí took on this translation for free after he resigned from his post at the Argentinian consulate. These territories were annexed in 1881 by General Roca, but in none of his chronicles does Martí stop to wonder what Amerindians living there thought of these annexations and violent war. On the contrary, Martí supported these actions because he believed in the right of the state to expand its inner frontiers beyond the provinces that surrounded Buenos Aires, much in the same way the US did when they waged war on the Native Americans.

In this regard, Martí followed a generation of politicians who saw themselves inheriting territories that formerly belonged to the Spanish empire that created “fictitious borders,” which they accepted without considering the Amerindians’ right to their ancestral land. Instead, they ruled these territories as they pleased, which was a continuation of a policy of colonial dispossession that began five hundred years before. The only difference was that this time, the Creole state claimed possession of these lands and used the law to force these communities to give it up under the pretext that they did not have ownership titles for them or did not make them produce. That is what happened in Guatemala, under General Justo Rufino Barrios, where Martí supported a similar policy of land expropriation. He even thought of becoming a coffee producer—something he did not do—and instead came to the United States, where he lived for fifteen years, and saw firsthand the appalling conditions the Native Americans lived in.

Nonetheless, during his stay in North America, Martí continued to refer to indigenous peoples as less socially developed than whites, as “children.” He believed it was better for them to abandon their habits, lands, and traditional customs and become “regular” peasants or American citizens. He did not believe in the superiority of his biological inheritance, but his culture. He was not a “naturalist” thinker, but someone who put his trust in the progress of history and in education to “help” them move towards a higher degree of sociocultural development. This way of thinking was typical of intellectuals influenced by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. It was a vision of history anchored in a progressive and linear time, which objectified the Native peoples and denied them the present they shared with the speaker (denial of coevalness according to anthropologist Johannes Fabian). Thus, Martí talks in his articles of “a superiority that is nothing more than a degree in time” between the races. It was an optimistic view of humanity and history that divided the world between socially developed and backward societies. It was a view rooted in what he called “the beautiful human march” that, according to Jean Lamore, was the product of Martí reading sociocultural evolutionists such as Edward Burnett Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan, and John Lubbock. That is why I argue that Martí’s vision of society was temporal, hierarchical, and ethnocentric, allowing him to justify land dispossession and acculturation.

He did not believe in biological differences that could hinder their social advancement, although at the heart of the theory of sociocultural evolution, there is an ethnocentric drive that makes it as problematic as biological racism. Why? Because ethnocentrism becomes racism when it is used to express the cultural superiority of one ethnic group over another or in the case that the State uses it to support laws against ethnic minorities and in favor of whites.

No doubt, these are both forms of discrimination—ideological constructs—with obvious political and economic intentions that result in segregation and violations of the rights of members of minority groups for generations. Both ways of looking at race respond to the rationalizing logic of the modern state, as David Goldberg argues, which defended across the Americas the interests and aspirations of groups descended from Europeans. These states had a scale of values, a list of racial and cultural exclusions, based on which these other social subjects did not have the right to be part of and have a voice in the debate. To do so, they had first to set aside their cultural and material heritage and adopt the manners of the dominant culture.

Hence, as I have suggested in my book and articles on Martí, it is fair to say that the “desert campaign” in Argentina, which was nothing more than a war of extermination
against the “savage,” the policy of European immigration, and the belief that it was necessary to “kill the Indian and save the man” in American schools were policies guided by a white supremacist agenda that responded to the interests of the white, Western, modernizing state. Martí, as I said, enthusiastically supported these policies, which his biographers and critics ignored and continue to ignore today.21

To conclude, Martí’s support of the war and annexation of these territories, his translation of the Argentinian government’s legal argument on the question of Misiones, his post at the Argentinian consulate in New York, and his praise for the Argentinian generation of his time show his complicity with the Argentinian and European policy of progress and civilization at the expense of the Indigenous communities that lived there. Martí supported these policies, disregarding what Indigenous communities thought of them or the traumatic effects they had on their lives. Some of the Indigenous survivors of General Roca’s military campaign took refuge in the northern territories of Misiones, where the government nonetheless arrived shortly afterwards to displace them. The diplomatic “allegation,” therefore, translated by Martí and presented to President Cleveland in 1894, is the culmination of a liberal policy of economic expansion, genocide, and repopulation of Argentina that Martí supported.

Why, then, do so many critics ignore these facts and focus instead on essays such as “Mi raza” or “Nuestra América”? Why do they defend Martí against any charges of racist bias or ethnocentric views? Principally, the chronicles referenced here have been marginalized by critics who frequently celebrate Martí for his patriotic and literary achievements. The Cuban government has continuously censored any opinion that goes against the established one and the only texts that have been translated into English speak of Martí’s devotion to his country, humanity, and his great literary skills. That is why most critics only focus on the chronicles he wrote near the end of his life, when he was actively engaged in organizing the war against Spain to liberate Cuba. In this time, Martí’s objective was to unite all Cubans—black and white—to defeat the colonial regime. Thus, he minimized any references to the Haitian Revolution or the fear of black people because he believed these discussions could only serve to divide Cubans, which was one of the main purposes of the Spanish government. In addition, for many critics, and Cubans especially, Martí is still the Apostle, the greatest man that lived on this earth and there is nothing that can stain his figure. For this reason, I suggest looking at the lesser-known articles he wrote on the topic of race early in his life and not focusing so much on his latest writings, where he speaks more favorably about these communities and was influenced by social reformers such as the Friends of Indians organization and Henry George. These texts are problematic, to say the least, and should be taken into consideration when discussing his philosophical stance.

NOTES
1. I have discussed these issues in several of my books on Martí. See my article titled “José Martí: ‘la aristocracia intelectual’ y el concepto negativo de las masas,” Letras Hispanas 9, no. 1 (2013): 5–19.
3. This article only discusses Martí’s representation of Indigenous communities in the US and Latin America. In my book Miedo negro, poder blanco en la Cuba colonial (Madrid: Iberoamericano, 2015), I discuss his representation of black people and chronicles such as “Mi Raza” (My Race).
8. ———, Obras completas vol. 7, 324.
11. Martí was offered $800 by the Argentinean government to translate this book. That amount is equivalent today to $26,392.19 if we calculate the average inflation rate of 2.77 percent per year. He rejected the payment and did the work for free. The book is titled Argument for the Argentine Republic upon de Question with Brazil in regard to the Territories of Misiones (Washington, 1894).
21. “Martí, el evolucionismo y los indígenas. Reiteraciones sobre un mismo punto,” La Habana Elegante 55 (Summer 2014)
José Martí on Racism

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Some recent scholarship on the works of José Martí has revealed a number of previously lost writings that appear to challenge standard interpretations of the political philosophy of this great Cuban patriot, poet, and thinker. According to Jorge Camacho, a leading scholar in the field, at least in some of his writings, Martí comes out as having shared the deterministic racism against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas that prevailed among the Latin American elites of his time. True, his political thought on these matters might show some contradictions. But such contradictions in no way challenge my interpretation of Martí’s anti-racism in “Martí’s Liberal Anti-Positivism.”

However, my interpretation of Martí’s general political philosophy is incompatible with Camacho’s on this point: I reject that Martí was a positivist whose views on the identity of Latin Americans fall within the civilization-versus-barbarism tradition of figures such as Sarmiento and Alberdi. I reject this interpretation even if Camacho has textual evidence that at some point in his development Martí supported the genocidal war that General Julio Argentino Roca waged against the Amerindians of the Pampas in Argentina in the late-nineteenth century. I reject it even if Camacho has some evidence that Martí’s objection against anti-black racism was prompted by pragmatic considerations, such as that he was trying to enlist black Cubans in the fight for his nation’s liberation from Spanish colonial rule.

On my view, a more charitable interpretation of Martí’s views on racism is available. It stems from an understanding of the entailments for racism of his general philosophical outlook, Krausism, as well as from his argument in “Mi raza” (My Race) and some other representative writings, which suggest that Martí was committed to rejecting racism. In response to Camacho, I propose we first draw a distinction between what Martí actually said and what he should have said in light of his own philosophical commitments to Krausism. First, Martí was aware of Latin America’s social, economic, cultural, and racial diversity in the nineteenth century. Given Krausism’s vindication of harmony among all human beings and more broadly with nature, he should have vindicated the intrinsic moral value of all individuals and groups. Surely, the Martí unveiled by Camacho might have harbored certain racial prejudices against some ethnic and racial groups, including the Amerindians. And like many intellectuals of his time, he might have embraced some version of the civilization-versus-barbarism dichotomy. But he need not embrace the geographical and genetic determinism first championed in Latin America by figures such as Sarmiento and Alberdi. Furthermore, there is the Martí of “Mi raza,” an essay that clearly argues against anti-black racism. Reconstructing his arguments in a charitable way requires placing it in the content of Martí’s Krausism, a complex philosophical outlook from which the thesis that all groups of people deserve equal rights follows. As is well known, Martí in fact claimed that there is a single race, the human race. Somewhat less known, at least to philosophical audiences, is his objection to racism against people of African descent. His actual argument is not only ambiguous, but has a limited scope since it only targets one type of such racism: namely, racism based on the white racists’ belief that their own racial group is superior to black peoples and, by extension, any other group. The literature on racism shows that the bias of thinking that race determines moral standing comes in various types. Martí’s views on racism are closer to John Stuart Mill’s, who also seems to have endorsed a version of the civilization-versus-barbarism dichotomy (something not uncommon among theorists of the nineteenth century). Furthermore, like Mill, he might have supported an imperialist policy of coercion by education of the native populations of the world. But arguably, racism comes in degrees, and neither Martí nor Mill appear to have had a deterministic conception of racial differences based on either geography or genetics. That would be incompatible with supporting the integration of the native peoples by education, which is, of course, a form of coercion.

In my book, I offer several reconstructions of Martí’s anti-racism argument. First, I reconstruct it as a slippery-slope argument holding that if white racists think they have a right to assert their racial superiority over black people, then black people also have the right to assert their racial superiority over the white people. If racists of one type or the other were to invokes empirical evidence in support of their alleged racial superiority, Martí can note that no such evidence exists, as demonstrated in the wide rejection of the Bell-Curve theory of Richard Hernstein and Charles Murray.

I have suggested that, to render Martí’s argument stronger, he could have invoked his own Krausist conception of the intrinsic moral value of unity and harmony—or its converse, the intrinsic moral disvalue of division and conflict. Assuming that harmony among individuals, groups, and with nature is intrinsically morally good and conflict intrinsically morally bad, his anti-racist argument may now run this way:

1. If people from an ethnic/racial group proclaim their racial superiority over another group of people, then that would incite a reaction and create conflict.
2. Conflict is intrinsically morally bad.
3. Therefore, it is morally wrong for people of an ethnic group to proclaim their racial superiority over another group.

Of course, Marxists and anarchists among others would reply that premise (2), which assumes Krausism, begs the question against their own political philosophies. Yet there is a more compelling argument that’s still faithful to the concept of Nature of the Krausists and runs as follows:

1. Peace is intrinsically morally good but demands of Nature the recognition of human rights.
2. People whose human rights are violated through racial discrimination will fight for those rights.
3. War is incompatible with peace.

4. Therefore, racial discrimination is contrary to Nature, the enemy of peace, and intrinsically morally bad.

The Krausists’ assumptions here are captured by their concept “Nature.” If we want to avoid them, Martí’s argument can be recast as relying solely on strong evidence from history, the social sciences, and common sense about the intense pain and suffering often caused by racial conflicts. There is no need to make any Krausist assumption in order to object to racism along these lines. At the end of the day, on this charitable reconstruction, Martí has argued with a high degree of plausibility that racism leads to war or other forms of social discord, which are generally morally bad. Now even utilitarians can agree with him, given that war and social conflict increase the balance of pain over happiness in the world, and pain is intrinsically morally bad.

Of course, in other writings Martí may have had biases in favor of white people of European descent. In addition, he may have supported discriminatory policies against Amerindians, as Camacho’s work demonstrates. That would show inconsistencies with his own philosophical outlook of Krausism. But it falls short of showing that he was part of the racist tradition exemplified in Sarmiento’s proto-positivism and the positivism that came later. Did he actually support the genocidal campaigns against the Amerindians that took place by the end of the nineteenth century in various Latin American countries? If he did, he was inconsistent. But “Mi raza,” a representative anti-racist writing, provides evidence against any attempt to place him comfortably within the racist, positivist tradition.

NOTES
1. In addition to the essay by Jorge Camacho in this issue, see Camacho’s Etningen, politica y poder: José Martí y la cuestión indígena (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).


4. In “The Negro Question,” published anonymously in Fraser’s Magazine (1850), Mill refuted Thomas Carlyle’s anti-black racist position, previously published in the Magazine. He defended an anti-determinist view on race that put him at odds with the scientific establishment of his time, which was social Darwinist. Given this evidence, it is wrong to classify Martí or Mill within the determinist tradition of Sarmiento, Alberdi, and Roca. See John Stuart Mill, “The Negro Question,” Fraser’s Magazine (1850), https://users.ox.ac.uk/~ajryan/lectures/Mill%20on%20The%20Negro%20Question.pdf.


AUTHOR BIOS

Jorge Camacho is director of the Latin American Studies Program and professor of Spanish, Latin American, and Comparative Literature at the University of South Carolina. He has published more than one hundred peer-reviewed articles and has authored fourteen books. Five contain more than eighty texts previously unknown and uncollected, written by José Martí, Rubén Darío, and Mercedes Matamoros.

Eric Chavez was born and raised along the US-Mexico borderlands of Juárez, Chihuahua, and El Paso, Texas. He is currently a PhD candidate in Borderlands History at the University of Texas at El Paso. Chavez’s research interests are borderlands history, phenomenology, and philosophy of liberation.

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Alexander V. Stehn is professor of philosophy and associate director of the Center for Bilingual Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). He grew up in rural South Texas as a monolingual English speaker of mixed “white” heritages but achieved academic biliteracy by studying the philosophy of liberation with Enrique Dussel in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Along with Mariana Alessandri, he is the co-founder of RGV PUEDE, a nonprofit whose mission is to educate and organize parents, families, and communities to support, improve, and extend dual language Spanish-English bilingual education programs from Pre-K to Grade 12 across the Rio Grande Valley.
FROM THE EDITOR

Amy Marvin
GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Editing this journal in 2022 strikes me as both aspirational and grounded work. Beginning with the aspirational, I am hopeful to sustain this venue for cutting edge conversations in LGBTQ+ philosophy and theory, broadly construed. Of note in this context is the change of name from the Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy to APA Studies on LGBTQ Philosophy. This transition reflects a set of aspirations for the journal while I serve as its steward, including the development of a peer review process for essays alongside innovations and experimentations in form, as featured in this current issue. I aim to continue fostering this as a space for more traditional essays and reviews in philosophy while also encouraging more flexible formats such as regular freewheeling conversations between philosophers without much editorial interference. The shorter issue below is thus a demonstration that often studies in LGBTQ philosophy can take the form of an interesting conversation among peers. This too reflects the situation of this journal as a distinctly APA journal: What is a spirit of the newsletter even as the work of establishing a respected place in scholarship continues. It is also in this spirit that I break with tradition to write a longer than usual introduction section, following in the tradition of a "Letter from the Editor."

Looking to the past of the newsletter also has me reflecting on the work Grayson Hunt accomplished as the previous editor of this journal since the fall 2018 issue. Hunt steered the journal while working simultaneously as a program coordinator, lecturer, and associate director of LGBTQ Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is now the director of equity outreach and resources in the Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity. Publishing this newsletter for the past years as part of his award-winning record with academic service at his university and his commitment to LGBTQ research in philosophy, Hunt especially stood out as an editor who encouraged increased publications in trans philosophy. I hope to continue Hunt’s work by showcasing new developments in trans philosophy in addition to LGBTQ philosophy more broadly.

Looking to the present, this brief issue features a conversation between Marquis Bey and Nicholas Whittaker titled "Everybody and No-body Are Allowed in on This." On one level, this interview is an introduction to the work of Marquis Bey as featured in their book Black Trans Feminism and developed in Them Goon Rules, Anarcho-Blackness, and their newest book, Cistem Failure, published in August 2022. Whittaker does excellent work as an interlocutor by drawing out some of the philosophical and pragmatic commitments that Bey aims for through their project.

The interview also showcases some potential sites of future elaboration, debate, and disagreement about Bey’s work. Bey’s understanding of anarchism and gender abolition leads them to critique identity politics and restrictions of black trans feminism to the standpoint of individual black trans women as a centered source of authoritative knowledge. Whittaker also challenges Bey to consider their work in the context of transracialism, which has certainly been a site of controversy in philosophy. Throughout the conversation Whittaker provides a charitable reading of Bey’s work that simultaneously does not shy from pointing to potential disagreement, drawing out different ways of engaging with a major contemporary ongoing project in LGBTQ philosophy that has wide uptake beyond philosophy as well.

I hope that readers will find this interview to be a helpful introduction to Marquis Bey and Nicholas Whittaker as philosophers, as an elaboration of some of their ideas for...
those more familiar with their work, and as an opportunity to read two philosophers engaging in open conversation.

Looking to the future, the continued work of this journal is tenuous and fragile. The questions this journal raises are framed by other questions about how hot summer will get next year, how low or high the water will rise, and who will be able to continue publishing across mass illness, rent and food price increases, and a developing anti-LGBTQ political landscape. I am contingent, as is this journal. So are you, dear reader. Let’s at least make something interesting out of it.

CONVERSATION

“Everybody and No-body Are Allowed in on This”: A Conversation with Marquis Bey

Nicholas Whittaker
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Marquis Bey
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

NICHOLAS: I wonder if we can start with a bit of a tough request; for the folks reading who may not be familiar with your work—both/either your general projects, swirling across your different manuscripts and teaching work and conversations with comrades and colleagues, and/or your newest book, Black Trans Feminism—and for our sakes, to set the conversation of a shared ground, how might you sum both up? Maybe let’s start with the general and move to the particular next. Paraphrase is weird and tricky, and will always leave some stuff out, but how might you describe your work in the past few years? What have been the common threads, questions, guiding lights? What, maybe to put it as simply as possible, do you write about?

MARQUIS: What an excellent way to begin, and I’m appreciative of this start, too, because it allows me to reevaluate the trajectory and intentions of my work. So to your poignant question: What do I write about? There is, as you’ve alluded to, no simple way to describe it. And I quite dislike attempts to simplify and reduce the complexity of thought—indeed, one of my most despised words is “basically.” So to try to maintain the complexity of the thoughts and ideas and politics that have been gifted me—because I am always thinking in conjunction with others, others who have tilled the soil to permit my inhabitation of it in a certain way—I would say that the threads running through my work are fugitivity, blackness, nonnormative gender, abolition, and life. Those are the things I find myself constantly returning to, turning over and re-turning over to gain additional insights into how we might move more softly, radically, graciously, intentionally. I write about the ways blackness might be reconfigured around not the epidermis but, instead, as a modality of refusal; I write about how transness and gender nonnormativity are not affixed to a specific anatomical or medico-juridical positioning but are the abolition of gender as a vector through which one is required to emerge into sociality; I write about how black feminism necessarily exceeds the parameters of racialized gender and insists on imaginative worlds that refuse the terrors of the world in which we live.

And with all of this, I try always to think about how it might become ever more possible to be together, to become together with others in ways that do not carry forms of violence into the very world we seek to cultivate. Through vitiating normative and thus harmful ontological impositions and imagining, truly imagining, outside of the current extant apparatuses we have to define and understand, we can, I think, approach something like life lived otherwise—which would then be, maybe, a bit hubristically, the first time we’ve been able to truly live.

NICHOLAS: You’ve given me so much to ask about here, but first I want to pause and draw something out. I love the way you describe the re-turning process of intellectual thought. I was once asked by a young would-be philosophy student how to read black studies texts; she’d been trying to read folks like Moten and Wynter, but had been having such trouble entering the miasma and figuring out what the arguments and claims were. I gave her this advice: read them like you’re on a spiral train track, constantly drawing nearer to the “destination” but only by returning to the same points on a circle again and again. You have to give up the hope that you can leave a point or location, leave a thought or an idea, once and for all. There’s no sentence where Wynter says what she means by “episteme” or territory, once and for all. She had to keep writing it, again and again, in different ways. It’s not (just) about difficulty; it’s about trying to think and offer something up to be thought about in a different, non-linear way.

Black studies seems like it’s doing a Heraclitus thing, a Nietzschean eternal recurrence thing; you gotta keep coming back, because you’re different when you arrive again, and that makes the thought or idea different, and you never have a grasp on what Moten or Wynter or Bey, for that matter, are trying to tell you if you’re not willing to let it keep being different. This kind of sentiment pervades all of your work, in both form and content. What does it feel like, to try to do theory in this kinda aimless, kinda obsessive, kinda non-teleological way? How and why do you try to write and read and talk in this spiral, and why not write and read and talk linearly? Why not just give us your definition of blackness or abolition and then move on to the next thing? (Especially when this is the exact kind of progress report finality that university publishing and grading structures encourage…?)

MARQUIS: Damn, I love this. Yes, it’s very, very much about coming back and reading again and again; it’s very much, as you so aptly say, “not (just) about difficulty; it’s about trying to think and offer something up to be thought about in a different, non-linear way.” This I love so much. Because that’s one of the things, right, one of the things that is often brought up by folks who aren’t living amidst this discourse
or who, sometimes, demand being a part of this discourse only to find out it takes work: “Why can’t they just write clearly? Why can’t they just say what they mean in plain (typically) English?” And, truthful, that shit pisses me off (am I allowed to say this, both the profession as well as the question?). I’ve learned from people like Moten and, as well, Judith Butler that the difficulty is necessary; the difficulty is not difficulty for the sake of difficulty—though even that would be okay, I think, because the words and lives of black and queer and trans folks need not be readily digestible and intelligible—but rather it is an attempt to exceed the semiotic grammar of what we’ve been given. Insofar as we have inherited a certain language and world, or in Heideggerian fashion been “thrown” into the world, that dictates what is possible to think and know. If we are, then, trying to think and know and become in ways that attempt to imagine something quite different, that will require that we write and speak and mobilize ideas in language that is not readily transparent—a transparency, we know from Glissant and Denise Ferreira da Silva, that is endemic to the colonial imposition. We need, in short, to break language. What Moten and Wynter and Butler, and now me, if I may be so bold, are writing in is broken language. Broken in service of something else.

So, more pointedly, why not just give my definition of blackness, of transness, of black feminism once and for all? Why write so circularly? It is because I am, always, practicing. I am trying out different ways of saying something, different ways to have something felt and understood, or more accurately misunderstood and un-understood. I am discovering what it is I am trying to move through in the writing itself, which some kind of self-editing process would undermine. I am trying to speak on different registers with the hope that one register will invite one kind of encounter and another will invite a different one, perhaps with the same cast of participants as the last encounter or perhaps a different cast, a cast for whom this register is more aligned than the last. I am trying to be, sometimes, precise with the language I use—because to say “blackness” is not the same as saying “African American” and “refusal” is not the same as saying “resistance.” I remember talking to my partner about this and they brilliantly responded, “Very few people are bringing these claims of intelligibility to, say, medical practitioners, so why is it being brought to us as humanities scholars? It’s not just your ‘knee,’ it’s your patella; it’s not just your ‘back,’ it’s your latissimus dorsi.” Similarly, in my case, it’s not feminism that centers black trans people, it’s black trans feminism. And whole books are required to tease out that precision.

And lastly, to draw this nearer to a close that will never close, this is not so much about having a super precise definition of any given term. Surely, I try to say what I mean and, as many know, I can be quite discursively loquacious. That is not, however, an attempt to know something ultimately, finally; it is, I want to wager, an attempt to allow the ideas and modalities to emerge in different possible ways and have different effects. I cannot, in the end, say what abolition “is” because what it is is a number of things that do things.

NICHOLAS: This is all so thrilling to read, not least because, as you surely know, this is not typically how academic philosophers in the university mainstream talk about their/our writing and thinking practice. Indeed, everything you’re saying here is, unsurprisingly, reminiscent of one of my favorite bits in your newest book, Black Trans Feminisms. And we can get to the meat of that new work in a moment, but to just dawdle a bit longer in the metaphilosophical morass: Early in the book, you say you’re doing philosophy here. And you then proceed to give one of the best accounts of philosophical thinking I’ve ever come across. You write that, in your use of the word, “philosophy is a sustained practice of thought toward neither knowledge acquisition nor epistemic mastery but, rather, a way of conceptualizing meaningfulness in excess of the semiotic regimes currently in place.” I don’t want to get into the irritating litigations of who or what counts as a philosopher or philosophy. But in an academic landscape defined by intellectual xenophobia and border control, there’s something thrilling about being handed a description of philosophical activity that feels both so radical and ecumenical and yet so precisely the kind of thing that, at their best, Wittgenstein is doing, and Martha Nussbaum is doing, and Charles Mills is doing. No real question, here; just wanted to take a moment to realize how we’ve landed on the precise kind of metaphilosophical intervention your work, and the work of black studies and trans studies, has to make on the way academic philosophers conceptualize the yearnings and curiosities pushing us to write and read and talk together. That is, we could see you and others as urging academic philosophers to break language. Or we could realize that, at their best, breaking language is what academic philosophers have been doing all along. Maybe here’s a question: Do you have an intuition here? Do you see your experience of philosophizing as a relitigation, a reinvention, or as a rediscovery, a return?

MARQUIS: Irritating litigations, indeed. I’ve long disliked or found not quite my interest those kinds of conversations: what or who “counts” as within a given demographic or milieu, the criteria for which were often underlain with harmful and violent logics of exclusion and normative antagonisms. But I do, truly, appreciate your appreciation of my account of philosophy. I was, after all, a philosophy major (as well as an American Studies and English major) in my undergraduate career, and that mode of thinking has long continued to live with me. Because it was there, and all along the way from there to here—wherever either of those loci are, which, likely, is nowhere in particular—that I slowly cultivated this sense of wanting something else. So on this front, and to your question, perhaps my experience of philosophy, of philosophizing, is none of yet all of those things (this is, admittedly, a cop-out answer that means virtually nothing, I know). More specifically, what I hope to do in my philosophizing and my theorizing is to invite. I was actually talking to a group of sharp, brilliant high schoolers in Los Angeles during a three-day workshop and lecture, and some of them had read my work and had some questions about my conceptualization of blackness. They asked if my aim was to persuade people or to tell others that they got it wrong or what? And I responded precisely in this way: that my aim, always perhaps, is to invite. I’m not so much concerned with making declarative statements that
mark someone as incorrect if they think differently; I am concerned with bringing folks along for this ride, looking and feeling at this or that, how it moves differently via this way of thinking and seeing and feeling, what is opened up or foreclosed or wildly different were we to continue along this ride. *Come on in, I want to say, come on in, come and experience what this might be like. Everybody and non-body are allowed in on this. Some might not want to get in on it, others might leave halfway through. And I will thank them for that, always. And others still will stay and be invigorated by the ride. For me, all of that is possible and, maybe, necessary. And it’s able to happen because everybody was invited.*

**NICHOLAS:** And what I love about that answer is how it embodies this kind of humanism (a gauche word in black studies these days, I know!) that’s been pervading the conversation thus far. All I’m trying to say with that word is that I’m so heartened by the way your notion of and experience of doing philosophy is centered on the philosophers, on us; on those of us who think, and invite others to think. So often, it feels like we’re obsessed with perfecting the products of our philosophizing—the words we say, the arguments we construct, etc. And the danger of that mode of thinking is, of course, that if the product is imperfect then the philosophizing has been a failure. But you’re offering us a way to love philosophizing because of what it does for the philosopher: where it takes us, and who it takes us to. Maybe this is a bit pat, but as you’re describing it, we don’t think in order to write a final product; we write and write in order to keep thinking. “Producing philosophy” is the imperfect thing we keep trying to do so that we can keep changing, as the people we are, and get close to others, and change them too, and be changed by them. If every written philosophical text disappeared from the world, all of our hard work wouldn’t have been a waste at all. I really love that!

**MARQUIS:** Yes, precisely! I love that. I truly do write in order to continue thinking, to discover and invent and create and forge thinking in different ways. How can we continue to write and philosophize in service of ideas that allow us to become together in different, perhaps more robust ways? And that project is one, I’m coming to insist upon who it takes us to. Maybe this is a bit pat, but as you’re describing it, we don’t think in order to write a final product; we write and write in order to keep thinking. “Producing philosophy” is the imperfect thing we keep trying to do so that we can keep changing, as the people we are, and get close to others, and change them too, and be changed by them. If every written philosophical text disappeared from the world, all of our hard work wouldn’t have been a waste at all. I really love that!

**NICHOLAS:** And this feels like it’s really at the heart of that book. So let’s move there! I have a thing I want to ask following up on this precise point, but let’s take the long route there. First, to circle back to that tough, weird question we opened with: what is *Black Trans Feminism* about? What are you trying to do with and in this book, in particular?

**MARQUIS:** That is the question I’m never quite good at answering, even though it is, of course, one of the first, most sensible questions to ask. I’ll begin with this: I wrote *Black Trans Feminism* out of two equally powerful feelings: love and exhaustion. To the former, I encountered a number of ideas and people and texts and language that simply enraptured me and made me want to live in and through them. I encountered—truly encountered, in a sense that carries with it a being struck, a being affected, being moved—C. Riley Snorton, both on the page and in the classroom (not to mention the university office or the coffee shop), Susan Stryker, Judith Butler, Fred Moten, Hortense Spillers, Cathy Cohen; and, too, someone like Gilles Deleuze. Encountering them allowed me to encounter a kind of love that moved me to, as Snorton once told me, take thoughts and ideas as seriously and as deeply as I could. That seriousness and depth is what I move through.

To the latter—the feeling of exhaustion—I found myself more and more reading or listening to folks recapitulate things I found either boring or off or misguided. Surely this is the nature of academia: we have intellectual disagreements and sometimes write those things down as the basis for an argument. But there was also an exhaustion I began to feel with the way that radical politics and sociality was being instantiated. It is no surprise that I depart, sometimes slightly and sometimes substantially, from many of the mainstream and even purportedly radical modes of thinking within the fields I move through. I depart from things like intersectionality (lovingly, let me be clear), like “cite black women,” like defining black trans feminism as “centering” black trans women, like identity politics—all of these things have complex understandings and definitions that I do not want to flatten, and I also don’t want to throw shade or malign these deeply important ways of thinking. But for me, what I attempt to do in *Black Trans Feminism* is offer a different, and to me more radical way of articulating justice and imagining the world differently. *Black Trans Feminism* is about what happens when we emphasize politics over purported identification, or what happens when we look elsewhere for how to relate to others. It is about allowing Hortense Spillers and Gilles Deleuze to talk to each other—hell, it is about actually reading Hortense Spillers and not simply throwing out buzzwords from that one and only essay it seems people have read of hers. It is about fugitivity and abolition, nonnormativity and radicality, hope. And in the text, it all requires that I reconfigure what is even meant by blackness, transness, and (black) feminism; it requires that I do not simply rehash common knowledge; it requires that I take ideas as seriously and as deeply as they’ll go. And that has led me to some quite interesting places in the book.

**NICHOLAS:** I wanna sit with your use of “exhaustion,” as opposed to, say, “disagreement.” We’ve all felt that, as academics; this experience of a field of literature, an institutional structure, hell, a conversation, as exhausting, as draining in this kinda precise and somewhat peculiar way that exceeds merely finding something people are saying or doing to be incorrect. If something about the ways of thinking of blackness, transness, feminism, and more generally “our ways of articulating justice” are exhausting, then they’re not just wrong. What are these ways of thinking and doing that you find exhausting, and what do you think you’re saying—about them, about scenes of conversation, about yourself—when you call them exhausting? What are we doing that’s draining, and why is it draining? Does that
make sense? I’m trying to find a way to articulate what it is you’re inviting people away from in the book by figuring out what it means to motivated to do so by exhaustion, this peculiar and precise word, you know?

MARQUIS: Yes, precisely. It’s not just “wrong,” at least in my estimation; exhaustion is something a little more particular. So what are those exhausting things? Well, one might be the ways that intersectionality is made recourse to over and over without much, if any, critical articulation. To me, it’s often expressed as a formulaic math problem: How many marginalized identities do you have? More than this person? Congratulations! You are the person who is to be listened to, who is right, who can have nothing said in opposition to them, etc. Or, another might be how blackness is theorized as definitionally deathbound, as always already known as the “black body” that is automatically given to social and political death, as nothing. Or, another might be the ways “ungendered” is mobilized as a buzzword without much consideration of the trans implications, without much consideration of what is happening in trans studies. Or lastly, another might be the presumption of “identity” as the thing we must always be thinking about and working toward more clearly articulating. That because the Combahee River Collective said something about their identities being the foundation for their politics and because so many black women in particular, and black people in general, have made constant recourse to the importance of their identities, then it is an overwhelming good that we simply need to continue regurgitating. I find all of these things, and more, quite, quite exhausting.

But now I feel compelled to clarify a bit, if I may. I know how all this sounds; I know how I sound saying these things, and I feel the urge to set a few things straight, knowing that I cannot set it all straight (though the book, I think, does a good job at that). But just for the record, I do not intend to align myself with the political right, nor with those who promote racial “colorblindness,” nor with people who castigate identity politics as an unthinking mob mentality. And further, I do not intend to align myself with black or trans conservatives, nor with those who pejoratively use phrases like “social justice snowflakes” or “woke moralists.” Let that be clear. Those who do or say these things often have an image of the world and relationality that seeks to preserve what is currently in place, are hostile toward radical change, are conservative—or liberal too, because liberalism is trash as well (let us be and become, as forcefully as possible, radical)—or are white supremacist, cisnormative, patriarchal, anti-choice, environmentally vicious, and extractive. My intention in departing from the discourses mentioned above is in fact to radicalize the left: How can we push harder and more forcefully toward the abolition of fundamentally harmful things, namely, categorical impositions, modalities of ontology? How can we not simply center the ever more marginalized and refuse that very logic of margin and center? Because in my understanding, the very logics of categorical imposition, of hierarchical inside/outside logics, of discrete individuation are all, at base, colonial impositions. So if we wish to fundamentally change things, we must undermine those logics, not merely the symptoms.

NICHOLAS: I’ll find my way back to the point, I promise, but first I’m pulled by yet another meandering tangent! What does it feel like, to have to make that last clarification? I’m often having to make the same kinds of clarifications—in my work on horror, for example, where I’m constantly saying things like “black people are horrific/monstrous”—and it’s always an odd rhetorical and conceptual move; but not necessarily a bad one! On the one hand, it’s frustrating to always have to be on the defensive, to have to always be cognizant of the way one’s pursuit of radicality might sound to bad faith actors, or the material ways in which our philosophical work, when they sound a certain way, can become fodder for brutality. But on the other hand, I find that there’s something genuinely exciting and fruitful about having to think, how does what I’m saying sound like what people who wanna do evil are saying? Why is it not that? What are these kinda subtle differences between radicality and evil? Why do people who wanna do evil sound so much, sometimes, to a lazy or bad faith or simply mistaken ear, like me? How do you navigate having to, and perhaps wanting to, or perhaps wishing you didn’t have to, make these clarifications?

MARQUIS: I really love these questions, and I love them in part because they are so difficult to answer. But you are absolutely right that these things sound so much like what people who want to do evil are saying, and there is work to be done to clarify the distinction (though, as we’ve established, it is exhausting work), but there is also work to be done precisely by those with lazy or bad faith or mistaken ear. And when that work is not done, I would wager that that is when it gets exhausting—it is exhausting when the conceptual, intellectual, philosophical work is imbalanced. So how I navigate that depends on those factors and others: Is the audience I have in this moment laboring with me to think, to philosophize in liberatory and radical ways? Is this audience simply here to have their assumptions reaffirmed (which is okay sometimes)? Is this audience looking to antagonize me and wait for a “gotcha” moment in order to undermine my entire philosophical project? I cannot know these things from the outset, no matter what shorthands many want to try to promote as a way to assume solidarity and togetherness. Those shorthands are always imprecise and unable to hold the grand capacities of what is needed. So I am often a bit timid when interacting with others because I am never certain, from the jump, where someone is at, never certain of the extent to which I’ll have to curtail potentials for intellectual (and perhaps even physical) violence. And on the one hand I don’t mind this timidity because that is simply another way to say that I am suspending assumptions and allowing for the burgeoning moments of interaction to characterize the kind of relationship I can have with another; timidity is simply another way to say, in this scenario, pause. And I love that a lot, it’s actually one of the things I say in the context of my departure from tenets underlying what is deemed “identity politics.” Let us not presume that because this other person is, ostensibly, “like me” that automatically means they are like me, have the same relationship and view of power, occupy the same positions, have the same politics.
But it is nonetheless tiring. So, on the other hand, I want so desperately to be able to not have to explain myself, to defend myself at each turn. I keep my mouth shut sometimes because I have a strong feeling that what I think is not welcomed—I would be the Debbie Downer if I were to say something I thought right now, so I’ll just say nothing, go back home, and write furiously for a few hours about all the things I wanted to say. That can be cathartic, sure, but what would be most cathartic, I think, is not even agreement with me on all things—that’s kind of boring—but something a bit more humble: Can you cultivate space for us, whoever “us” is in this moment, to truly meet each other and be invited into a coalitional gathering where we are without presumption and are here only because we wish to engender the possibility of emerging just a bit more freely? I continue to hope for that.

NICHOLAS: That’s fantastic, you just gave me words for that exhaustion I didn’t have! It’s the exhaustion of disproportionate work; it’s the exhaustion of being on guard. Being surrounded by people who believe the contrary to you may be exhausting in some sense, but not, I think, in the sense we’re talking about. This is an almost internally directed exhaustion, an exhaustion stemming from constant self-regulation and self-surveillance. It’s sad to describe it that way, but I think that’s often how it feels. And now I have to do the very same kind of clarification by noting that I’m in no way trying to latch onto cancel culture discourse, or free speech whinings by the elites! What’s going on here is less a fear of being canceled and more a constant awareness of the way our discursive and grammatical resources are so limited for what we’re trying to do, so we have to do the extra work of trying to do it within that paucity. And it’s exhausting because that extra work—the affects of good faith and humility, the willingness to think through an odd-sounding radical claim—is often disproportionate, as you say. So actually, to remix the diagnosis of self-regulation and surveillance I just mentioned, maybe we could say that the exhaustion you’re feeling, the exhaustion Black Trans Feminism is trying to do something about, is not the exhaustion of always having to be careful or timid, but of often, in these conversations, being the only one who’s careful and timid. I’ve noticed that in my writings against modern “antiracism,” the words that often bubble up are words like “smug,” “smarmy,” “self-assured.” I feel like in doing so, I’m trying to say something like what you’re saying here: humility is, in fact, a radical virtue, and the congealments of, say, identity politics might be seen as symptoms of, or made possible by, the flight of studying and thinking about race and gender injustice from a metaphilosophical orientation of humility into one of self-security.

MARQUIS: Yes! The exhaustion of being the only one who’s careful or timid. That’s exactly it. I so deeply want others to be more precise, or rather more capacious and open, more experimental and curious and inquisitive. Because I often find that when I say things like blackness is a primordial mutiny against imposed ontologies available to anyone, or transness is the critique of gender as such, or that feminism—which is always a black feminism and a trans feminism—is the undoing and abolition of gender norms, and then find myself uninterested in “female” “empowerment” or championing all things black or validating incessantly any and everything a trans woman does, people often come at me with, “But I thought you were a feminist!” or “You’re supposed to be all about black power” (two things I’ve had hurled at me on more than one occasion). Those responses evacuate thinking and the possibility of these things meaning something radically, critically different. They’ve already pinned down the definition, an immutable definition, and when I do not align with it there is no carelessness in how it is being articulating but in fact a very blunt and imprecise deploying of a sort-of definition one has never really thought about. It’s frustrating, to say the least.

So the emphasis on humility is key for me. One of the reasons why, briefly—and still kind of, though in a very particular way—I developed a love for someone like Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was, at least in one sense, all about the “perhaps.” And I love that, a kind of Gianni Vattimo “weak thought” (I’m really digging into my continental philosophical archive now!). And of course, this is what I learn, too, from black studies—from undercommon study and fugitive planning—or from trans feminist theory—from a refusal to let normativity hold uncritical sway. A love for deep thought. And perhaps here is one of the most acute links between the philosophical tradition from which I come and this intellectual sentiment of care and precision: if some of the most radical thinking, genuine thinking has come from, in my estimation, trans theory, black feminist theory, black studies (“all thought,” writes Jared Sexton, with whom I of course quibble in other regards, “insofar as it is genuine thinking, might best be conceived of as black thought”), and if Martin Heidegger—twentieth-century continental philosopher extraordinaire—notes in his later years that “the most thought-provoking thing about the times we live in is that we still are not thinking,” then how can one not be doing intense metaphilosophical work when thinking the questions and implication of the black, the trans, and the feminist?

NICHOLAS: It’s funny, because I’m seeing another weird “analytic philosophy crossover” here. Another way to describe the thing that those folks you’re exhausted by aren’t doing is defining, or letting you define, your terms! There’s certainly an overfetishization of defining one’s terms, clearing the conceptual ground, in analytic mainstream philosophy, but you’re hinting that there’s something to that kind of precision. And a thing you’re revealing is that it’s not just that such precision allows us to get “closer to the truth,” but that it’s kinder! It’s more social, it’s more generous, it’s more loving, to ask someone “What do you mean by x?” instead of assuming we know what they mean. This is something running through a lot of my work these days: if someone is asking you to think deeply with them, then sure—in addition to the intrinsic value of deep thought that you’re pointing out—it’s cruel, antisocial, to refuse! We teach children to listen with open ears and closed mouth, but of course that’s wrong. To care about what someone says is not just to hear it, but to ask more about it, so that you understand it better.

So then, here’s a chance for you! In the book, and throughout our conversation, you’ve returned to a series of claims: that
the names we give certain social categories—black, trans, queer, feminist, etc.—can and should be used differently than the way contemporary identity politics uses them. This is a way of using those names that aligns them with an abolitionist project—a project of refusal—about race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In doing so, we reveal that blackness, transness, queerness, feminism, all exceed—are more than—what contemporary identity politics take them to be. If this rearticulation of what you’re after in the book sounds good to you, then here’s me listening with an open mouth: What do contemporary identity politics tell us that blackness, and transness, and womanhood, and queerness are? And given that, what is that politics—what is that kind of feminism, and black “radicalism,” etc.—interested in doing or accomplishing in the world? What is the vision of the world, and our identities, that your book is inviting us away from?

MARQUIS: There certainly is something to that precision. It’s a precision that is not quite interested in “mastery”; it’s not a precision to get things proper and in order. Rather, for me, it’s a precision that has an ethics, as you’ve alluded to. Precision in service of mitigating harm and violence. It is kinder and more compassionate to sit with another and listen, to ask “What do you mean by x?” or to continue to invite them to say more (indeed, the thing I always say—and that my partner would corroborate this in a heartbeat—when I have more questions or even when I think someone is completely off about something, is “Could you say more?”). In this is truly a deep sense of care: I care enough to engage.

So you’ve tasked me, it seems, with caring to engage on the page, explicitly, and I am so grateful for that. What it seems to me that contemporary politics regarding identity defines the terms at hand as, overall, is one of fixity and knowability: I know what it is to be black, to be trans, to be a feminist, and I know that because I’ve already decided what it is, and further still, it cannot change. Contemporary politics says that blackness is fixed and rooted in the epidermis and that, too, it is tied to—solely to—a history of abduction and captivity. Contemporary politics tells us that to be trans is to have undergone “the surgery” or to feel “trapped in the wrong body,” to be a “man” who feels like a “woman” or a “woman” who feels like a “man.” Contemporary politics tells us that a feminist is someone who is all about “women’s empowerment” and “leaning in” and voting for Hilary Clinton. Surely there is more to these definitions and they are striated in certain ways, but this feels very much like the refrain I hear over and over. And it bubbles up in so many subtly insidious ways: you’re black, so you must be in agreement with this other black person about race; you didn’t vote for Hilary Clinton—you’re supposed to be a feminist; you disagree with this black trans woman? It disallows so much, and it in fact disallows thinking, a critical apparatus; it disallows pushing further and more radically. Like, no, I’m actually not okay with any and all genders or gender proliferation—I’m interested in abolishing the whole regime. So I would actually say that those who promote this loose kind of identity politics, i.e., because one is a purported race or gender then on those grounds one is in solidarity or agreement with them, in fact do not do politics.

Let me explain myself, because I know that sounds wild. To note implicitly or explicitly that one ought to or does have an affinity for something on the grounds of a bestowed or claimed identity evacuates capacity within subjectivity. In other words, there is no room to move—which is to say, agitate, engender other kinds of relations, think, do the political—when one is confined to their identity and unable to do something outside of the circumscriptions of that identity. The way I understand identity is that it is an imposed ontology, it is given, enforced—nonconsensually.

Before we are even permitted to exist—indeed, in order to even be said to exist—we must accept unwaveringly these categorizations that have preceded us. There was no say in being something else. This is what identity is, on my reading. And, too, this is a violent act—a primordially, ontologically violent act. So, because I am interested in abolishing any violent mode of existence and relationality, that necessitates the abolition of identity as well. I want to invite us into daring to imagine what life could be like were we able to imagine ourselves for ourselves from the jump, rather than already within a system of confinement. If “identifies” definitionally cannot not be chosen, what would it be like to choose something else?

The vision of the world, I think, that I and Black Trans Feminism invite us away from is not just a world that is obviously bad (characterized by white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, transantagonism, and the like; the easy targets) but also one in which people still say “Sir” and “Ma’am” and check “African American” or “White” on surveys and promote incarceration as “justice.” So I think I’ll end here by quoting myself, as gauche as such a move is (please forgive me). I just want to show that all of what I’m saying is also actually said in the work itself; it’s right there in print—which was a terrifying thing to do—and I feel compelled, at least for now, to stand by it. So, in the Introduction, I write:

Black trans feminism cannot abide such classificatory violences, so it urges us also to abolish the categories we may love, even if they have not always been received well. If the aim of the radical project of black trans feminism is abolition and gender radicality, which is the case I will be making, it is imperative to grapple with what that actually means. We cannot half-ass abolition, holding on to some of the things we didn’t think we would be called to task for giving up. If we want freedom, we need to free ourselves, too, of the things with which we capture ourselves. The project at hand is interested in a thoroughgoing conception of freeness, and it seems like black trans feminism, to call on Saidiya Hartman, “makes everyone freer than they actually want to be.”

NICHOLAS: This is fantastic, and if you’ll allow me, I’m gonna give you the gift of an incredibly irritating, but I think really fruitful, expression of curiosity that’ll sound like a “gotcha.” I hope we’ve built the trust to know it’s not that!

Is Rachel Dolezal imagining herself for herself from the jump? (Why don’t we suspend, if possible, all the exhausting squabbles about the distinction between
transracial and transgender identity, and just try to isolate this one case.) Because to a certain ear, one in bad faith or one having trouble picking up what you’re putting down, it sounds like you’re saying she is. It’s quite clear to me, both from our conversation and from the book, that you’re not, or not quite, and I have an inkling about what you might say in response to this. But I wanna offer you this chance to work through this question yourself. Are you inviting us to a vision of human life whereby “freedom” from classificatory violence looks like what Rachel Dolezal is doing?

MARQUIS: This is a super thorny question, but an exciting one—one that I’ve in fact answered at length in my article “Incorporeal Blackness: A Theorization in Two Parts—Rachel Dolezal and Your Face in Mine.” So I’ll answer this in two parts, first, a little lazily, with a passage from that article about my general sense about Dolezal; and second, more directly to your question posed here.

To Dolezal. In that essay, at length, I write:

I attempt to extricate “good feelings” or feelings of sympathy for her from seeing her as an occasion that highlights how we might reassert our intellectual and socio-political understandings of subjectivity, of ontology, of what is possible for us to be in the world. I actually do not like her, to be honest. She does not strike me as someone with whom I would be friends, nor is she to me a “good” person. If I may, she is quite annoying, antagonizing at times. And yet, I cannot get away from her. . . . My aim, then, is to proffer blackness’s incorporeality as a vector through which to complicate the worn narrative surrounding Dolezal and transracialism, delinking the argument from whether racial mutability is “a thing” and moving toward a conception of blackness (not “race”) as conditioning a certain ontological mutability and instantiating the possibility, and radicality, of mobilizing a blackness to trans effects.²

That’s the aim with Dolezal, understanding her as a provocation—an imperfect and difficult one—to think other things as possible.

To your question directly: “freedom” from classificatory logics is not simply an open electivity whereby people can choose to identify however they wish. That is a misguided reading of what I seek to do (and I appreciate so much how you’re not doing that). I think this kind of freedom is not really “any person, any identity” but rather, much more than that, the vitiation of such categorical alignments as requisites for social viability. In other words, I’m looking for a way to be in relation that is in fact not predicated at all on having to choose this box or that box; a sociality that is open in the sense that we need not “be” this or that in advance precisely because we emerge as legible or viable in the relation with others, without presumption and circumscription, without, as a philosopher might say, existing ahead of ourselves.

NICHOLAS: And that brings us to what is, to and for me, the heart of your book, and a perfect place for us to move from this conversation to whatever comes next. Throughout the book, your reimageritions of blackness, transness, and feminism orbit around a fervent commitment to praxis: to doing things in the world, things that make it better for all of us. When the commitment to existence ahead of ourselves—to say once and for all what it is to be ourselves, where that must take hold of static taxonomies to work—is abandoned, I hear you saying, our senses of selves—our identities, if such a word must still be used—become entangled with what we do. It’s no wonder, to me, that your formulation of “black trans feminism” doesn’t read “black trans womanhood,” that you undergird all of the ontological work you’re after with a political project. In this, I’m reminded of recent work in philosophy of race that’s pushing us towards the same kind of renewed commitment to centering political activity in our theorizing: I’m thinking about work from Olúfemí O. Táiwò and Briana Toole, in particular.

So I have two related questions for you, to round us out here. First, how is, if it is, the work of actually living and doing in the world snaking throughout our conversation, in what we’ve left unspoken here, to be found in the book? Where does praxis hide in what we’ve talked about so far together?

And then, the crucial next step, to those reading, wherever and whoever and however they may be, those who may be so used—we all are, at least sometimes—to a way of doing academia that centers on knowing instead of doing. What do you want them to do with what we’ve said here? Not just what you want them to know or to think about: How do you want these words, and your book, to enter their lives? They may not do it; perhaps they won’t want to, or will not know how, or will think they have a better idea, or will in fact have a better idea. But what do you, yourself, wish for them? If praxis is all wrapped up in what you’re thinking about, then how do you want people to take hold of it?

Does that make sense?

MARQUIS: I think this is a marvelous way to bring this conversation to “whatever comes next,” as you’ve beautifully said. And I’ll do my best to respond to the two questions genuinely.

To the first, living and doing in the world (or perhaps the worlds) can be found in the book in numerous ways, I think. Most obviously in the final chapter, the conclusion, wherein I meditate on “fugitive hope.” To me, black trans feminism invites an insistence on living, and with that living a certain disposition toward hope. It is not a glossy, naive hope but rather a fugitive one, a hope that is informed and steadfast where that must take hold of static taxonomies to work—ourselves—to say once and for all what it is to be ourselves, all of us. When the commitment to existence ahead of ourselves—to say once and for all what it is to be ourselves, where that must take hold of static taxonomies to work—is abandoned, I hear you saying, our senses of selves—our identities, if such a word must still be used—become entangled with what we do. It’s no wonder, to me, that your formulation of “black trans feminism” doesn’t read “black trans womanhood,” that you undergird all of the ontological work you’re after with a political project. In this, I’m reminded of recent work in philosophy of race that’s pushing us towards the same kind of renewed commitment to centering political activity in our theorizing: I’m thinking about work from Olúfemí O. Táiwò and Briana Toole, in particular.

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not what we need it to be. So fugitive hope, that concluding chapter, demands that we do not lose sight of sociality in the here and now and to come, because this is what we have and where we are, and we demand better of it, can only emerge into the kind of existence we so urgently desire if it were better.

Also in the book, doing and living is deeply embedded in the philosophical and metaphilosophical, I want to assert. All this “high” theory and philosophizing is intimate with the social life of things: to think and do philosophy—which is very much a praxis; a critical disposition is embedded endemically with praxis, how to move and act—is to practice how to be in the world better with ourselves and others. So when I discuss the trans/figurative or becoming-black woman or indeed abolition and gender radicality, my hope is that these ideas move others to, for example, refuse to resort to calling the police, to stop using gendered pronouns when addressing someone who has not gifted them with their (un)gendered relationship to the world, to stop balking at the ways people subvert the assumptions of ontological immutability, to love more fiercely and courageously, to cultivate more room for conditions that open up possibilities. These are all things we must do.

To your second question, I suppose I’ve already started answering it. But more pointedly, how do I want those reading these words to be moved and entered by them? In small and large ways, spectacular and quotidian ways. Having read this, you may very well now call yourself an abolitionist and join abolitionist organizations or be out on the front lines during a protest. Very good. You might find yourself no longer saying “That guy over there” when you don’t actually know if that person is or desires to be a “guy.” And very good. You might discover that this is the first time you’ve been able to think of yourself as not having to be a “man” or a “woman” and begin, in whatever way, moving away from those or other designations of yourself. Very good too. Or you might have more courage to pick up a molotov and throw it through a window when there is yet another eruption of white supremacist or transantagonistic or patriarchal violence. And, to that too, very good. Do any number of these and other things. The point is that you are moved. That is the fugitive spirit, the spirit of refusal to let things remain as they are. The spirit of abolition and radicality emerging from the black and trans and feminist and black trans feminist. I want you, reader, to move and be moved and move others—radically.

NOTES

CALL FOR PAPERS

APA Studies on LGBTQ Philosophy invites members to submit papers, book reviews, and interviews, conversations, and more experimental writing formats for publication in the spring 2023 and fall 2023 editions. Submissions can address the areas of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, asexuality, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as issues of concern for LGBTQ people in the profession. The journal seeks quality paper submissions for review. Reviews and notes should address recent books, current events, or emerging trends. Members who give papers at APA divisional meetings, in particular, are encouraged to submit their work. Please pitch the editor before the deadline if you have an interview or more experimental proposal.

DEADLINE
The deadline for submission of manuscripts for a spring edition is December 15, 2022. The deadline for the fall edition is May 1, 2023. The editor may choose to move submissions from the spring edition to the fall edition depending on the number of submissions received.

FORMAT
Papers should be in the range of 5,000–6,000 words, with 7,500 words maximum permitted. Reviews and Notes should be in the range of 1,000–2,000 words, with 3,000 words maximum permitted. All submissions must use endnotes and should be prepared for anonymous review.

CONTACT
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Marquis Bey is assistant professor of African American Studies and English, faculty affiliate and advisory board member of Gender & Sexuality Studies, and advisory board member of Critical Theory. Broadly, their work concerns black feminist theorizing, transgender & nonbinary studies, critical theory, and contemporary literature. They are the author, most recently, of Black Trans Feminism and Cistem Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender, both published with Duke University Press in 2022.

Nicholas Whittaker (they/them) is a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center, CUNY, studying philosophy. Their research is focused on a cluster of interrelated questions bubbling out of philosophy of race, philosophy of art, phenomenology, philosophy of language, and metaphilosophy. Besides their academic writings, which can be found in the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism and Film and Philosophy, they’ve written about movies, books, blackness, and love for publications including the New York Times, the LA Review of Books, The Point, and The Drift.

Amy Marvin is a visiting assistant professor in philosophy at Gettysburg College. Her work focuses on care, cultural production, solidarity, community, and their mediation through institutions, with interests in feminist philosophy, social and political philosophy, and continental philosophy. Her writing appears in Philosophy Compass, Contingent Magazine, Hypatia, Feminist Philosophy Quarterly, Transgender Studies Quarterly, and Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge.
APA STUDIES ON Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry
UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, CONNECTICUT

We celebrate the new name of this publication. The American Philosophical Association has authorized changing the name from APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy to APA Studies in Native American and Indigenous Philosophy to emphasize that work printed in this venue—as in all the previous newsletters—is anonymously peer reviewed in the case of professional-level submissions, and reviewed for specific educational merit in the case of student contributions. As such, having your work published here should count positively in hiring, tenure, promotion, and admissions decisions.

We open the issue with a poem, “Made With Love,” by Spelman College student Valencia White. We have often opened with poems, invocations, or descriptions of artistic practice. Our decision to do so demonstrates a core principle of many Indigenous philosophies, namely, that reality is multifaceted and includes the poetic as its own force. Beauty and the ethical implications of Walking in Beauty are real. As such, a metaphysics that fails to recognize this, or an epistemology that fails to provide resources for understanding and working with this dimension of reality, are, from an Indigenous perspective, signs of a partial and therefore inadequate philosophy.

The poem is followed by a letter from Committee Chair Andrea Sullivan-Clarke (Muscogee) of Windsor University that thematizes a resilience that, along with the creative response to the poetic dimensions of our world, is a hallmark of Native American and Indigenous philosophical practice.

This issue has two sets of offerings that work together to demonstrate implications of the Native American/Indigenous intertwining of epistemological and ethical principles. The first, by Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, intervenes in conversations about epistemologies of ignorance from an Indigenous philosophical perspective. She explicates, then critiques suggestions found in some of that work that members of systemically oppressed communities consider capitalizing on the patterns of ignorance perpetuated against them as a form of political resistance. While these suggestions may be well-intentioned, they betray some fundamental misunderstandings of the cohesion of norms demanding epistemological and ethical responsibility in Indigenous philosophy.

The second set consists of a course assignment devised by Shay Welch of Spelman College for her undergraduate course in Native American philosophy. It is followed by three examples of undergraduate work in response to the assignment. Student authors are Naima Castañeda Isaac, Simone Madden, and Valencia White. In her course, Welch asks students to work with the principles of Native epistemology in ways that are congruent with its philosophical practice. In the process, she exemplifies how these principles both ground and integrate inquirers as full-bodied persons—relationally embedded in communities with specific locations, bearing both historical weight and creative possibility to which members are responsible and responsive. As Welch’s assignment demonstrates, a distinct strength of Native American philosophy is that it rejects the methodological sundering of our capacities as inquirers, knowers, and builders and instead demands an integrated response. Since so much of Western academic practice demands self-fragmentation and self-alienation, students met this assignment with some trepidation. They were stretched, but their work demonstrates the richness that marks philosophical inquiry, in its deepest and ultimately most abiding meaning, as the response to the call of Wisdom and the reckoning with that call in our lives.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in Studies in Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We invite comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding Native American and Indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats. As noted, work is anonymously peer reviewed. For scholars needing further information about acceptance rates for their professional records, please contact the managing editor.

In all cases, references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website. Please submit...
material electronically to Agnes Curry (acurry@usj.edu). For consideration for the spring 2023 issue, please submit your work by January 15, 2023.

POEM

Made With Love: Poem and Description

Valencia White
SPELMAN COLLEGE

MADE WITH LOVE

One thing I can say for certain: my grandma knows how to cook
And she didn’t learn it from a recipe book
There is no scientific method for her mac n cheese
And cornbread doesn’t come with a hypothesis
Her palate doesn’t need testing tubes
The formula for her baking consists of hard work and care

Her momma taught her how to cook with love
Told her that she didn’t need any measuring cups
And to season until her soul told her to stop
Her momma showed her how to make something out of nothing and to make it with passion
How to make food taste like it was blessed by the heavens above
How to cook for the whole family, and to do it with ease

But still, her food is always evolving
Her recipes are dynamic
Shaped by the ingredients around her
She takes what she’s learned and makes it uniquely hers

See my grandma knows how to cook
Because she cooks to make her family smile
To see us laugh around the dinner table
To see our eyes light up the minute she tells us food is ready
Cooking for my grandma is a selfless act
No matter what was going on, she always made sure we were fed

You know, I want to know how to cook
How to dance around the kitchen in a flawless choreography
Perfectly cooking thanksgiving dinner with finesse and ease
So I learn from my grandma as much as I can
I take in her tips and tricks
Hoping that one day, just like her, I will truly know how to cook

***

My poem, “Made With Love,” analyzes the concept of Indigenous knowledge and how it relates to the Black experience in connection to cooking. This poem relates to the concept of Indigenous knowledge because I talk about how knowledge comes from ancestors and is passed down from generation to generation. I talk about this in regards to my grandma learning from her mother, and her teaching me how to cook. Additionally, one of the qualifications for something to be viewed as knowledge for Indigenous people is that cooking must be done with an ethical purpose. My grandma cooks with the purpose of bringing joy and feeding her family, which is ethical, and there is only positive intent behind her actions. Native knowledge is also shaped through experience and observation, which my grandma did with her mother and I do with her as described within the poem. My grandma ultimately knows how to cook because of the experience she has: she knows more than anyone else in my family. Another key factor is that this knowledge was attained in an ethical way and there was no harm in the creation of this knowledge. Lastly, my grandma’s knowledge of cooking could be defined as knowledge in accordance with Indigenous qualifications of knowledge because it is not restrained in a way that Western knowledge requires for something to be knowledge. Western sciences and knowledge often require strict validations or procedures in order for it to be considered “real knowledge,” and once defined cannot be changed. My grandma’s cooking is constantly evolving and her knowledge is not static: there is always more to be learned.

I am adding to the Native concept of knowledge because I am showing that Native philosophies are often ingrained within our lives and this fact goes unrecognized. When told how Indigenous knowledge is created, a lot of people would immediately disregard that as weird or untrue. The example of cooking proves that many people actually do have conceptions of Indigenous knowledge within their lives, but they just don’t recognize it. The idea of passing recipes and certain cooking techniques from generation to generation is something that many people have in their families. I think it is also interesting to note how the Native conception of knowledge is more normalized in terms of cooking, but it is not recognized in other fields, when cooking and baking are technically chemistry (in accordance with Western knowledge). Although recipes are often suggested, they are not required in order to make a good dish, and I would argue that recipes are just lab reports and use scientific methodology because of the steps, trials, and materials that must be described in order for something to be considered a legitimate recipe. Therefore, it is seen as okay in Western knowledge to use the Native conceptions of knowledge in regards to cooking because when one has the experience and has learned from their elders, they are viewed to be experts in whatever they are cooking.

Additionally, cooking is such an important part of Black culture, and the ability to pass down the capability to make soul food or cultural food is common in a lot of Black families. The idea of cooking with no recipe is a sentiment that many Black families share because the recipes have been cooked so many times that it is almost muscle memory. It is a trait that has managed to not become colonized and has stayed constant since before slavery. I think it’s important to recognize parallels between Indigenous cultures and Black culture because it shows the history that is behind some of the things that Black people just consider to be normal. It reflects the idea that knowledge is maintained
through experience, action, and observation, and that many fail to recognize that this is how knowledge was originally maintained and defined. There are a lot of conversations within the Black community regarding returning to one’s roots or being connected with one’s ancestors. I have shown that cooking is one of the ways you can do that because cooking is an example of knowledge that Black people have that actually comes from their ancestors, especially in regards to soul food. I believe that cooking is one way that Black people are really able to connect with their ancestors and don’t even notice it.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR
Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
WINDSOR UNIVERSITY

One of my favorite movies is Smoke Signals and one of my favorite lines comes from the radio DJ who tells his listeners, “It is a good day to be Indigenous.” Many times, I tell myself that, especially when the items on my to-do list are checked off or when I have had a meeting with my Indigenous colleagues. Something about being in their company recharges my batteries and keeps me going until I can return home to Oklahoma.

Many would think that after a couple years of a pandemic with a virus that keeps mutating and affecting our lives in significant ways, it might be strange to say that it is a good day to be Indigenous. True, we have not attended many APA meetings, or we may not have held many sessions, but we have adapted and are looking to grow as well as thrive. Yes, there are events in the world that negatively impact Indigenous people all over the globe—the slaughter of people so that corporations and countries may take the land, the militarized policing of those standing up for the environment, and the location of mass graves connected with the colonial policies of residential schools to name a few.

It is not easy to be an academic when so many events in the world demand your attention and energies. But being Indigenous means also to be resilient. It means to adapt, to stay true to oneself and maintain one’s relations. We may not have had the typical production in a normal year, but we have returned with ideas, plans, and visions of the goals that we want our committee to implement in the coming year. To that end, we have created an APA community that is open to all those seeking to be a part of our group; please join us! We invite those who have Indigenous research to please submit to our new APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We encourage our fellow committees, especially those representing historically marginalized groups within philosophy, to collaborate with us in developing panels, sessions, and projects.

As I embrace the final year of being chair, I think it is a good day to be Indigenous because, like our ancestors, we are still here, and we are moving forward. We have new members willing to take up the projects and provide fresh insights and experiences that will take us in a new and yet very familiar direction. It is exciting to begin my last year—it is also a good day to be Indigenous.

NOTES

ARTICLES
Strategic Ignorance: Is It Appropriate for Indigenous Resistance?

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
WINDSOR UNIVERSITY

In Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana reveal there is more to the phenomenon of ignorance than is generally assumed. According to Sullivan and Tuana, “ignorance is often thought of as a gap in knowledge, as an epistemic oversight that easily could be remedied.” Described in this way, ignorance is not a desired state, and once we discover that we lack a critical piece of information, we immediately attempt to remedy the situation. In cases of racial oppression, however, ignorance can also play a more calculated, and thus more pernicious, role. In some instances, “a lack of knowledge or an unlearning . . . is actively produced for purposes of domination.” Those holding power can use ignorance in ways to oppress others and preserve the status quo.

As a tool of oppression, ignorance can assume different forms. It might be the result of an intentional act to prevent a group’s access to knowledge acquisition, such as preventing girls from going to school so that they may not receive an education. In a similar vein, it may assume the form of removing Indigenous children from their home and forcing them to attend residential school. In this way the United States and Canada intended to deal with their “Indian problem” by forcing them to assimilate while preventing Indigenous children from learning their traditional knowledge. Ignorance may also result from the intentional creation of “informational niches” that lead to a society’s “collective amnesia.” One example of the intentional creation of a state of ignorance can be found on the historical websites of state governments, like the one for the state of Indiana. According to the website, Indiana was the historic homeland of many Native American tribes including the Shawnee, Miami, Wea, Potawatomi, Delaware, Wyandot, Kickapoo, Piankashaw, Chickasaw and others. These tribes were removed from the state through a series of treaties in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Although the information notes that the tribes were removed from the area, it reads as though the Indigenous inhabitants signed treaties and left of their own volition. It makes no mention that tribes, like the Potawatomi, were forcibly escorted by the US Army from their homelands and
made to undertake what is referred to as the Trail of Death. The historical description also assumes the legitimacy of the treaty-making process, even though there were many underhanded dealings by Indian agents and government officials to gain access to Indigenous land for non-Indigenous settlement. Other examples of informational niches that aim to whitewash the racist history of the United States include statues honoring leaders of the confederacy and even Mount Rushmore, a monument to four former American presidents built into the sacred land of the Lakota.

Although the above examples of controlling knowledge access and social memory attest to the power of dominant groups in society, ignorance is not solely a tool of the oppressor. In fact, an interesting point made by Alison Bailey is that some instances of ignorance can be exploited by individuals from historically marginalized groups. For example, the white ignorance possessed by members of the dominant society can be used by oppressed people to conduct a form of resistance to their oppression. In this paper, I consider Bailey’s account of strategic ignorance (the exploitation of a dominant group’s ignorance about racial injustice) as a possible method of Indigenous resistance. My worry is that Bailey’s endorsement of strategic ignorance fails to consider Indigenous epistemologies that are connected to the land and emphasize such values as harmony, balance, and beauty.

As a result, I claim that strategic ignorance, generally speaking, is not a viable resistance measure for the Native American and First Nation communities of Turtle Island (North America). I conclude by addressing two possible objections to my critique: the use of trickster methodology in Indigenous narratives and the support of ethnographic refusal by Indigenous activists and researchers. Having addressed these objections, I conclude by suggesting that recent Indigenous resistance, which relies on being someone that one’s ancestors would recognize, also runs counter to Bailey’s view.

THE LOGIC OF IGNORANCE

Bailey’s strategic ignorance as a tool of resistance relies on María Lugones’s account of two types of subjects and the logics associated with them: the pure subject (a unified identity) and the fragmented subject (one whose identity is reduced to a racially marked one). Members of the dominant society (predominantly white and colonizing) rely on the logic of purity to understand identity. Per this logic, members of the dominant society have identities associated with different identities, such as when an Indigenous person can bring their unique perspective to solving an environmental concern. For Bailey, it is better to rely on both logics—to “keep the logic of curdling superimposed” on the logic of purity.

Unfortunately, in terms of race, those in power rely almost exclusively on the logic of purity. As a result of its power, the logic of purity enables its users to “erase, dismiss, distort, and forget about the lives, cultures, and histories” of oppressed people. Epistemically, members using the logic of purity fail to see how the world really is; they are actively ignorant. Given that in most cases, ignorance is something to be avoided, one might assume that society would seek to actively challenge their assumptions about the world, or perhaps guard against being misled by their beliefs. That, however, is not the case. As Bailey describes,
the logic of purity is comfortable. It preserves the hierarchy of power on which a racial or colonial society depends.

To challenge the status quo, Bailey suggests that oppressed people use the logic of purity to their advantage—more specifically, they should exploit the “logic of purity . . . in resistant ways.” This is a significant departure from what we normally think about ignorance. In most cases, the response is to directly engage those who are ignorant by informing them of their deficiency. For example, if someone is not familiar with the treatment of indigenous children in the residential schools, I would try to show them historical accounts and testimony from survivors. But when the individuals who hold the power are resistant to change, the challenge is made even more difficult. Exploiting the logic of purity enables those who are oppressed to resist their oppression while at the same time preserving their sense of self. An example might be to invoke a “calculated slow down” while doing work. Those in power would chalk up the slow down to laziness—while those working slowly have the satisfaction of getting over on the boss. Those who are oppressed are often depicted as victims, which prevents others (and sometimes even themselves) from thinking about their situation in a more sophisticated way. Bailey’s solution draws on Lugones’s theorizing of oppressed people as oppressed resisting subjects in order to reframe the lives of victims of oppression. No longer thought of as passive and unable to change their circumstances, oppressed resisting subjects can take control to actively change an oppressive society.

In order to actively resist, those who are oppressed must draw from their knowledge of multiple worldviews, specifically, those knowledges that they use to navigate the world. Indigenous people describe day-to-day living as walking in two worlds because they avail themselves of the epistemological resources contained in the traditional and the colonial worldviews. According to Bailey, oppressed individuals rely on multiple knowledges to navigate the master’s house under the gaze of the oppressor and are able to do so without being truly seen. One who is oppressed draws from these different knowledges while “walking through his neighborhood, attending his schools, or working on his assembly line.” While those who are oppressed suffer from not being truly seen, Bailey also notes that the oppressor can be a victim of the logic of purity as well. If the oppressor fails to accurately know their world, then it would seem that their attempts to preserve the status quo makes them vulnerable to individuals who can exploit that vulnerability.

Oppressed resisting subjects, according to Bailey, make use of the “dominant misconceptions [about race] as a basis for active creative responses to oppression.” They accomplish this by playing into the logic of purity and its attendant stereotypes and prejudices. For example, Bailey describes instances of strategic ignorance committed by Black domestics who “accidentally broke [their employer’s] china while dusting or pretended they could not read when confronted with their employer’s questions about civil rights literature.” By exploiting the ignorance of those in power, oppressed resisting subjects are able to conduct a “a kind of underground ‘guerilla’ battle.” Strategic ignorance is successful in these cases because it feeds into the biased expectations of the oppressor. For example, the actions of the Black domestics are seen by the oppressor as being consistent with the stereotypes associated with the identity; the person is clumsy or ignorant.

Exploiting what the oppressor does not know showcases the role for logic of curdling. Bailey points out that it shows “how oppressed resisting subjects, as agents can animate their ambiguity as a tool for resistance.” The notion of multiple identities, as highlighted by the logic of curdling, enables a more robust interpretation of the acts of resistance: “the maid’s actions are ‘clumsy’ on purpose” and the person feigning the inability to read is wisely dumb. While playing into the stereotypes of racial ignorance may feed into the prejudices of the oppressor, it can also divert the attention of the oppressor from methods of survival utilized by marginalized individuals and communities. Thus, Bailey points out that the logic of curdling offers “techniques for survival, or they can be consciously cultivated into art of resistance and transformation.”

In spite of its diversity, we must not ignore that deploying strategic ignorance can come at a great cost for the oppressed resisting subject. The oppressed resisting subject must always be aware of the dangers associated with the acts of their resistance. Walking in two worlds requires an expenditure of resources such as time and energy. It can be exhausting (mentally and physically) to know the two worlds and the ways of navigating through them successfully. Bailey admits that oppressed resisting subjects must also attend to the context in which their resistant actions are carried out. For example, they must know their “employer’s moods” for one thing, and be aware of indicators like body language and tone of voice. A broken dish may result in something more serious than an eye roll from one’s employer or a docking of one’s pay.

Bailey suggests that strategic ignorance could be used in ways that might “undo white ignorance.” White ignorance relies on the logic of purity to not truly see people of color as fully equal of consideration. However, white ignorance also prevents the oppressor from seeing their own identity. The logic of purity acts as a filter that prevents the oppressor from being mindful of the properties that comprise their actual identity. That is to say, in light of intersectionality and situated knowledge, every identity is “multiple.” Under the influence of the logic of purity, however, the oppressor will fail to understand this. If such is the case, then perhaps exploiting strategic ignorance might induce a change in the oppressor’s perceptions.

Through strategic uses of ignorance, Bailey seeks to undermine the stereotypes and prejudices of dominant society. One example that she uses to make her case is that of Frederick Douglass. Douglass wanted to learn to write, and in order to learn the letters of the alphabet, he challenged white boys by stating that he could write letters better than them. Naturally, the boys would take up his challenge because they believed themselves to be superior. According to Bailey, Douglass exploited what the white boys did not know about “black character” and Douglass was able to learn how to write additional letters, a trick
that could only succeed if his opponent underestimated him. Bailey offers an interpretation of Douglass's daring by proposing that “hopefully [he] challenged the white boys’ existing perceptions while also boosting his sense of self.” If the acts of oppressed resisting subjects are to change society, then strategic ignorance must be able to affect the oppressor’s reliance on the logic of purity by “superimposing” the logic of curdling.48

STRATEGIC IGNORANCE AND THE REIFICATION OF STEREOTYPES

Although the use of strategic ignorance is believed to empower those who are oppressed, I am not as confident as Bailey regarding the transformative outcomes of strategic ignorance. I worry that the dangers of playing into the stereotypes and prejudices of the dominant society have not been fully considered. It stands to reason that reinforcing what the oppressor believes they “see” through the logic of purity would only serve to reify those stereotypes and prejudices. While Bailey mentions this objection, she fails to engage it fully, opting to entertain the possibility of using the reification of stereotype as part of the living-two-lives rhetoric. Although the limits of this paper prevent me from satisfactorily addressing the reification of stereotypes, I disagree that playing into the use of stereotypes would significantly contribute to the ease of living in two worlds, and I do not think this is what Indigenous people intend when they speak of their experience. Given that there are some extremely harmful stereotypes associated with racial identities, there must be a very good reason to advocate for their use. For example, in the documentary A Good Day to Die, police assumed that the Indigenous protestors occupying the Department of the Interior were violent given the warrior stereotype; they misunderstood that when an Indigenous protester said it was “a good day to die” they meant they were willing to give up their lives for the cause.50 The stereotype caused the police to misunderstand the motives of the protestors and to see them as a threat to their lives. I am not convinced that the use of stereotypes would promote the use of the logic of curdling among those in power; some may incite violence.

Consider a second example concerning Douglass. In 1854, he crafted an eloquent response to the architects of race science in his address, “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered.” Douglass argues,

The evils most fostered by slavery and oppression, are precisely those which slaveholders and oppressors would transfer from their system to the inherent character of their victims. . . . By making the enslaved a character fit only for slavery, they excuse themselves for refusing to make the slave a freeman. A wholesale method of accomplishing this result, is to overthrow the instinctive consciousness of the common brotherhood of man. For, let it be once granted that the human race is of multitudinous origin, naturally different in their moral, physical, and intellectual capacities, and at once you make plausible a demand for classes, grades and conditions, for different methods of culture, different moral, political, and religious institutions, and a chance is left for slavery, as a necessary institution.51

In spite of his skillful use of reason and rhetoric, Douglass’s speech did not receive uptake in the community of race scientists. If reason and eloquence is unsuccessful at gaining uptake, then how might his views be more likely to reach an audience if he adopts a stereotypical identity consistent with the logic of purity? Would they learn more if he acted uneducated or less articulate?

In addition to the presentation, consider Douglass’s claims; if we assume the differences of different races (as is posited by the logic of purity), then we will not be in the position to argue against the oppressive treatment of those believed to be inferior. Other examples of the recalcitrant nature of the logic of purity can be found in white society’s need to revive the articulate speeches by people of color, such as Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” and Chief Seattle’s 1854 Speech.52 In each case, the language in which the speech was given was changed to reflect biases concerning people of color. In the case of Truth’s speech, it was given the stereotypical speech reminiscent of the Black characters in Gone with the Wind. Chief Seattle’s speech was changed to project a noble savage image and was taken for use by environmentalists. While these changes were made to make the speeches more palatable or consistent with societal expectations, I suggest that the changes also reduced the speeches’ impacts on society because it is easy to dismiss the voice of a caricature. Given society’s lack of reaction in the face of Douglass’s counterevidence and the intentional revisions of speech to be consistent with racist expectations, I fail to see how acting in accord with racist stereotypes would yield more than broken china or the confirmation of the inferiority of people of color in the minds of the oppressors when they are guided by the logic of purity.

In addition to the above worry, I hesitate to promote the use of strategic ignorance on behalf of the Indigenous people and communities of Turtle Island. The epistemology of ignorance, particularly the willful maintenance of ignorance, is located within a non-Indigenous worldview and fails to engage with an Indigenous epistemology. This omission prevents those advocating for the adoption of strategic ignorance from considering whether such methods are consistent with the values of the Indigenous worldview. As we shall see, strategic ignorance does not make sense for many Indigenous communities because its utilization violates the obligation to preserving the harmony and balance with one’s relations.

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES AND WAYS OF BEING IN THE WORLD

When I speak about Indigenous epistemologies, I do not intend for my explanation to be applied to every Indigenous group on Turtle Island. Rather, I am referring to those communities who have epistemologies that have shared some epistemic “principles.” For example, there is a shared principle of relatedness in several of the epistemologies of Turtle Island and it addresses how one...
should act/be in the world. Indigenous individuals are born into a community that includes nonhuman relations, such as spirits, rocks, rivers, members of animal species, etc. To know that we are all related introduces obligations to those with whom we stand in relation. Indigenous people do not stand outside of the world, but they are participants in the “meaning-making of the world.” As Burkhardt describes, “How we [Indigenous people] behave, then, in a certain sense shapes meaning, gives shape to the world. In this way, what we do, how we act, is as important as any truth and any fact.”

There is a normative sense associated with living in the world. According to Viola Cordova, “the universe is a good thing—the goodness is inherent in the fact that the moving, living universe operates on the principles of balance and harmony.”

Given that what humans do, as an acting part of the universe, contributes to the creation of the world, individuals are obligated to act in those ways that “maintain balance” and harmony. If what I imagine has implications for the harmony and balance of the universe—if “I am responsible for adding to the world a new thing”—then I am doubtful of the exploitation of ignorance as a strategy that is consistent with the values of the Indigenous communities that affirm this unique way of being in the world.

In crafting my objection, I do not draw from Western moral theories; I do not claim that deception is always wrong or that an individual would be acting contrary to a greater good. Instead, I seek to call attention to the fact that the epistemologies of ignorance are grounded in a framework of Western epistemology, where the values seem quite different. For example, Burkhardt notes that Western epistemologists believe that all questions should be asked and the more knowledge, the better. However, Indigenous individuals—who are raised on the stories and narratives that contain the metaphysics, epistemology, and values of their people braided together—stand in relations and thus, they incur obligations as a result of having those relations.

The point is to fulfill obligations, so every question need not be asked.

Donald Fixico (Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, Seminole) describes the activity of being in the world, using the Navajo ethos. Fixico explains, “Within the circle of life, a continual effort for balance is the purpose for individuals and communities.” What matters is the kinships (relationships) and so the knowledge that contributes to their development and continuance is the focus.

If the end is to live and fulfill one’s obligations, then Indigenous people do not need to know everything, and therefore, it does not make sense to ask some questions. How to act is not learned from a moral theory, but it is a reasonable practice, working from the metaphysics and epistemology to infer how to live. Individuals are expected to act in specific ways that promote balance and harmony; yet, there is also an expectation within the community that each member will autonomously learn how to live.

The questions that focus on how one should be in the world are the only questions worth asking.

Given the above, it makes sense to ask whether the exploitation of white ignorance by playing to a stereotype is consistent with Indigenous values. The question I must consider is whether by playing to a stereotype I contribute to the balance and harmony of relations—but it is not solely the relation with the individual who is ignorant that matters. I must also consider whether my actions interfere with the well-being of others in my network of relations.

Using a Western worldview, particularly the epistemology, as the frame for the problem of epistemologies of ignorance omits the consideration of values external to the Western framework. While it is not surprising that those who advocate for adopting strategic ignorance would suggest that individuals exploit the ignorance of racists to inform and change society, part of me feels that such advice is not fully in the interest of Indigenous individuals. I question the motives behind proposing that Indigenous people adopt Bailey’s strategic ignorance. Are those who claim to be the allies of Indigenous people and ask us to adopt strategic ignorance doing so from a place of good intention, or are they really asking Indigenous people to teach and enlighten them—to do the work that should be done by others or themselves?

Bailey suggests that she would “like to see the project of undoing white ignorance as part of a broader coalition of resistance that include strategic uses of ignorance by people of color.” I must ask whether this is the type of relationship that she wishes to have with an Indigenous person or community. As someone who seems to be well-intentioned with respect to the oppression of people of color, and who also admits to having ignorance, does she want to learn in that manner? Surely, she would rather have a relation that is more authentic than the presentation of a stereotype even if that stereotype is employed for her benefit.

Another worry about Bailey’s recommendation is that it seems to place the burden of changing society on those who are already working on resistance. Granted, strategic ignorance would be part of a larger program of resistance I am sure, but the workload of people who are combatting oppression, including colonialism, is quite heavy. Surely, we should not add more work for them to do. Not only does the request to use strategic ignorance as a part of resistance seem to place the burden on the shoulders of people of color, but it also comes across as a demand regarding how the task should be accomplished. This runs counter to the Indigenous respect for autonomy that I mentioned earlier.

Lastly, the call for people of color to adopt a particular practice neglects to appreciate their differences. This is analogous to Indigenous feminist challenges to white feminism. Indigenous feminists understand their first objective of resistance to be decolonization, which does not align with the agenda of white feminists. While people
of color experience racism in today’s society, the concerns of Indigenous people differ because being Indigenous is not just a racial issue; as co-signers of the treaties, Native American and First Nations are sovereign nations with a special status. An Indigenous identity is not merely racial. It is political, spiritual, and cultural. While we may have experienced oppression as other groups have, our particular experiences vary in significant ways.

TRICKSTERS, REFUSALS, AND IGNORANCE

In this section, I consider two possible objections to my claim that strategic ignorance is not consistent with Indigenous values. The first objection calls attention to the presence of tricksters in the oral tradition of Indigenous communities. Stories are critical to how Indigenous people locate themselves in the world. They teach, guide, and contain those values that are important to the people, such as harmony, balance, respect, etc. Gerald Vizenor (Minnesota Chippewa) claims that “within any Indigenous story there is both a trickster and a tragic element at work.”66 If stories contain the philosophical thought of Indigenous people and my claims rest on the values contained within those stories, then what sense might I make of the presence of tricksters, such as Coyote, Raven, or Iktomi? I propose that the presence of these elements in the stories are not there to encourage the listener to adopt a trickster relation with others. Instead, the presence of a trickster in Indigenous stories serves to show the irony of living in an uncertain world.67

Burkhart discusses this view in his book; he states that “Indigenous tricksters teach their relatives about the contours of locality and so help them put their feet back on the ground.”68 Stories containing the actions of tricksters often reveal how not to act. For example, the story of Coyote in “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us” reveals that Coyote has lost touch with the world by wishing for the rain so that he may exact his revenge on a group of prairie dogs who were poking fun at him. Unfortunately, Coyote fails to realize that he is also affected by the rising waters.69 Burkhart explains that Coyote forgot his place and especially his connections/relations with all things.70 Stories about tricksters do not recommend that the listener mislead or fool others. Rather, their role is to instruct the listener in what not to do. The story about Coyote provided by Burkhart is instructive. It serves as a reminder to not forget how we are related to all things; it speaks about our place in the world.

Another example of the use of the trickster methodology can be found in Burkhart’s book on Indigenizing philosophy. He claims that his use of a trickster methodology enables the reader to “see the conflict of locality and delocality” as regards to the Western worldview in philosophy.71 Burkhart further explains that “seeing myself as Iktomi in his stories and in attempts to find meaning in my own life opens up space for me to find meaning that [Iktomi] could not.”72 Tricksters do not necessarily provide explicit instructions for how to live. Rather, the listener infers how to live. Thus, tricksters often reveal our foibles as humans and help us to think about different perspectives. We can consider the less virtuous actions of the trickster without committing ourselves to their course.

Given the sophisticated grounding of the trickster methodology in Indigenous stories, I think that someone using it to support a call to adopt strategic ignorance has much more work to do. They must provide an account of exactly how the presence of tricksters in Indigenous storytelling provide support for their claims. In addition, they must also provide the details as to which people these stories apply. If it is the case that only a few communities do invoke trickster stories as a way of being in the world, then Bailey’s argument will still not apply to those who do not use stories in that way. Without a full account, trickster stories do not provide a serious endorsement to support Bailey’s method of strategic ignorance.

The second objection that I consider is the epistemic refusal to provide accurate testimony as briefly described by Angie Morrill (Klamath) in “Time Travelling Dogs (and Other Native Feminist Ways to Defy Dislocation).”73 Morrill states that “Every story is not for everybody.”74 She draws on an example provided by Greg Sarris, who described the cautions made by his Pomo Great-Grandma Nettie and Old Auntie Eleanor.75 They warned the children in the family not to talk to those outside the community, and if they did talk to them, to exercise caution as to what they told them. Sarris notes that sometimes the children heard their great-grandma and aunt tell unfamiliar stories to “the professors” who came to visit.76 If the women told stories that were highly embellished or were ones created to satisfy the biases of the researchers, then that is the type of refusal I have in mind. Morrill notes that instead of confiding personal stories to outside researchers, “refusal is a choice and a strategy.”77

To withhold information, to withhold stories, is not the same as using a stereotype to educate someone on what they neglect to see or appreciate about racial injustice. Unless it is the performance of a stereotype that is well known in the dominant community, the Indigenous person who refuses to relay their stories and their experiences is not participating in strategic ignorance. Morrill notes that the refusal is really one of self or community protection, “You may claim to know me; you may claim my story for yourself, use it as evidence, or produce it as a truth.”78 There is a danger associated with sharing everything with another, especially a non-Indigenous researcher or a person of the dominant society.

As additional support, Morrill also cites Audra Simpson’s (Kahnawake Mohawk) research on ethnographic refusal.79 According to Simpson, anthropologists have historically, if not currently, taken Indigenous voices and processed those viewpoints through “analytics that interpreted their aspirations in ways that were not their own.”90 Simpson points out that anthropologists who are outsiders to the community may seek knowledge and assume that the community should share their knowledge with them, but often the answers provided by the community do not satisfy the anthropologists and so they either interpret or embellish their findings.91 As a result, communities quickly reach their “collective limit,” or what Simpson suggests is code for “let’s just not say.”92 Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) notes that researchers have studied Indigenous communities on behalf of higher institutions and the
federal government with the focus of research being to solve the “Indian problem.”

Unfortunately, as Eve Tuck (Unangax) and K. Wayne Yang point out, the “promised benefits of participating in social science research have been slow to accumulate” and the stories “considered most authentic in social science research are stories of pain and humiliation.”

These types of stories, according to Tuck and Yang, are the ones that get the funding, the ones to be published, and the ones that seem the most “authentic.” But when this type of research poses harm, directs the narrative of Indigenous lives, and provides no assistance to those who have become objects of study, then it is reasonable for community members to advocate for ethnographic refusal. It is not applicable solely to the Indigenous communities being studied, but Simpson suggests that it should also apply to the Indigenous scientists who are now doing research in their communities as well.

This objection does share a similarity with Bailey’s strategic ignorance. There is a sense of protection of the self, a preservation that Bailey believes is acquired by realizing the multiplicity of your identity when enacting strategic ignorance: you know better. However, like the objection concerning trickster methodology, ethnographic refusal does not explicitly propose adopting stereotypes to challenge racial ignorance. Neither the use of trickster methodology nor ethnographic refusal are stereotypical—they are part of being Indigenous. Ethnographic refusal is an example of communities and individuals restoring the balance and harmony to a world that is adversely affected by colonial research. This research distorts reality, asserting a power imbalance that perpetuates the marginalization of Indigenous people. Refusal is a strategy of Indigenous resistance, but it is not intended to instruct those holding epistemic power, at least not according to the Western understanding of instruction.

**RESISTANCE AND INDIGENOUS VALUES**

The Native American and First Nation people of Turtle Island were believed to be primitive, savage, and, as Carl Linnaeus described, “stubborn, easy to anger, and difficult to civilized.” As a result of these racist stereotypes (among others), those in the dominant society believed the perceived inferiority of Indigenous people was real. Colonial policies that were based on these stereotypes included the forcible removal of Indigenous people from their ancestral lands, the removal of Indigenous children from their homes, the creation of residential schools to assimilate Indigenous children, the termination of tribes as well as legislative attempts to destroy aboriginal rights, and the objectification of people (as objects of scientific study and experimentation). These are only a few of the historical policies and injustices against Indigenous people justified by a logic of purity. While I have not mentioned the current battles that Indigenous people encounter today, I argue that the historical policies and dangers they pose provide ample reason for not playing into racial stereotypes. Many of these policies were conducted by those who believed themselves to be acting in the best interest of Indigenous people and they took their support from the racial hierarchy that resulted from the logic of purity. Breathing life into dangerous stereotypes may usher in future colonial policies, especially given the political atmosphere of both the US and Canada.

That is not to say that I do not think other forms of Indigenous resistance are possible. Rather, some recent forms of Indigenous resistance happen to be more consistent with the values of the Indigenous people on Turtle Island than strategic ignorance. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) proposes a radical Indigenous resistance that does not play into stereotypes. Instead, this resistance is comprised of what makes the people who they are. Simpson asks a simple question, the answer of which indicates the framework for the resistance: “Do my Ancestors recognize me as their own?” The type of resistance endorsed by Simpson entails the reclamation, and continuance, of the cultural practices and traditions that gave rise to the survival of the people in the face of the above historical colonial policies. As Simpson explains, when my indigeneity grows, I am more connected. I fall more in love with my homeland, my family, my culture, and my language and more in line with the thousands of stories that demonstrate how to live a meaningful life, and I have more emotional capital to fight and protect what is meaningful to me. I am a bigger threat to the Canadian state and its plans to build pipelines across my body, clear-cut my forests, contaminate [sic] my lakes with toxic cottages and chemicals, and make my body a site of continual sexualized violence.

A critical part of Simpson’s radical resistance is the presence of the communal narratives that contain what is truly important for living a life that must engage with the colonial worldview on a regular basis. As Fixico notes, one “of the various values that Indian people hold in high esteem” is relationships. Relationships help Indigenous people find their place as well as “understand the world and universe.” As a result, Indigenous people gain experience that contributes to their well-being by participating in a community and, to use the title of Simpson’s book, doing As We Have Always Done.

There is a part of strategic ignorance that I have yet to consider and that is when we adopt a Socratic-like response to an act of racial injustice like a microaggression. For example, suppose that a non-Indigenous person has no issue with using terms like redskin or squaw, and they admit to someone that they do not see the offense. An appropriate response might be to ask, “What do you mean by that?” with the hope of having them come to realize the error of using such terms. If an Indigenous person asks this question, it seems as though they are feigning ignorance. In fact, one might be pressed to say that they are adopting a stereotype of ignorance. This appears on the surface to be a case of using strategic ignorance to inform or teach someone.

However, this seems to me to lack the specificity associated with a stereotype—shouldn’t everyone question someone’s use of pejorative terms? Is questioning only the prerogative of those who are offended by the use of offensive terms?
It seems to me that I should speak up as an ally to correct someone when their choice of words may cause harm even if those particular terms do not apply to myself, and I would hope that others would correct someone using the above terms too.

Another way of looking at this example, however, is to also claim that asking, “What do you mean by that?” is an Indigenous response and not a stereotypical one. Even though I am appearing to adopt a façade of ignorance in asking the question, I am doing so respectfully. I recognize that you are an autonomous being and that we stand in relation with each other. I do not teach you in a way that is insulting or demeaning. Rather, I encourage you to arrive at the answer on your own. This seems to me to be consistent with the views on teaching provided by Lee Hester (Choctaw). According to Hester, respect is a value that impacts how we treat one another, especially when teaching. He points out that correction is part of education, but “Correction implies that one person knows what is correct and the other person does not; even worse, that one person acts correctly and the other does not.” For Hester the worry is when we feel superior to those we are teaching and fail to treat them respectfully. I realize that this may not make sense in the Western worldview—but as I understand it, how I teach you matters. If I tell you how to act, what to say, and what to know—then I have disregarded your authority. I underestimate your ability to arrive at a socially just response. So, when pressed, I am going to respond that this is not a case of strategic ignorance because I am not adopting a stereotype when I question someone about why they hold a socially unjust belief. Instead, I am keeping with the value of respect.

If one considers the importance of relationships, one can see how the use of strategic ignorance is not suitable for an Indigenous way of being in the world. Fixico describes that “the negativity of life is chaos and disorder. Chaos is frustration in life, anxiety, and disappointment. Such disorder leads to fear, distrust, and ultimately, to self-destruction.” Strategic ignorance introduces inauthenticity or imbalance, which would give rise to distrust in our relationships. Granted, the relations between oppressor and those being oppressed is not an ideal one, but the introduction of more negativity via deception will not be what leads to reconciliation or a repairing of the relationship. Instead, the burden of developing a relationship with Indigenous people and communities must be borne by the dominant members of society. Although colonizers must learn the logic of curdling so that they can see Indigenous people as they really are, it is not the obligation of Indigenous communities to teach the colonizer. I do not agree that the reification of stereotypes is consistent with the values of Native American and First Nations people on Turtle Island. More importantly, it seems that if one ignores the Indigenous values and adopts an Indigenous stereotype, even if it is an act of resistance, the individual is failing to be someone that their ancestors would recognize.

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Mvto! (Thank you!) to the members of the UW Feminist Philosophy Reading Group (Dr. Tim Brown, Dr. Karen Emmerman, Dr. Sara Goering, Dr. Darcy McCusker, Dr. Michelle Pham, Dr. Sam Sumpter, Dr. Paul Tubig, Natalia Montes, Erika Versalovic, Erica Bigelow, Jer Steeger, Nic Jones, and Kayla Mehl), the 2022 Emmanuel College Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, and the anonymous reviewers of the APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy for their comments regarding this manuscript. I am humbled by the generosity of all those who contributed to making this article better.

NOTES

2. Sullivan and Tuana, Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 1.
3. Consider, in the case of the United States, the remarks made by Richard Henry Pratt, the Superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Pratt is often connected with the phrase “Kill the Indian, save the man.” See Gene Demby, “The Ugly, Fascinating History of the Word ‘Racism,'” Code Switch, January 6, 2014 (National Public Radio, 2022); available at https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/01/05/26000815/the-ugly-fascinating-history-of-the-word-racism. In the case of Canada, consider the testimony of Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs. Scott stated:
   I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. . . . Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.
   See National Archives of Canada, Record Group 10, volume 6810, file 470-2-3, volume 7, pp. 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3).
8. Before going further, I must note that I am not speaking for all Indigenous people or nations. Instead, I am proposing that for the Native American and First Nations communities/individuals whose share similar values (e.g., balance, harmony, and beauty) will not find Bailey’s call to adopt strategic ignorance compelling or appropriate.
10. Alison Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 83. See also Bailey’s discussion of Charles Mills’ racial contract and social contracts on pages 78–82.
16. It is not merely the dominant society which relies on the logic of purity. Members of marginalized groups may also buy into this logic, especially when internalizing the dominant society’s assumptions about race.
40. Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 89.
42. Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 90.
44. Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 90.
51. Frederick Douglass, The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered: An Address before the Literary Societies Western Reserve College at Commencement July 12, 1854 (Rochester, New York: Lee, Mann and Co., Daily American Office, 1854), 287.
53. My use of the word “principles” is not intended to capture the Western meaning of the term. Rather, I use the word in the same manner as Brian Burkhart, who noted that “in calling these ideas principles, I do not mean to give them special philosophical status. In American Indian thought, they are simply ways of being.” See Brian Burkhart, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology,” American Indian Thought, ed. Anne Waters (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 16.
57. Cordova, “Ethics from an Artist’s Point of View,” 254.
58. Cordova, “Ethics from an Artist’s Point of View,” 254.
63. Cordova, “Ethics from an Artist’s Point of View,” 173.
64. Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 90.
65. I would like to thank Dr. Tim Brown for bringing up the issue of respectability and how that is associated with Brother Rabbit stories and so this stresses the difference between social groups who have experienced colonization. I hesitate to use the term “authentic” when discussing Indigenous issues because it poses its own misunderstandings and expectations. Perhaps a better term might be “genuine” or “honest”?
71. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, xxiii.
72. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, xxiii.
76. Sarris, 82, quoted in Morrill, “Time Traveling Dogs,” 3.
77. Morrill, “Time Traveling Dogs,” 16. Admittedly, this response assumes different forms of refusal, but it is a strategy for not participating in the further oppression of Indigenous communities. Fixico also describes a similar scenario, recounting Russell Mean’s grandmother’s advice regarding how to respond to the questions of anthropologists. See Donald Fixico, The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge (Oxfordshire and New York: Routledge, 2003), 132–33.
Assignment Description: Native American Philosophy, Spring 2022

Shay Welch
SPELMAN COLLEGE

FEATURED STUDENTS:
Simone Madden
Valencia White
Naima Castaneda Isaac

In spring 2022, I changed up the assignment format for the final project for my Native American Philosophy course. Typically, I have three performances for the students to present original philosophical arguments in a style that is more akin to Native American modes of knowing and knowledge sharing. At the end of the semester, I have the students write a larger research paper so that they have an opportunity to deliver an assignment that is in accordance with their Western philosophical training. This semester, in addition to the performances, I had the students create performative art projects that carried their own original...
contribution to Native American studies. One of the unconventional interjections that I added to this project was that the students incorporated the Innovation Lab to construct their art projects. Our Innovation Lab is a creative space where students use an array of high-tech instruments to develop original creations. The Innovation Lab is often used for computer science and other related STEM courses. But students of all fields are slowly being required to have some knowledge about tech ventures, and our college is regularly promoting the Innovation Lab as an important space for students to develop new skills. I decided that it would be interesting to combine the humanities, art, and technology so that the students were able to gain a wider range of creative knowledges in a space that is shared by students and operates on a community learning structure. The Innovation Lab is for students and the students are required to learn how to use these technologies largely on their own with help from each other and a few student assistants.

Students are always nervous about having to do performances for their philosophy assignments. This anxiety became amplified when I required the use of the Innovation Lab. But I regularly tell them that this is not an art class; the projects are not held to the standards of an art class. The purpose of their doing art and performance for doing Native philosophy is to help them learn how to engage in non-Western knowledge practices, which are creative and offered with community and harmonious intentions for learning as a journey.

These student projects reveal how philosophers can be creative and the manifold ways in which they can picture their own philosophical ideas being represented through performance. I believe the students did an amazing job and provide an exemplary model for how to engage in Native epistemological practices both analytically and creatively.

We read four books for this class: Indian from the Inside by Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb; The Dance of Person and Place by Thomas Norton-Smith; American Indian Thought, edited by Anne Waters; and Native Science by Gregory Cajete. Students used three of the books for their general knowledge of the Native American philosophical worldview, but they all seemed to favor Cajete’s book for their guiding resource on doing Native performance and art as knowing.

Student project description on the syllabus:

Final performance using Innovation Lab: 30%

Get wild.

The students were also required to do a five-page write-up about their projects to help them explain their pieces. They were required to give the background philosophy that they were using for their art, why they chose their art piece, what their process was in creating the art and how they incorporated the Native philosophy, and what original philosophical idea their art contributed to the Native philosophy discussion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Project Description

Simone Madden
SPELMAN COLLEGE

INTENTION

For our final showcase, we were tasked with coming up with a creative project. While this is extremely out of my comfort zone, I know now that I would not be able to learn about Native American philosophy without the creative aspect. Throughout this semester, we have never veered away from the subject of art and how it plays a significant part in Native culture. Although there are many types of traditional Native art, I decided to focus on fashion. For my project, I was intentional about finding Native American fashion designers. I was inspired by a lot of the work I came across, and also surprised at the amount of amazing artists who aren’t recognized publicly.

PROCESS

Background: The first part of my project consisted of research. I was not aware that there are Native American fashion designers who are just as prominent as some of the mainstream designers I’m used to (Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Vera Wang, etc.). While I found a lot of collections that I liked, a lot of them were clichéd and included a lot of feathers and turquoise. While at first glance I didn’t really see a problem with this, the further along we got into our readings, the more aware I became of its problematic aspects. In Western society, minority cultures are often diminished to the clichés or “norms” within the culture, as if those are the only things their culture is good for producing. Although there is no specific obligation, black and brown people should aspire to showcase things within their culture that don’t fit the status quo for the further advancement and acknowledgment of their communities. I finally came across a Shoshone-Bannock beadwork artist by the name of Jamie Okuma. She creates beaded shoes, and her work has been published in many high-fashion blogs. Jamie has also been commissioned to create pieces for many museums around the world. Because of this, I decided to create my own beaded pair of boots. I’m very imaginative, so I created my own prompt: Pretend that Jamie Okuma asked you to create a pair of beaded boots to feature in her runway show.

Inspiration from class readings: After continuous research and class discussions, one point in our reading stuck out to me in. To have a culture explain how they understand
Indigenous peoples use their knowledge of the sky to influence their views of ethical behavior and other cultural standards of being. Even though we read this chapter near the end of the semester, I thought it was important to represent the celestial beings that are critical to Native American societies’ knowledge of community (evolving creation stories), architectural structures, and world order through my beadwork.

The beading: To keep up with the many ethical beliefs in Native culture, I tried to limit my waste as much as possible in this project. How the materials were obtained are just as important as where they came from. Although I had to order the beads off of Amazon, I did obtain the boots and the fabrics I used from Goodwill. This was so that I could limit my carbon footprint within this project as much as possible. I also did research to decide what designs I wanted to include on the boots. Offentimes there are certain patterns or symbols that have specific meanings in Native culture. The specific designs I incorporated were flowers, beaver, space and celestial beings, and different fabric designs. I looked at many videos and tried different methods of beading to find out what method would work best for me. Some of the methods consisted of sewing the beads directly onto the boot, but it was hard to reach the point of the shoe from the inside. I also tried sewing my designs onto a piece of fabric and then transferring to the shoe with needle, thread, and glue. Ultimately, I decided to glue the beads on because of their small size. It was hard to thread the needle every time I needed to sew on a new color.

Struggle points: Within this project, I had to jump over a lot of hurdles. I had no idea what I was signing myself up for when I decided what to do for my project. My original plan also consisted of laser printing a pair of beaver earrings. After I figured out the laser cutter would not be up and running for the duration of my project, I wanted to include beaver in the boots. Beading takes incredibly long and it’s not as easy as the YouTube tutorials make it seem. After I figured this out, I decided to cut my project down to beading one boot instead of a pair. Not only did this take a tremendous amount of weight off of my shoulders, but it aligned with the ideas of ceremonial art we read in previous chapters. Creating art is time consuming and you have to put everything into it to create the finished project. I realized the project couldn’t be its best if I had to bead a pair of boots. Beading overall is very hard. I had to think quickly on my feet, and I decided to glue the beads on. While this was still very time consuming, I wasn’t pricking...
and poking myself constantly. I also got bored with just using beads later on in the project, so I thought it would be cool to switch some things around and use different fabrics as well. For this half of the boot, the main struggle was coming up with new designs to add. I had to go back to the drawing board to figure out what colors or symbols that would add value to my project.

Original Contribution: While my original thought was to recreate one of Okuma’s designs that I had come across during my research, I later decided that wasn’t “original” at all and goes against much of what we have learned this semester. Art is taken very seriously within Native American culture and often has significant meaning. What’s significant to Okuma comes from her background, and we do not have the same story. To make sure the boots fit my story, I was intentional about picking certain designs that were significant not only to me, but also things that we have talked about during class that my classmates can relate to. This brings up the idea of interconnectivity. Ceremonies and other traditions are used to strengthen the connection of our relationships with each other, nature, and the rest of the world. Taking part in various ceremonies is a way to categorize and create new pieces of knowledge. I think it was significant that I included my classmates in my thought process while creating this project because our showcases have certain ceremonial attributes. Making sure that I included specific designs makes them feel included. In our readings, they often say that transformations don’t happen until you are in the act of performing with that specific symbol. I think this is true for our showcase as well. Performances with symbols also makes it easier to understand the knowledge presented to us. It adds value, almost like putting a name to a face.

One of my main focuses was to incorporate a beaver into my project in some way, shape, or form. I feel like beaver has been essential to our understanding of many big concepts that were out of reach when we started the class. Not only is beaver an example of personhood, a Native concept that requires continuous awareness, but they are also specific to our class. Much like sacred knowledge within the Native community, no one would be able to understand the meaning beaver has to our class. Another main focus goes back to celestial phenomena. In Native culture, creating art is a lengthy process. They breathe life into art the same way they talk about the land. This can be done through prayer, song, and dance. While I didn’t sing or dance, I did take a lot of time to think about what family members to include as stars in my project. They are represented by different color beads. While the sky acts as a compass, I picked certain people that I felt paved the way for me to include in this project.

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Final Project Description
Valencia White
SPELLMAN COLLEGE

For my Native philosophy final project, I created a woven basket inspired by the Ohlone tribe in Northern California because that is where I’m from and I wanted to honor the people who inhabited the land before me. I was inspired by the importance of learning from and respecting one’s ancestors which are valued within Native beliefs. Although I am not directly related to the Ohlone tribe, I wanted to learn more about the people who originally cultivated and thrived off the land. Originally, I wanted to create a piece of clothing or jewelry. However, through conducting research on the Ohlone tribe I learned that they are very well known for their woven baskets, which made me change what I wanted to make in collaboration with the Innovation Lab. I discovered that for the Ohlone people, baskets can hold many meanings, but I drew my inspiration from the fact that the baskets they make can represent their lifestyle in connection to nature and their relationship to the spirit world because this is something that I learned about extensively in class. I chose this topic because humans’ relationship with nature and recognizing how important it is to respect the natural world because of the impact that our actions and choices have is one of the things that really stuck with me throughout this course.

After deciding this, I began exploring my options on how I was going to create this basket. I first thought I was going to 3D print the basket but ultimately ruled out this option as it would take too long. After examining the materials available to me at the Innovation Lab, I decided to use vinyl to weave a basket. I chose this option because there was a lot of vinyl for me to use with a different range of colors and textures which is an aspect the other option didn’t have. It is also a very malleable material, and I thought it would be easy for me to weave a basket out of it. Initially, I was slightly intimidated at the thought of making a basket and genuinely had no clue where to start. But everyone at the Innovation Lab was supportive and gave me good advice throughout this process. Throughout the process of creating this basket I was also able to push myself because I was really unsure of what the final product would look like and I do not consider myself to be a really artistic person. I
had to believe in my own creativity and be fully committed. Additionally, the more time that I put into creating this basket, the more passionate I became about the process. I really got into weaving the basket. The process of deciding how I wanted to weave the vinyl took a couple of tries, and I had to create a smaller basket as an experiment for how I wanted the final one to turn out because I wanted to test out my technique before I started on the final product. The process of creating the final product took me about two weeks as I would spend about six to eight hours every week in the Innovation Lab cutting out pieces of vinyl, weaving them, and planning out what colors I wanted to incorporate next. I had to be very intentional to make sure that I had enough space to incorporate all the colors I wanted to because I had a limited amount of space on the basket to execute my intended design.

I decided to create a design that represented the interconnectedness of the soil, plants, and sky. Each one of these aspects is represented through different colors within the basket. I started with different shades of brown (representing the soil), transitioned to green (representing plants), and lastly transitioned to blue (representing the sky) at the top. I chose to incorporate the colors in an ombre pattern to represent the relationship that all these aspects hold with one another and to show that they all rely on each other in order to thrive. I also wove in silver and gold vinyl to represent the spirituality that is within all these elements and to represent them as other than human beings.

Throughout my creative process, I tried to honor the twelve steps of artistic creation when making the basket. I drew from the first step of preparation by making sure I had extensive research. I also reflected on the concept of time by making sure I completed it in a timely manner and provided myself with enough time to give my full effort. I believe that I also exemplified the concept of “intrinsically well-practiced belief” within my project because I was able to express the Native beliefs accurately and truthfully with my basket. I also put an appropriate amount of will into my project because I was able to fully understand the repercussions of what I was agreeing to create and the purpose of what I was going to make. I planned out fully what I wanted to create and was devoted to successfully completing it. Additionally, I used the step of packing a symbol because my art has a metaphorical meaning to it. By completing it I honored the step of completion, and I will eventually use the step of giving away because my basket will be a tribute to this Native philosophy class. Lastly, the step of aesthetics and appreciation of intrinsic meaning is shown within my basket because the aesthetics and value of the basket are related directly to what it means.

The basket I made is a way for me to respect and appreciate the earth because it is a tribute to nature and represents how natural elements are beings as they play an important role in ensuring the well-being of humans. Plants specifically exemplify the Native belief of life-seeking life because as plants live their lives, they simultaneously support all life. It is important to maintain a balance and harmony with relationships with nature because life is dependent on mutual reciprocity and giving back what has been taken from nature. I exemplified the concept of reciprocity but specifically within nature, by transitioning between the different aspects of nature and having them flow together. I wanted this basket to show the importance of nature within Native beliefs as these beliefs are often rooted within the focus of participating with nature and doing so in a respectful, ethical manner. This basket also represents the Native relationship with the earth for knowledge. All three aspects I chose have a direct relationship with each other and thrive off each other, so I think that it is a good representation of how the Native belief of interconnectedness works. My basket also shows how connecting with the land is important because the Ohlone people have lived there for so long that it becomes a part of their soul and spirit, and this is represented through the gold and silver running up the sides of the basket. I also wanted to reflect on how these natural elements relate to a Native conception of persons as it includes non-human spirits and other than human beings through the incorporation of gold and silver. Because art is used to pass on knowledge, I wanted to show this in my basket by conveying Native beliefs.

My original contribution to Native philosophy is demonstrated through the materials I used because Native art, and specifically baskets, are normally made with natural materials and plants. I incorporated modern materials in my design as a way to demonstrate how Native concepts and beliefs can be used in a way that is still respectful and meaningful. I believe that I accurately portrayed Native beliefs around interconnectedness, nature, and spirituality through my project and I was able to contribute to native philosophy by using vinyl as my artistic medium because it is a different expression of native beliefs, but the act of creation still followed Native elements. I was able to adapt the traditional Native concept and origin with the tools that were available to me. Since my creative process did use some of the twelve steps
of artistic creation but in a more unconventional way, I showed how Native beliefs can be adaptable to different environments. I think that a lot of people are scared to be offensive by using Native beliefs or techniques within their art or even life in general and don’t want to be disrespectful to Native culture, but this project is an example of how one can use Native concepts to learn and spread knowledge if it is respectful and ethical. I think that the importance of ethics and knowledge is something that I was able to fully grasp while making this basket because I was utilizing Native knowledge to create my project and I was able to complete it in a way that followed these Native values. Although the concept of respect and ethics when attaining knowledge is often applied to nature and how people treat it, I think that it is applicable in this case as well because I was able to gain knowledge about how to learn in a respectful way and not overpower any boundaries while simultaneously trying to spread knowledge about Native philosophy. I think that this project contributes to Native philosophy and beliefs because it transforms what I have learned with unconventional materials as well as demonstrates how to apply knowledge ethically and respectfully in correspondence with Native beliefs.

Overall, I believe that this process was able to bring me a lot closer to understanding the process of creating and gaining knowledge in accordance with Native ideals, particularly as expressed within art. Previously, I have always viewed art as a form of expression, not necessarily to convey and gain knowledge. The concept of learning through experience was really solidified for me throughout this process; the more that I engaged with the project the more I was able to understand this, because I would adapt my technique as I went as I discovered the most effective way to weave. Additionally, I was able to learn firsthand some of the processes that are involved when creating Native art because I wanted to create a piece of art that took inspiration from Native beliefs and baskets. I believe that I was able to effectively create a piece of art that reflects the history of where I’m from, incorporate Native philosophies, and contribute original ideas to Native philosophy.

A Virtual Reality Vision Quest

Naima Castañeda Isaac
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I just want to preface this and say that this semester overall has been a transformative journey for me, so I felt like it was right to do a vision quest. Me making this world is a ceremony of art where I find and use my creative spirit. The virtual world begins with a ceremony done with an elder who is a healer, a storyteller, an artist, and a giver and seeker of knowledge. The sweat lodge is also a sacred place because of the ceremonies and wind of the speech that the participants speak that grounds them in that place and makes it sacred. I look for symbols and metaphors along the way; most are plants, stars, and animals. Each door holds a world that looks different because one is on a journey and is bound to see different nature and things in their life. Also, the changing of the environments symbolizes the chaotic nature of the universe; the sojourner (whoever has the Virtual Reality (VR) goggles on) is living in that chaos and finding the “little” things that connect to each other and that help them make sense of the world around them and of themselves. Because of circularity as a world-ordering principle, time is cyclical, and so the sojourner returns full circle to the sweat lodge to the elder and tells them what they learned. The person that existed before the vision quest is still the person who exists after their transformation because each impacts each other and one’s future depends on their past. Animals, plants, the stars, the moon, and the sun have souls and knowledge that the VR vision questor learns from and that guide and protect them in their journey, and through this journey, the VR vision questor learns to respect them always.

The process of my inherent ceremony of art is more important than the actual product. Here I will talk about the process I did, including the twelve steps of a journey to art creation that Gregory Cajete outlines in Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence. First is “preparedness” to immerse oneself in the process. We had talked about our performances in class and I thought about it for a while so that I was prepared with an actual outline. I also had to learn how to build in Horizon Worlds, so I watched videos and made draft worlds so that I was fully prepared. With the sources step, the Oculus goggles were attained from the Innovation Lab at Spelman. I “adhered to the cultural patterns in Native American science” to build my world using the concepts of chaos, relatedness, circularity, symbols, sacredness, ethical participation, and gifting. With regards to timing, my intuition told me when to start building and when to stop. I didn’t really have set times—I just really had to be in the mood to build because it was hard. My room was the best place to build because I had my notes, my water, and my books to help me. “Letting go and becoming” was also necessary for my process because I had to be extremely creative since I was literally building everything from shapes (spheres, cubes, cylinders, pyramids). I had to really let go and just let the creativity flow. “Appropriate will” was used in my process because I had a specific intention (to make a vision quest for class but also to think through a transformative time in my life) that gave a good context to my preparedness and work. In my world, I packed “symbols” to try to convey meaning. Some of the symbols of the animals I used were based on the specific meaning that Native peoples have for animals, like the fox as a trickster. I also used the symbol of the butterfly and packed it with the meaning of transformation but with specificity to the transformation caused by a journey. I also included Bad Bunny’s song “Antes que se acabe,” which is another kind of symbol in my life that I guide my life
on. He says that there will always be good and bad days, and that to smile, you sometimes have to cry. With my vigil, I had to be very patient and intentional with every little thing and this was necessary because I was making the world from scratch. I made the sad worlds dark and foggy and was even intentional with making the trees in each world different to make the journey subtly chaotic. I had to research specific ways that animals and plants interact with each other, like bees, trees, and spiders. So I was very intentional with every detail in the world. The completion of my project involves it being ready to use, so I had to finalize everything to make sure that I could cast it to my computer screen so that it had the potential to make everyone see and experience it. In “giveaway,” my project will enter into communities where it will be recognized and symbolized both in class and in Horizon Worlds (because other people can visit my world). My art might be used many times, but it will be most significant if the people experiencing it know the purpose and context of my project. As for “Aesthetics and appreciation of intrinsic meaning,” I hope that my project and creation will be used and honored for the purpose that was intended so that many people over my lifetime or generations will be able to learn from my project.

In making this project, I learned that everything I do has an impact and is important, and I feel like I related that to other classes as well. I used constructive realism to construct a world logically and ontologically. The world I created is constantly being empirically verified by the questor and also other people that visit the world. It is nonempty because it is grounded in sense perception. It has utility because it was used for me to gain knowledge and also has significance for the rest of the people who come into contact with it. It makes sense under a Native American framework because every aspect of it is guided by principles that I learned about, and so it is within a cultural frame of reference. My world is creative, unfixed, and a work in progress because I can always edit it and everyone who comes in contact with it will take a different meaning from it. The world I created is alive and is a part of me and a part of any other person who embarks on the journey that I made. My world version is similar to that of an actual vision quest but definitely has its own twist that relates more to me. For these reasons, my world is a well-made world.

I myself am being transformed by my project because imagining what a vision quest and a journey would be like for me and my life made me think about the things I would write in my journal before, during, and after the mental hospital. In a way, my being in the hospital was transformative because I was taken away from the normal routines, responsibilities, and constructs of the world and was left to think about my thoughts, myself, and the world, similar to a vision quest. So, through that transformation, I came out with knowledge that has impacted me, and I realize that I will always be on a journey in search of knowledge and meaning for myself and for the world. During the times while in the hospital that we were allowed to go outside, I felt like the sun was a part of me because it felt so good and would literally change my mood, and so that changed my choices. I ritualized bead-making because beading outside in the sun made me the happiest I had ever been; so it really made me think about how connected I am to nature and how the ceremonies and rituals I perform ground me in different places. The vision quest in the VR world tries to reflect that in the sense that the questor is connecting to the people around them and letting their knowledge heal them; they are really seeing the ways in which they are connected to others and seeing how each impacts and participates with each other. I take knowledge of my experience from the hospital and from creating a vision quest to make me be more appreciative of the “little” things which really aren’t that little: in a Western mindset, we ignore those things, but tuning into those small things and nuances really makes all the difference. I learned that everything matters because everything that I do has an impact and I have to respectfully participate in the world with everybody. Not hating yourself and finding things that make you happy is super important. If you don’t have that, you might not respect other people and you won’t feel connected to them or like you matter or that your choices matter. And I think that Native American philosophy helps a person with their self-image in that every person is important because they can impact the world in their participation and everyone has knowledge and a sacredness. Like in the books we read, they talked about how plants, animals, the cosmos, and places were sacred but in saying that, it’s also like saying that you are important and sacred and your acknowledging and accepting that actually contributes to the harmony and balance in the world.

The symbol I bring back in the Virtual Reality vision quest of the butterfly is something that symbolizes my transformation. It’s
a gift that I give to the elder because they gave me the gift of knowledge through the ceremony of the vision quest to me, so I reciprocate with a gift. Butterflies in my life also have meaning and I feel like are my symbol. This project is an original contribution to the world because I don’t think that there’s anything like it in the VR world. Also, I feel that my original contribution is that with mental health, the idea of a vision quest generally (because I did not actually go on a real vision quest but kind of made my own) can greatly improve someone’s life. I think that the sacredness of self is also critical in one’s own life and in their contributions to the rest of the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

As they say, all good things must come to an end. This issue of the APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience will be my last one as the editor of this publication. For the last five years, Stephen C. Ferguson II and I have worked tirelessly to provide essays and book reviews related to African American philosophy. Ferguson is to be commended for working closely with me to produce this publication, even after he was no longer officially an editor of it. With respect to this issue, he was responsible for soliciting the tributes and articles celebrating the life and work of Charles Wade Mills. He also contributed an article on Mills’s life and legacy to this issue.


Wiredu was born in Kumasi, Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), in 1931, and attended Adisadel College from 1948 to 1952. He was later admitted into the University of Ghana, Legon, in 1952. After graduating in 1958, he went to University College, Oxford. At Oxford University, Wiredu was taught by Gilbert Ryle (his thesis supervisor), Peter Strawson (his College tutor), and Stuart Hampshire (his special tutor). He wrote a thesis on “Knowledge, Truth, and Reason.” Upon graduating in 1960, he was appointed to a teaching post at the University College of North Staffordshire (now the University of Keele), where he stayed for a year. He then returned to Ghana, where he accepted a position teaching philosophy at the University of Ghana. He remained at the University of Ghana for twenty-three years. From 1987 until he retired, he was an Emeritus Professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He was ninety years old when he died. Two of his authored works are *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980) and *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (1996). He was also the editor of *A Companion to African Philosophy* (2003). Most recently, Barry Hallen wrote a study of Wiredu’s philosophy titled *Reading Wiredu* (2021).

In this issue, I am happy to have contributions from Stephen C. Ferguson II, John H. McClendon II, Liam Kofi Bright, Eduardo Mendieta, and Yubraj Aryal.

Given Mills’s prominence within the discipline of philosophy, Ferguson has collected several essays that focus on his life, legacy, and philosophical contribution. Liam Kofi Bright offers us a moving tribute to Mills. Bright originally published his tribute to Mills on his blog, The Sooty Empiric, on September 21, 2021. Ferguson offers an assessment of Mills’s philosophical journey from “Analytical Marxism” to “Black Radical Liberalism.” He, in addition, explores the limitations of “Black Radical Liberalism” as a political philosophy. And McClendon offers us an ideological and philosophical assessment of Charles Mills, particularly with respect to Black intellectual culture and Marxism.

Next, John H. McClendon II offers an assessment of Cornel West’s conception of Marxist philosophy. McClendon argues that West’s *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* is an anti-Marxism text. By painting Marx as radical historicist, West hopes to convince people that Marx is a pragmatist rather than a dialectical and historical materialist. This essay is a part of a larger manuscript that McClendon is working on, which critically assesses West’s prophetic pragmatism.

And, lastly, we have two reviews of Leonard Harris’s collection of essays, *A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader*. Eduardo Mendieta’s “Hoping in the Darkness of Necro-Being: On Leonard Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader” is a thoughtful review essay on *A Philosophy of Struggle*. In it, Mendieta contends that *A Philosophy of Struggle* provides readers with a representative collection of Harris’s contributions to several areas of philosophy. These areas include metaphilosophy; philosophy of race, especially in the ethics and epistemology of racism; normative ethics; moral psychology; and history of philosophy. He then writes about the significances of Harris’s actuarial account of racism and his writings on honor and dignity. He ends the essay by asking two questions about Harris’s philosophical project. The first question is about whether Harris is wrong in his criticism of King and that Black Americans were, in fact, honored along with King for their contributions to American society. The second question (or, more accurately, “quandary”) he poses to Harris is about Harris’s criticism of democracy. In fact, he challenges Harris’s view that democracy, particularly the US version of constitutional democracy, cannot motivate people who belong to the dominant group to recognize and respect the dignity of those who have been historically (and continue to be) disrespected and subordinated.

Yubraj Aryal provides us with an appreciative review of *A Philosophy of Struggle*. Aryal does not take the traditional approach to writing an academic book review. Rather, Aryal...
identifies a few of the main themes in Harris’s writings throughout his career. Aryal ends the review by declaring that the twenty-first century will be the Harrisian century in African American philosophy. Perhaps we should leave it up to philosophers in the distant future to judge whether Aryal’s assessment is a plausible one.

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION**

APA Studies 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.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com.

Beginning with the spring 2023 issue, Anthony Neal will take over the position of lead editor and Bjorn Freter will take on the position of associate editor.

**DEADLINES**

Fall issues: May 1
Spring issues: December 1

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**FORMATTING GUIDELINES**

- APA Studies adheres 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:
  


**ARTICLES**

**Personal Tribute to Charles Mills**

Liam Kofi Bright
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Like many in the philosophical world today, I am in dismay at the loss of Charles Mills. I feel compelled to honor him with a public tribute, as he meant more to me than almost anyone else in the profession and I think socialized affection and grief are a fitting response to this sort of tragedy. I’ll try and say a bit about why Mills was so special to me personally, but I think that the characteristics I saw in him would be familiar to many who interacted with him. In this way I hope that my idiosyncratic impressions and experiences will give some more general idea of the man we have lost.

Professionally. By the time I met Mills, he was already an international superstar. His work had long been of interest to Black or Africana thinkers, but by the mid 2010s when I got to know him he was well established among the white mainstream of political philosophy. As Mills himself would have been first to point out, there are more of them and they have more money for keynote lectures and the like, so his newfound status among this crowd represented a somewhat new experience of the profession. As is implicated in the Daily Nous tribute to Mills, this degree of fame and respect came somewhat late in Mills’s career, and I believe it was the perspective he had as someone who had been on the outside for much of his career that gave him a great degree of empathy with those of us who had not yet to (or will not ever) make it to the same degree.

In any case, for whatever psychological reason, from the very first interaction we had, Mills acted as a supportive mentor to me, giving me intellectual and professional advice while being incredibly generous with his time. In fact, I think our first interaction resulted from me cold emailing him some half-baked idea I had in response to his work. He responded with generous feedback in short order, and then agreed to have a video chat with me. I now realize that this is very much supererogatory, but I would never have known it at the time. He made it seem like the most natural thing in the world that he wanted to help me out and had lots of time to give, despite not knowing me from Adam.

Down the years this continued. We’d make a point of meeting up at conferences and exchanged emails fairly regularly. I’d turn to him for advice or just to check in on what he thought of professional trends or the like. Always, in every encounter, he was wise, kindhearted, eager to help, and so naturally these things that one never felt a burden. I have no doubt at all that whatever measure of professional success I have and will achieve owes no small part to him.

Intellectually. Mills’s work has been groundbreaking. No survey of Black political thought would be complete without him. His most famous work, The Racial Contract, is
now an acknowledged modern classic. It is typical of Mills in its attempt to bring to bear the work of contemporary (especially Rawlsian) political philosophy, combined with his deep knowledge of and respect for the classical liberal tradition, to understand the problems of contemporary societies. In particular, he sought to show how aforementioned political philosophy served an obfuscatory role, but nonetheless provided intellectual resources that could allow us to get a theoretical handle on how it is that unjust hierarchies are maintained. Thinking through these themes led to another of his most influential papers, *Ideal Theory as Ideology*, which has been agenda setting in metaphilosophy, as it pushed philosophers to try to attend more to the concrete details of contemporary reality, or at least explain how it is that our abstract reflections relate to the goings-on of everyday life. Probably his most culturally resonant work was his essay *White Ignorance*, which applies the approach advocated for in *Ideal Theory as Ideology* by bringing together work in naturalistic epistemology, social psychology, history, and sociology to make the case that there are predictable irrationalities that will be displayed by white-majority populations when it comes to reasoning about the situation of a Black (or non-white) underclass. And in his recent work (such as this essay *Black Radical Kantianism*) he has once again been drawing on the liberal tradition, this time in a reconstructive vein, to try to draw from Kantian ethical thought to develop principles for reasoning about how to move towards a just society given a history of injustice.

This is just a tiny survey of a grand career’s worth of writings. I think he was among the leading lights of contemporary liberal theory, and at a time when the legitimacy of that mode of society is subject to severe scrutiny and skepticism, his loss is a great blow to that tradition (so it has been somewhat amusing, in a grim sort of way, to see Mills singled out as an example of postmodern anti-rational illiberalism by some contemporary reactionaries).

And for me personally Mills’s thought has been incredibly fertile. It was actually on his encouragement that I got involved in thinking about the demographics of philosophy and what that means for the work that gets done, which led to my very first publication and continues to be part of my work. My most recent paper was a response to the issues he raised in *White Ignorance*. More generally, the vision of philosophy as able to speak to contemporary realities, deeply informed by interdisciplinary social scientific study, while at the same time conversant with the best of the historic tradition—this inspires me, this is what I want to be. Charles Mills provided the model which I am still trying to live up to.

**Personally.** That first video chat I mentioned above opened with Mills taking a look at me and saying “Ah, so I see you’re one of those light-skin brothers like me, eh?” He said it with a sparkle in his eye and a cheeky smile. His point was to disarm and somewhat shock, but without doing anything to be off-putting, put me at ease by a humorous display of overfamiliarity. It worked. You would deeply misunderstand Mills if you got the impression of him above as a sort of pious sage figure, dispensing kindly advice with his face always turned towards righteousness. That captures something of him, but it misses out on the irreverent, earthy humor of the man.

His deeply underrated essay *Do Black Men Have a Duty to Marry Black Women?* contains one of the few lines of analytic philosophy that genuinely made me laugh out loud when I first encountered it:

> Many pornography catalogs have a specialty section of black-on-white videos where “big black studs meet blonde sluts,” (How do I know this?, you casually inquire; a friend of a friend, I quickly reply) . . . .

And to understand Mills you have to get that aspect of him too. The topic is a serious one, the context is the cultural disrespect and visceral disgust (intermixed with eroticized fascination) Black people’s sexuality can evoke. If you read the essay, it’s clear that Mills understands those stakes, and indeed the whole essay is an exercise in taking seriously and reasoning through something that can deeply matter to people’s everyday lives, yet which is often ignored by the professional mainstream. But for all that, Mills would combine it with self-deprecating joking aside, a none-too-pious ability to see the absurdity of the whole situation and our place in it. To laugh rather than cry in the face of the slings and arrows of outrageous historical fortune.

I just cannot overstate how much this means to me personally. This element of Mills, the ability to take things seriously while laughing at them, made me feel more at home in the field than anything else. I often feel in philosophy, even and maybe especially the bits of the field I like, there is a kind of dour, protestant sensibility of moral seriousness. It’s not that I think this is wrong per se, but it’s just deeply unfamiliar to me. I grew up discussing big issues of politics and society with my family, and for all we deeply cared about such things the norm is and was to be lighthearted, to be able to see the funny side and not take oneself too seriously. Mills’s sense of humor, and unselfserious, down-to-earth way of being in the field, was a visible proof that I could make it, I could work on the things I care about while still retaining elements of
my personality and upbringing that feel essential to being me.

My absolute favorite memory of Charles Mills is also the last time I saw him in person, three years ago. I had been offered a job at the LSE, and it was the last summer before I was due to move to London and take up the post. We met up for lunch at a conference and went to some basement cafe somewhere a bit out of the way. We laughed and gossiped and lamented the state of the field. Towards the end of the meal, with a serious look on his face, he told me that given that there are so few Black professors in the UK, I had a responsibility to represent Black philosophy, and then after a beat followed it up with "well, at least until we can find someone better." I will miss him so much.

NOTES

“Black Radical Liberalism” and the Retreat from Class: The Life and Legacy of Charles W. Mills

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NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

The news of Charles Mills's death hit many people—including myself—with a deep sense of sadness. The death of Charles Mills, however, is not just the death of a singular and remarkable individual. No doubt, he was a revered figure in contemporary philosophy. Yet, his life, philosophical thought, and legacy embody a whole political problem: How do we understand exploitation and oppression in the world? When people like Charles Mills die, dew-eyed celebration should not replace critical examination. We fail to do Mills's philosophical thought justice if in reflecting upon his life and legacy we do so uncritically.

In the aftermath of Walter Rodney's assassination, on June 13, 1980, by the political regime of Linden Forbes Burnham in Georgetown, Guyana, C. L. R. James gave a talk in January of 1981 titled "Walter Rodney and the Question of Power." In light of Burnham's repressive state apparatus, James castigates Rodney for making a serious “political mistake” by not giving serious thought to the question of seizing state power. Both James and Rodney were towering figures in the Pan-African movement and Marxist circles. In fact, James and Rodney were not just friends. But more importantly, they were comrades in the world communist movement. As Jodi Dean notes, to be comrades entails "a political relation, a set of expectations for action toward a common goal." Therefore, James's critical examination of Rodney was in the spirit of being comrades in revolutionary struggle. With dew-eyed sadness about the death of a comrade, James went beyond celebration and offered a critical assessment of Rodney's "political mistakes." While I am not implying that Mills was a revolutionary in the same sense as Rodney, I do hope that my essay is taken in the spirit of comradely criticism of Mills's political mistakes.

I can remember when I first came across the writings of Charles Mills. It was around 1994. And it was before he became famous with the 1997 publication of The Racial Contract. I was an activist and budding Marxist-Leninist. At the time, I was reading everything and anything I could get my hands on related to Marxism-Leninism. I was reading Harry Haywood's Black Bolshevik, V. I. Lenin's What Is To Be Done?, Karl Marx's Capital, V. I. Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy, and Kwame Nkrumah's Consciencism. At some point, I came across three articles by Charles Mills: "Ideology" in Marx and Engels," "Is It Immaterial that there's a 'Material' in 'Historical Materialism'?” and "Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?" In Charles's early philosophical essays, I found what I thought was a kindred spirit. (At this point, I didn't know what "Analytical Philosophy" or "Analytical Marxism" were.) Mills's early philosophical work displayed a philosophical depth and critical understanding of Black culture and history. His early writings appeared to be refreshingly different from most of the Black philosophers I was reading at the time, particularly the anti-Marxist idealist pathetic (Christian) pragmatism of Cornel West.

When I became aware of Charles, he was an associate professor at the University of Illinois Chicago. At the time, I was working with John H. McClendon III (who was the director of the Black Culture Center at the University of Missouri—Columbia). And we were in the planning stages of organizing a conference on Black philosophy. We had already invited the African American Marxist thinker Bob Rhodes and Mizzou philosophy professor Robert N. Johnson. But we wanted another progressive Black philosophical voice on the panel; so I suggested to McClendon that we invite Charles. We both called Charles and spoke with him. We briefly discussed his work on Marxism and hoped that we could eventually meet in person. Unfortunately, he had a prior commitment and was unable to attend the conference. We eventually asked the Black philosopher Johnny Washington (Saint Xavier College, BA, 1972; Stanford University, MA, 1976, PhD, 1978) to participate. He was teaching at Southwest Missouri State University (Springfield, Missouri).

When I started graduate school at the University of Kansas (KU) in the fall of 1996, doing a dissertation on Charles Mills's The Racial Contract was the farthest thing from my mind. I wanted to do both my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation on a straightforward Marxist topic. As it was, the only person working in the area of Marxism in my department was the prominent business ethicists and anti-Marxist Marxologist Richard T. DeGeorge. What a character he was! Eventually, I wrote a master's thesis on G. W. F. Hegel, C. L. R. James's Notes on Dialectics and the 'Notion' of Freedom (working with Julie Maybee). Starting in about 2001, I started working on my doctoral dissertation on Charles Mills's The Racial Contract—under the direction of analytical feminist philosopher Ann Cudd. While working on my dissertation, I had the good fortune
to personally meet Carole Pateman! In our conversation we talked extensively about the ideological and philosophical differences between she and Charles on contract theory. These differences would become the subject of their book, *Contract and Domination*, published in 2007.

From 1995 to 2003 (when I completed my dissertation), a lot changed in the philosophical world! Of course, *The Racial Contract* was published in 1997. Still to this day, it is one of the best-selling philosophy books by a Black philosopher—as Mills has noted on several occasions. I had the good fortune to study with one of the leading feminist contractarians of our times—Ann Cudd. And I was tackling Marxism-Leninism from below. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the fact that I was able to study with John ‘Mac’ McClendon III—day and night for three years—while we were at KU. Many folks may not realize that ‘Mac’ started his doctorate in 1996 and finished in 1999. (John had enrolled in the doctoral program in African Studies at Howard Universities in the late 1970s. But he never finished the program. That’s another story—for another time.)

My dissertation, titled *Racial Contract Theory: A Critical Introduction*, was completed sometime in 2003—a year after my son’s birth. I wrote it as a Marxist-Leninist critique of Charles Mills. I wrote the following in my abstract:

> Although the novelty of racial contract theory has been greatly praised in various disciplines ranging from philosophy to political science, few philosophers have felt it necessary to subject it to critical review and/or analysis. For that reason alone, this dissertation represents a valuable contribution. This dissertation has a two-fold purpose: interpretive and critical. It, therefore, is, in aim, a scholarly study and introduction to racial contract theory. Here my aim is to critically examine his theoretical model and the validity of its explanation of the dynamics of white supremacy in its global articulation. This dissertation also has the additional task of rendering a critique from a Marxist-Leninist philosophical perspective, that is, dialectical and historical materialism. My polemical encounter with Mills centers not only on conceptual or methodological issues but also constitutes an external (ideological) critique of Mills’ contractarianism. I demonstrate that Mills adopts an idealist conception of history to explain the historical emergence and continued existence of white supremacy. Furthermore, Mills’ racialist approach ignores the central role that the class structure of capitalism and capitalist exploitation play in the founding and continued reproduction of white supremacy. [Italics Added]

I would not change one word of the abstract today. My assessment was spot on. In many respects, I anticipated that Mills’s ideological journey would take him rightward to what he would later label as “Black radical liberalism.”

After leaving KU, I published two chapters from my dissertation with the journal *Cultural Logic: Journal of Marxist Theory & Practice*: “Social Contract as Bourgeois Ideology” (2007) and “Contractarianism as Method: Rawls contra Mills” (2008). Despite my critical treatment of *The Racial Contract*, Charles was always ready to give me a mischievous and playful smile along with a few sarcastic comments whenever I saw him at various American Philosophical Association (APA) meetings. I vividly remember on one occasion that Mills chided: “Hey! This is the guy who has been criticizing my work from a Marxist-Leninist perspective! This guy thinks he is going to be successful in the philosophy profession by being a Marxist.” And on more than a few occasions I—like so many others—asked Charles to write several recommendations and function as a reviewer for my promotion and tenure. Charles always graciously said yes! While I have determine ideological and philosophical differences with Mills, I will always appreciate his kindness, humor, and creative philosophical mind. In fact, in my estimation, Mills’s best work is not *The Racial Contract*. Mills is at his best when he engages with the Black experience.

**CHARLES MILLS: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Born on January 3, 1951, in London, England, the Afro-Caribbean philosopher Charles Wade Mills died on September 20, 2022, in Evanston, Illinois. Tragically, in May of 2021, he was diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic cancer.

His parents—Winnifred and Gladstone Mills—met on a “banana boat” from Jamaica to England in 1948. As Mills recounts, “My father, Gladstone, had actually completed a degree at the London School of Economics a few months before, and was now returning to England to become liaison officer for the British colonial office for West Indians students there. . . . My mother, Winnifred, was headed for Westminster Hospital as a student nurse.” Shortly after Mills was born, his parents moved back to Kingston, Jamaica, where Mills spent his formative years. His parents would later give birth to another son, Raymond. From 1960 until 1990, Gladstone Mills was part of the anti-colonial nationalist intelligentsia who were responsible for transforming Jamaica from a British colony into an independent nation. In fact, Gladstone Mills taught at the Mona, Jamaica, campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI). During his time with UWI, he served as head of the school’s Department of Government from 1963 to 1980, and as dean of its Faculty of Social Sciences from 1967 to 1970. Under Mills’s leadership as dean, the school introduced its bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctoral programs in the field of public administration.

Charles Mills attended the prestigious all-boys high school Jamaica College. After completing his secondary education, Charles Mills attended the University of the West Indies and received a BSc in physics in 1971. Afterwards, Mills taught for a while at the Jamaican equivalent of a junior college. He taught physics in Kingston from 1971 to 1973 at the College of Arts, Science, and Technology, and from 1976 to 1977 at Campion College. After completing his undergraduate degree, a Commonwealth Fellowship took the young Mills to the University of Toronto. Subsequently, he worked on his graduate degree in philosophy at the University of Toronto from 1976 to 1985. While at the University of Toronto, Mills was politically active with several organizations including being a member of the Workers Party of Jamaica, a Marxist-
Leninist political party aligned with the Soviet Union. He also helped to unionize teaching assistants. Under the supervision of Frank Cunningham and Dan Goldstick, Mills completed a dissertation titled *The Concept of Ideology in the Thought of Marx and Engels.* Charles was not the first Black philosopher to do a dissertation on Marxism. Several Black philosophers have done dissertation topics related to Marxism: Leonard Harris, Lucius Outlaw, Cornel West, John P. Pittman, Tommy Shelby, and John H. McClendon.

After receiving his doctoral degree in philosophy, he began teaching at various philosophy department in the United States. Discussing his "years in America," Mills makes the following observation: "in coming to the US to work after I got my PhD in Canada, I was changing race, becoming part of an unambiguously subordinated ‘Black’ American racial group, while equipped with the inherited cultural capital and privilege of my ‘brown’ Jamaican middle-class origins and education."

Initially, he taught at the University of Oklahoma (1987–1990) and then later at the University of Illinois at Chicago (1990–2007) where he was a UIC Distinguished Professor. Before his appointment as Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center, CUNY, in August 2016, he was John Evans Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy at Northwestern University. In 2016, he delivered the John Dewey lecture, “The Red and the Black,” at the American Philosophical Association Central Division meeting. He was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2017. And he gave the prestigious Tanner Lectures on Human Values in 2020 on “Theorizing Racial Justice,” at the University of Michigan. Giving the Tanner Lectures was a recognition of Mills’s "extra-ordinary" achievement as a thinker. Past lecturers have included John Rawls, Karl Popper, Michel Foucault, Amartya K. Sen, Jürgen Habermas, Toni Morrison, Carol Gilligan, Amy Gutman, K. Anthony Appiah, Isabel Allende, Spike Lee, Neil deGrasse Tyson, among others. A long-delayed forthcoming book, *The White Leviathan: Nonwhite Bodies in the White Body Politic,* is scheduled to be published under Oxford University Press’s new book series, "Critical Philosophy of Race." It will continue Mills’s "Black radical liberalism" project by examining the racialization of the body politic in the United States and the corresponding need for corrective racial justice.

**FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: THE POLITICAL ODYSSEY OF MILLS**

Being raised in a petit-bourgeois family (which was relatively prominent in Jamaica), Mills grew up in an intellectual environment that allowed him to develop into what he describes as a “British schoolboy in blackface or brownface” with an interest in science fiction and fantasy novels.

Mills’s political consciousness shifted in 1968 as he entered the Mona (i.e., Jamaican) campus of the University of West Indies. Mills’s *crisis of class consciousness* was influenced by the mass protests following the expulsion of the Marxist historian Walter Rodney from Jamaica on October 15, 1968, by the government of Jamaica, led by Prime Minister Hugh Shearer. The Rodney Affair, as it came to be known, incited a response throughout the Caribbean world and opened a whole new ideological world for Mills. Mills was introduced to Marxism, both in “independent” and party-linked Marxist-Leninist forms; varieties of black nationalism demanding “Black Power,” a slogan taken over from the American movements of the time but still very relevant in the Jamaican context given the socioeconomic exclusions I have sketched; a newly respectable Rastafari consciousness, buoyed by the growing international success of Bob Marley, and attracting middle-class conversions; and debates at the university on dependency theory, underdevelopment, the Plantation School as a model for understanding Caribbean economies, the Cuban Revolution, the enduring manifestations of race and color privileging in the region, and so forth.

Fellow Jamaicans like Peter Figueroa also played a role in influencing him to join the Marxist-Leninist political party Workers Party of Jamaica.

Mills belonged to a generation who are affectionately referred as the 68ers—the generation born at the end of World War II and politicized by the rebellious spirit of the late 1960s. For these children of Malcolm X, Mao, Che, Amilcar Cabral, the fight against imperialism and colonialism was the defining formative political experience. During the harsh climate of anti-Communism, many 68ers such as Jamaicans Brian Meeks and Rupert Lewis embraced Left-Radical ideas and/or Marxism. Mills eventually joined the Workers Party of Jamaica (which was aligned with the Soviet Union) during this period as a reflection of his growing political radicalism.

Mills also belongs to a long history of Caribbean intellectuals who, on the one hand, tend to exaggerate the character of racism in the United States while simultaneously discounting the determining character of capitalism, class, and class struggle in the United States. Mills and some Caribbean intellectuals are, on the other hand, able to discuss the ways in which capitalism, class, and class struggle shape the Caribbean world.

With respect to Mills’s early career, philosophical worldview, and politics, he consistently frames himself as “a Marxist and a fairly orthodox one at that.” This claim by Mills is rather odd given his adoption of “Analytical Marxism.” It is probably more accurate to characterize Mills as a democratic socialist who was sympathetic to classical Marxism of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and V. I. Lenin. Despite his anti-imperialism, Mills was a fellow-traveler and not firmly committed to Marxism. Despite his radical activism in Jamaica, Canada, his dissertation and early essays, Mills fundamentally adopts a petit-bourgeois form of “Marxism,” “Marxism” without Marx, that is, “rational choice” Marxism. In fact, quite interestingly, by 1994, he was supportive of Black Marxism, the anti-Marxist book written by Cedric Robinson.
During this early phase of his career, we find Mills wrestling with conceptual matters—questions of ideology, the precise significance of “materialism,” the status of morality, Stalinism—from the standpoint of “Analytical Marxism.”

Beginning with G. A. Cohen’s Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence (1978), Analytical Marxism aimed to marry analytical philosophical methodology and neoclassical economics with the Marxist critique of capitalism. It is imperative that I note that “Analytical Marxism,” does not entail a systematic philosophical doctrine; better yet, it is a plethora of various intellectual currents, principally in the disciplines of philosophy, political science, history, sociology, economics, and economic philosophy. It seems to possess, nevertheless, a saliently coherent intellectual current, which emanates from moorings in and affinities to neoclassical economic theory and analytical philosophic methodology.

In contrast to Mills, I contend, “Analytical Marxism” has deep roots in the intellectual tradition of classical revisionism as exemplified in the Social Democratic views of Eduard Bernstein. Amplifying this point, Marxist theorist Alex Callinicos observes,

> The difficulty . . . for analytical “Marxists” is that any such view of Marxism as a relatively unified body of theory possessing a hard core (the central propositions of historical materialism, perhaps, plus the principal theses of Marx’s analysis of capitalism) will simply highlight the question implicit in the direction of their work has taken: given the rejection, particularly by the rational-choice theorists such as Elster and Roemer, of most of Marx’s principal theories, and the use of mainstream social science, in what sense does calling them Marxists refer to more than facts about their individual political and intellectual biographies.

Callinicos in his comments on G. A. Cohen, one of the pioneers of analytical Marxism, further states, “But even he [Cohen] had by the mid-1980s settled for political objectives little different from those espoused by contemporary social-democratic thought—a workers’ cooperative mixed economy with fiscal devices to ensure rough equality’. Whether analytical Marxism represents a development of, or an exit from, the revolutionary socialist tradition therefore remains to be seen.”

“Rational-choice Marxism” was most systematically expounded by Jon Elster in Making Sense of Marx (1985). It rested on two theses: first, methodological individualism—social structures must be interpreted as the unintended consequence of individual actions; second, human actors must be regarded as instrumentally rational, in the sense of selecting the most efficient means for securing their ends. The first thesis was associated with the ideological offensive waged against Marxism by Karl Popper and Friedrich August von Hayek at the height of the Cold War; the second was a generalization of an animating assumption of neo-classical economics. How could an approach with such anti-Marxist credentials come to be associated with an attempted reconstruction of Marxism?

Classical Marxist philosophy and analytical “Marxist” philosophy are mutually exclusive and therefore any merger, at best, can only result in syncretism. The prime occlusion, at the level of political economy, is the respective antithetical conceptions of value. Marxist political economy maintains an objectivist theory of value and “Analytical Marxism” upholds a subjectivist one. Let me be clear and direct. “Analytical Marxism” is an exit from the revolutionary theory of Marxism.

Mills’s third book, From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism (2003), which brings together essays from the late 1980s until 2001, showcases his intellectual development from Rational Choice “Marxism” and/or “white Marxism” to “Black radical liberalism.” Mills characterizes this as a “red shift,” which implies a “new” political development that is progressive in nature. But, more appropriately, the “red shift” of Mills is actually in ideological and political terms a rightward shift away from Marxism.

By 1994, Mills’s transition is evident. He describes his position as “a ‘black,’ or at least racially informed, Marxism” similar to the Black Radical Tradition associated with Cedric Robinson. He further explains that his philosophical outlook is racially—as an African-American in a largely white profession—and theoretically—as somebody who, despite everything, still considers himself a Marxist (albeit in some appropriately hyphenated and qualified sense whose details I have yet to work out).

And he begins to repeat bourgeois nationalist critiques of Marxism:

> Unfortunately, First World Marxism, being largely white Marxism, has historically (following the founders) had little useful to say about race. In part this is a corollary of the general weakness of Marxist theory on issues of national identity and ethnicity, “backward” local particularisms which Marx and Engels envisaged as being swept aside in the universalizing drive of a progressive globalizing capitalism, producing a workingman who had no country. But the pattern of neglect has been perpetuated, more culpably, by subsequent generations of white Marxists, who have tended to write off race consciousness and black nationalism as an obfuscatory digression from the necessary focus on class.

And

What would a convincing Marxist theorization of race be like? The challenge that such Left accounts as have been given have generally failed to meet is the capturing of the phenomenological dimension of a racialized existence, the centrality of racial identity to the polity, the extent to which race structures one’s life and penetrates to one’s ontic bones. Race has been seen as epiphenomenal, the
tool capitalists use to divide the workers, the "false
consciousness" which needs to be demystified so
that the underlying proletarian identity can assert
itself and we can all get on with the important
thing, the class struggle.¹⁸

By 1999, Mills claims he no longer believes in Marxism. Pillars of Marxism such as the labor theory of value, as Mills remarks, rest on

a set of highly controversial propositions, all of
which would be disputed by mainstream political
philosophy (liberalism), political science (pluralism),
economics (neo-classical marginal utility theory),
and sociology (Parsonian structural-functionalism
and its heirs). But the irony is that all of these
claims about group domination can be made with
far greater ease with respect to race, relying not
on controversial Marxist notions, but undeniable
(if embarrassing) and well-documented (if usually
ignored) facts from mainstream descriptive social
theory, and on conventional liberal individualist
values from mainstream normative social theory.¹⁹

By 1999, Mills’s shift from philosophical materialism to
idealism is complete. This reflected a political shift from
being a card-carrying Marxist to “Black radical liberalism.”

It is an understatement to say that Mills was not prepared
for the raw and merciless racism he experienced in the
United States. The contrast to his Caribbean world was
sharp. If Mills had kept a journal, he surely would have
written something similar to his fellow Jamaican Claude
Mckay: “It was the first time I had ever come face to face
with such manifest, implacable hate of my race, and my
feelings were indescribable. . . . I had heard of prejudice
in America but never dreamed of it being so intensely
bitter.”²⁰

In fact, Mills turn to liberalism and away from “white
Marxism” can be explained in terms of the perceived
differences between the place of race and racism in the
United States and class and class exploitation in Caribbean
societies. Arguably, in the Caribbean, the population was
also divided along class lines that cut through the various
racial groups such as people of East Indians and Chinese
origins. In fact, Mills describes Jamaica as one of the
countries with “the most inequitable income distributions
in the world, an oppressive class system interlocking with
and exacerbated by the racial and cultural subordination
of the Black majority.”²¹ Whereas in the United States there
is the perception that race and only race dominates all
spheres of civil society and the State. The color of one’s
skin, for Mills, is the most fundamental fact in the lives of
Black folk and that race takes precedence over any other
allegiances, such as religion, their identity as citizens, and,
most importantly, their class. For Mills, race trumps class,
particularly when analyzing the United States.

Mills subsequently reduces class relations into race
relations when analyzing the United States. As Mills noted
in 1999, “the irony . . . is that in the United States the Marxist
material mode of group identification in a society does
not work for class but works very well for race.” Whereas
when Mills discusses the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica,
he gives priority to class relations. Mills’s fetishism of race
prevented him from making a rigorous analysis of the
facets of class structure and class struggle that underlay
racism in the United States. Unfortunately, Mills never
understood the need to examine class domination and the
class nature of power in the United States and the world
at large. He never understood the historical necessity of
developing a philosophical perspective that is consistently
anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist (but not anti-
white) and that speaks to the exploitation and oppression
of all peoples. The conclusion that Mills reached was one
of political defeatism, that is, the struggle for socialism was
a utopian in character. Rather than return to Marx, Engels,
and Lenin, Mills resorted to ideological mystification, racial
reductionism, and bourgeois liberalism.

The advent of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan
represented the beginning of major offensives against
the workers’ movements in Britain, the US, and throughout
the world that not only inflicted major defeats—such as
the decertification of Professional Air Traffic Controllers
Organization (or PATCO) in 1981 and the British miners’
strike of 1984–1985—but inaugurated right-wing political
policies that by the 1990s had become a normative model
for capitalism as a whole. With the decline of the Black
Left in the 1970s, the rise of the Right in the 1980s, and
collapse of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries
in the 1990s, the study of Marx became in Mills’s words “dead
in the water” and forced a shift to race in his intellectual
focus and an embracing of liberalism. Normally, such an
ideological transition would not be celebrated. However,
in my estimation, Mills wanted to hold on to the subjective
perception that he was still a radical of sorts. However,
the sad truth is that Mills’s political odyssey ends with the
reactionary ideological outlook that he labels as “Black
radical liberalism.” At the end of the day, similar to Cornel
West, Mills—like an alchemist—sought to give ideological
legitimacy to liberalism as a radical alternative to Marxism-
Leninism.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE BLACK RADICAL
LIBERALISM PROJECT: THE ODYSSEY OF PETIT
BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY

Clearly, Mills’s biggest contribution to African American
philosophy has been exploring the nature of white
supremacy. Arguably, however, Mills restricts the scope of
African American philosophy:

Those African American philosophers who do work
in moral and political theory tend either to produce
general work indistinguishable from that of their
white peers or to focus on local issues (affirmative
action, the black ‘underclass’) or historical figures
(W. E. B Du Bois, Alain Locke) in a way that does not
aggressively engage the broader debate.²²

What is the “broader debate” that Mills is referring to? For
Mills, the Racial Contract is “a global theoretical framework
for situating discussions of race and white racism.”²³
As such, it constitutes the only valid means, for Mills, of
challenging the assumptions of white political philosophy. Contrary to the dominant—if not popular—view, The Racial Contract is self-consciously not an exercise in African American or Africana philosophy since it addresses global issues as opposed to "local issues." (How ironic is that! A Black philosopher who wants to address global issues but sees "Black issues" as local!) Consequently, we could argue that Mills does not offer a broad conception of African American or Africana philosophy because their focus is on "local issues." As such, for Mills, to the extent that he is engaging African American/Black philosophy, it is limited to the philosophy of race and racism. In effect, Mills did not fully appreciate the extent to which the particularity of Black intellectual culture could broaden the universal character of philosophy.

"Though white supremacy fosters false universality (a distorted conception of the global)," as John McClenond has observed, "universality in and of itself is not false. Universality if it is not reduced to an arid abstraction must be mediated via particularity." What is the "rational kernel" to be extracted from Mills's philosophy? Fundamentally, we must see that the "Black radical liberalism" offered by Mills functions to legitimize liberalism as a radical alternative to right-wing populism/fascism. "Black radical liberalism" is fundamentally a liberal bourgeois project. Mills's conventionalist epistemology of race along with racial/racist ideology consistently obscures the nature of the material contradictions grounding race, racism, and white supremacy. At the end of the day, race analysis separated from a critique of capitalism and its material conditions can only achieve at best superficial descriptions and at worst a distorted conception of reality.

What "political mistakes" are embedded in Mills's philosophy? First, the cornerstone of Mills's philosophy relies on counterposing African (continental and diasporan) to Western thought as a mode of ideological critique. From the very beginnings of the Black Studies movement until now, Black nationalist proponents have declared an inextricable connection between a white ideology and the white academy. Traditional academic arguments supporting value-free scholarship, objectivity, non-partisanship, and universality were all scrutinized and such claims were ultimately deemed to be ideological. The social sciences, in particular, were deemed to be bastions of white ideology. This white ideology was proclaimed to give intellectual legitimacy and support to white supremacist policies at all levels of civil society as well as the State. Objectively, Black nationalists were responding to the pervasive presence of racism and national oppression. They thought the ideological struggle against white supremacy required, both inside and outside the academy, the development of a militant Black ideology. The terms "Black" and "white" intrinsically convey specific epistemological orientations.

To use postmodern language, "Black" and "white" represent a particular "gaze" from which one views the world. Mills's framework builds on the work of this ideological tendency in African American Studies. Think of Mills's essay, "The Whiteness of Political Philosophy."

To imply that all of Western political philosophy is racist or white supremacist neglects a crucial point. Western thought encapsulates more than capitalism and the ancillary rise of white supremacy. This perspective is problematic because it is ahistorical, as well as too indeterminate and vacuous. It leaves out the crucial details of Western thought and history that would enable us to mark African slavery's emergence into the arena of world capitalism. Prior to the emergence of capitalism, white supremacy did not exist. Capitalism is only a definite stage in, and not the complete history of, the Western world.

Mills's framework is built on the usage of Black and white as categorial stipulations for a particular intellectual/philosophical/political orientation. This empirically fallacious and unsupported distinction between a white ideology and Black ideology, white freedom and Black oppression, and the epistemology of ignorance associated with white people contrasts with the more accurate social epistemology of Black people. The result of this reasoning, for instance, leads to bifurcated notions about Marxism—where based on a presupposed antithesis holding between people of African and European descent, it must follow that such racial/cultural differences mark distinctions of an essentially philosophical import for adherents of Marxism. Consequently, we see Mills constantly talking about "Black Marxism" contra "white Marxism," or "Black liberalism" contra "white liberalism." Somehow or other, Blackness produces a change in the philosophical content of Marxism and/or Liberalism. Here Mills makes a crucial mistake in assuming that Blackness signifies a description of the method or theory of African American philosophy.

The truth of the matter is the following: Marxism is neither Black nor white (African or European). To be a Marxist is to employ a dialectical and historical materialist (scientific) analysis and critique aimed at concrete conditions that may include the evaluation of social relations, practices, and institutions that are established on racist grounds within the framework of the capitalist mode of production.

For the standpoint of Mills's racist ideology, Marxism is reduced to just another white (Western) ideology. The real irony to Mills's framework is that he seeks to revamp contractarianism although it is equally a part of the Western (or, more accurately, bourgeois) tradition.

Second, Mills belongs to a political tendency that formulates racial inequality as a problem rooted in whiteness, white privilege, or white supremacy. For Mills, everything is reducible to white supremacy—from slavery to various types of colonialism to contemporary versions of neo-colonialism to imperialism. The work of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones are representative of this racial reductionist political trend. As historian Eric Arnesen pointed out in a critical overview of the whiteness studies literature, "Whiteness is, variously, a metaphor for power, a proxy for racially distributed material benefits, a synonym for 'white supremacy,' an epistemological stance defined by power, a position of invisibility or ignorance, and a set of beliefs about racial 'others' and one-self that can be rejected through 'reason' to a racial category." While I don't have the space to adequately address the limitations of whiteness studies, Gregory Meyerson, Cedric Johnson, and others have presented detailed discussions. By relying on a problematic "retrospective psychoanalysis,"
Johnson notes, whiteness studies fails to develop a critical analysis and the historical rigor necessary to understand class and power in the United States. Johnson observes,

The academic and popular discourse of whiteness is concerned with the “souls of white folks” if you will, their predilections, behaviors and reactionary tendencies, often relying on retrospective psychoanalysis to discern the interior lives and private motives of the ante-bellum crowd, the minstrel show audience, southern lynching mobs and middle class suburban strivers alike, even when evidence of those motives and interests is scant.

He continues,

Whiteness has come to function not so much as an analysis of interests in historical motion, but rather, it functions as catechism—America’s original sin is racism and redemption in the post-political hereafter lies in white atonement. With respect to class struggle and the maintenance of consent and order by dominant classes, the devil is in the details of history, details that fall out of focus when we evoke “white interests” as a metanarrative of what is wrong with American politics. Roediger’s work has advanced an approach to thinking about history and contemporary politics that reifies whiteness, even as it explores its social construction, presupposes that racial identity is the foremost shaper of working-class thought and action, and silences interracial solidarity.  

Second, Mills uses a racial-caste framework to discuss contemporary race relations in the United States. In Mills’s framework the ruling class is magically transformed into the ruling race. Mills conflates class and caste; and subsequently conflates race and class (where ruling race becomes ruling class). This results in Mills’s analytical distinction between (white) freedom and (Black) subordination, and ruling (white) race and subordinate (Black) race. As Mills explains:

I unconsciously took the theoretical apparatus I knew best—Marxism—and shifted its terms from red to black and white. . . . I took the Marxist way of approaching class and applied it to race. . . . Now what I have belatedly realized is that in my theorization of race, I basically adapted most this apparatus and changed the identities of the players. Where Marxists talked about capitalism, or, more generally, class society, I was working with the concept of white supremacy. Whites and nonwhites are the two key players; racial exploitation is taken to be central; whites constitute the “ruling race”, the Herrenvolk, whose rule is consolidated by the state and the legal system. . . .

The problem is that Mills ignores the fact that class stratification among both white and Black people exists. And it produces differing class interests for the Black and white working class in contrast to the Black and white bourgeoisie. A Black and white worker share more in common in terms of their class interest than a white worker shares with Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, or Elon Musk. All workers sell their labor power, which is privately appropriated by the bourgeoisie. This objective phenomenon of socialized production is shared in common by all workers—despite racism, segregated communities, differences in culture, chauvinism on the part of white workers, etc. The struggle to overthrow capitalism and the fight against racism and chauvinism are not mutually exclusive but are integrally united.

Third, Mills fundamentally offers no progressive solution to the “Racial Contract.” Because Mills disconnects the roots of racial inequality from the political economy of capitalism, capitalism—despite being the material cause of slavery, racism, Jim crow segregation, gentrification, and poverty—functions as a presumptive context for the solution to any and all social and political problems. At best, all that Mills can hope for is welfare state capitalism as providing the solution to white supremacy. But why not go farther and argue for socialism as providing the solution to racism/white supremacy?

Mills’s racial analysis unfortunately overlooks the reason that Africans were enslaved, and, consequently, subjected to somatic fragmentation and designated as three-fifths of a person. As the Black sociologist Oliver C. Cox informs us,

It should not be forgotten that, above all else, the slave was a worker whose labor was exploited in production for profit in a capitalist market. It is this fundamental fact which identifies the Negro problem in the United States with the problem of all workers regardless of color.

In essence, the development of capitalism in the United States involved a racially differentiated process of proletarianization. Beyond a doubt, the African slave came to be the most thoroughly exploited of the working class. They were, however, not the only exploited people in the American colonies. Prior to the enslavement of African men, women, and children, European indentured servants were exploited. From the beginnings of slavery until the end of the Civil War, the vast majority of white people did not benefit from the exploitation of Black labor.

More significantly, Mills seems particularly unwilling to pursue the implications of class, capitalism, and class struggle with all that entails. In fact, Mills claims that the picture presented in The Racial Contract is “roughly accurate.” Subsequently, he argues that when we look at the long arc of United States history, “historically white racial solidarity has overridden class and gender solidarity.” Here Mills’s work, despite its historical affections, still remains to a considerable extent within the methodological conventions of contemporary bourgeois political philosophy, abstracting political theory from the social realities that underlie it.

Why did Mills choose to employ contractarianism as a heuristic method to understand white supremacy as a political system? Why bother? Is it simply a matter of sharing a common language with his orthodox colleagues in analytical philosophy? Did Mills want to break down
the walls separating him from friendship, collaboration, journal publication, peer approval, grants, promotion, big-time lecture fees, bourgeois success, and other pleasures of professional acceptance? What is the practical and theoretical value of the contract idea? Oddly enough, Mills never gave us a straightforward answer to these questions. Mills, for example, argues,

The notion of the Racial Contract is, I suggest, one possible way of making [a] connection with mainstream theory, since it uses the vocabulary and apparatus already developed for contractarianism to map this unacknowledged system. Contract talk is, after all, the political lingua of our times.31

He continues,

The “Racial Contract,” then, is intended as a conceptual bridge between two areas now largely segregated from each other: on the one hand, mainstream (i.e. white) ethics and political philosophy, preoccupied with discussions of justice and rights in the abstract, on the other hand, the world of Native American, African-American, and Third and Fourth World political thought, historically focus on issues of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, white settlement, land rights, race and racism, slavery, jim crow, reparations, apartheid, cultural authenticity, national identity, indigenismo, Afrocentrism, etc.32

He also claims

The value of formally articulating a group domination contract, then, is to provide a device for making vivid, within the framework of contractarianism, the actual historical record, and thus counteracting the misleading and mystified historical picture most white contractarians have.33

But, perhaps, the most telling reason for Mills’s adoption of contractarianism is the following comment Mills makes in response to those on the Left who argue that contractarianism is a form of bourgeois ideology:

socialism is not, to put it mildly, around the corner. Possibly the socialist movement can be revived at some stage, but for a long time to come we’re going to be stuck with capitalism and neoliberalism. Surely, then, it is better to have a nonpatriarchal, non-white supremacist capitalism and a degendered and deracialized liberalism than what we have now.34

The truth of the matter is that Mills’s employment of contractarianism is a sign of ideological defeatism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc, we are to believe that Mills was left without a political and ideological anchor and, subsequently, had no choice but to turn to the latest fashion in philosophy, contractarianism. Perhaps the best way of understanding Racial Contract Theory is that it is grounded in a liberal democratic paradigm that is essentially petit bourgeois in its class outlook. His theoretical framework has become the “common sense” of contemporary American liberalism. It is a form of American liberalism that recognizes the realities of American slavery in addition to Jim and Jane Crow.

Let me conclude with the following. Mills constantly argued that Marxism was incapable of addressing racism and/or white supremacy. To make this argument, Mills has to consistently ignore his early political life and political friendships that he developed with Black leftists. In the history of Africana thought and practice, many of the most progressive among anti-imperialist movements, organizations, and leaders eagerly adopted Marxism as an ideological tool to combat imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, national oppression, and class exploitation. In fact, it has been empirically demonstrated in numerous historical works that the ideological divide between left and right, in the Africana world, rests on the fact that the left has advocated socialism/Marxism and the right—in conformity with ruling class ideology and interests—has opposed socialism/Marxism.

A cursory examination of the Africana experience in the twentieth century provides numerous examples of Black Communists/Marxists in the United States, Caribbean, and continental Africa who presented Marxist perspectives on racism, national oppression, imperialism, and colonialism. Hubert Harrison, C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, Paul Robeson, Amilcar Cabral, Maurice Bishop, Harry Haywood, Abdul Rahman Mohamed Babu, Alex Dupuy, Hilbourne Watson, Kwame Nkrumah, Doxey Wilkerson, Abram Harris, Claudia Jones, Maude White Katz, George Jackson, Alpheus Hunton, Charlene Mitchell, John H. McClendon, among others not only provided theoretical analyses of white supremacy, but also were in the vanguard in the fight against racism, national oppression, colonialism, and imperialism.

NOTES


5. In 2005, Southwest Missouri State changed its name to Missouri State University.


8. Dan Goldstick is a longtime member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada and a former member of its Executive Committee, working closely with Miguel Figueroa and Elizabeth Rowley. Goldstick is the founding editor of the Communist Party’s theoretical journal, The Spark.


**Reflections on Charles W. Mills’s Key Intellectual Imperative: Mapping His Philosophical Course After Departing from Marxist Thought**

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**AN INTRODUCTION**

This concise expository presentation constitutes my succinct reflections and critical appraisal on how Dr. Charles Wade Mills tackled mapping his philosophical course after departing from Marxist thought. Keep in mind that unlike an exclusively direct political break from Marxism—which in some way ultimately entails various matters such as political tactics and strategy, ideological leadership, organizational structure, political tasks, or even personal differences—the context of philosophical ruptures correspondingly mandates providing an analysis within the realm of philosophical discourse. If philosophical differences are the deciding issues under contention, then in-kind alternatives by way of philosophical argumentation—with comparable ancillary justifications—should prevail as cardinal points of deliberation. With this in mind, Mills’s departure from Marxist philosophy principally involves two interrogational steps of monumental importance for our analysis.
Our first set of interrogations include the following: Imperatively, does Black intellectual culture have any significant influence on Charles Mills’s formation as philosopher? If not, what serves as the intellectual context during and after his encounter with Marxist philosophy? From the standpoint of method, how does Mills establish the grounding framework for his critique of white supremacy?

The second set comprises the following questions: What intellectual or theoretical concerns brought about his departure from Marxist philosophy? What is (and why does) Mills’s key notion about philosophical inquiry, which is fastened to his text, *The Racial Contract*, initially set the stage for his alternative project to Marxism? Please note, this configuration of interrogations shall not be presented in strict chronological order. Rather, the composite structure—as the sustained content generating the discussion—emerges as our heuristic framework, which accordingly guides our deliberation.

Undoubtedly, more can be said about Mills’s prodigious legacy, yet time and energy restrain a more ambitious undertaking. Obviously, there is abundantly more to the intellectual legacy of Charles Mills. My immediate objective in this essay highlights the focal point for this exercise, yet it is not the only point of equivalence with Mills’s broader philosophical scope. Indeed, I comment—in an earlier publication—on the scope of his work. There I pointed out that the magnitude of his scope actually precedes his magnum opus, *The Racial Contract* (1997).

Mills is a significant voice among the small cadre of Black philosophers committed to the correction of and expansion beyond the Eurocentric myopia of professional philosophy. In his previous scholarship he demonstrates not only that he is insightful, critical and creative, but that he also grapples with questions and issues that few other philosophers, (including fellow Black philosophers), have dared to address. Of particular note is his provocative article, “Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women” (*Journal of Social Philosophy*, July 1, 1994).¹

More recently, fellow Jamaican scholar Dennis Scott quite appropriately offers his personal judgment about Mills in the March 2022 issue of *Small Axe*. For our readers less familiar with West Indian scholarship and Caribbean intellectual legacies, this journal still remains as one of the foremost publications on the Caribbean contemporary scene. Scott notes, “The lamentable death of the philosopher Charles W. Mills, on 20 September 2021, has not only stunned us but left us all the poorer intellectually, the more so, I believe, for the want of an adequate framework for appreciating the real scope of his contribution. Easily, Charles was one of the most formidable Jamaican intellectuals of his generation.”²

Certainly, Scott’s commentary opens one of the several doors to Mills’s manifold legacy. Furthermore, I observed many other (quite similar) statements, including one that appeared in a German publication.³ Undoubtedly, Mills’s intellectual impact remains far-reaching and, accordingly, we duly acknowledge the numerous memorial activities—around the world—in his honor. With Scott’s statement, we have a gripping comment in eulogy-like fashion. Lastly, in response to Scott’s remark on the lack of “an adequate framework for appreciating the real scope of Mills’ contribution,” my essay offers an initial step in the direction of forging such a vitally important framework.

**ON THE FRAMEWORK OF BLACK INTELLECTUAL CULTURE AND ITS RELEVANCE**

Upon hearing of Charles W. Mills’s death on September 20, 2021—to a certain degree—it was not an unexpected occurrence or matter of surprise. Instead, it stands for me as another powerful indication respecting the inevitable fate of this particular—and, more personally, my own—generation of aging Black intellectuals. After all, we are the senior members in the continuum of Black intellectual culture. Certainly, given our elderly status, therein death occurs more frequently than for other subsequent generations. Significantly, I contend that with death there arises the pertinent and compulsory intellectual obligation for both sober reflections and critical appraisals on the past life of those now deceased.

This essential (intellectual) matter of self-scrutiny—in the wake of death—is not reducible to offering eulogies. For eulogies are principally—and rightly so—celebrations of life, specifically in view of death. Contrastingly, self-scrutiny (in broader cultural terms of the collective-self) demands critical examination. It follows that celebration without critical examination thus encompasses emotional expressions sans rational consideration. The rational consideration of life—in the wake of death—precisely demarcates philosophical assessment from the act of eulogizing. This continues as true of all forms of eulogy; which is to say, it matters not if eulogies assume either religious or secular utterances.

Our primordial context of Black intellectual culture in framing our deliberation on Mills is a perceptive choice—because we acknowledge that the very nature of any particular (organic) intellectual culture deeply involves the development of its own intrinsic measure. One which is substantially compounded with a higher degree of self-reflection, along with the decisive measure of accompanying critical assessment.

Without these vital components not only will individual members die over the course of time—an inevitable biological necessity—significantly, what emerges as the primary outcome is more tragically a failure of intellectual obligation, wherein sober reflection and critical assessment are absent. Since with the failure of not fulfilling our required obligations, we ultimately encounter—at our future expense—the very demise of this invaluable edifice of intellectual culture. In sum, what is at stake transpires as the destruction of the concretely established and historic embodiment of our intellectual culture, in all of its entirety.

Notwithstanding, the death of individuals—given its biological characterization—need not dictate the matter of sustained existence respecting the determinate intellectual
culture from which that given individual culture, in part, issues from fulfilling the specified (intellectual) obligations of its corresponding members. Importantly, sustainability of intellectual culture permits the retrieval of past traditions and contributions that have relevance for contemporary purposes. We can reflect upon and draw from such traditions and contributions—moreover, learn from past mistakes and failures—when confronting present-day concerns and future aims. Undeniably, the sum of such activities constitutes the continuation of the life of such cultural formations.

However, we must ask, what happens to those designated intellectual cultures that cease to live on? Frankly, it is quite difficult to pinpoint the precise moment in time or point in social space that comprise when (and where) such cultures suffer the fate of death. Since death is an event, which is preceded by the ambiguous nature of its ongoing process of movement, in a word—dying, which is often chiefly internal rather than external in character. In short, the mediated nature of dying—as continuous movement—is often less discernible than the actual (immediate) moment designated as death. This is why the coroner’s report on the time of death is more complicated than what meets the eye.

Comparably, the process associated with dying for an intellectual culture can extend beyond decades. In dialectical materialist terms, what we have is a descending line of regression or degeneration rather than an ascending line of development. In more abstract philosophical language, we have the concrete motion of ceasing-to-be, rather than coming-into-being. Yet, in terms of revolutionary political/intellectual culture, the process of “coming-into-being” is inevitably bound in correlative relation to another (if not aspect of) culture that ceases-to-be. Life and death stand as the hallmarks of revolutionary political culture and its attendant material conditions.

This is why philosophy cannot reside as an apolitical instrument. On this point concerning the political nature of philosophy, Mills was quite attentive. He argued that white (supremacist) philosophy as political ontology additionally generated an epistemology that hides the facts about how racism as structural impediment remained affixed to the interpretation of political philosophy. Whatever criticism may be directed toward his way, Mills was not ensnared by politics. Political philosophy was foremost politics, and issues forth political ontology as well as epistemology as reinforcements. He argues,

Now if the ‘Racial Contract’ is right, existing conceptions of the polity are foundationally deficient. There is obviously all the difference in the world between saying the system is basically sound despite some unfortunate racist deviations, and saying that the polity is racially structured, the state white–supremacist, and races themselves significant existents that an adequate political ontology needs to accommodate. So the dispute would be not merely about the facts but about why these facts have gone so long unapprehended and untheorized in white moral/political theory.  

The overriding question remains as to the type of politics he thought should be rendered as the suitable idealization. It was another West Indian intellectual, a generation before Mills’s generation, that embarked on the road of analyzing the nature of what constitutes a dying political/intellectual cultures relevant to people of African descent. Particularly related to the colonial experience, Frantz Fanon expertly mapped a course for our political and philosophical intervention.

We—of the older generation—cannot forget Fanon’s grand contribution via his text, A Dying Colonialism. Accordingly, this text not only described what happened but also takes part in the revolutionary struggle in Algeria. As cultural text, A Dying Colonialism extends beyond the boundary lines of the political autopsy on colonialism. For it aptly explicates the birth of the revolutionary process leading to the death of colonialism. What is the cardinal lesson we must gain from Fanon’s explication on cultural death and the revolutionary rebirth of new cultural moorings, in the broad sense of its meaning?

Namely, it is that through rigorous investigation, we can slowly disclose various stages in the process of a dying (colonial) culture and with some degree of approximate accuracy point to its alternative replacement. The complexity surrounding the examination stubbornly persists, since the actual process ancillary with dying cultures itself slowly exhibits a discernible process of regressive degeneration toward eventual termination. In formal academic fashion, the graveyard of such past/dead cultures now emerges as the province of cultural anthropologists, the philologists’ scrutiny of “dead” languages and for the historians of lost antiquities.

Since bourgeois philosophers have a greater propensity toward ahistorical frameworks, then we discover it is more generally the case that the distinction between what is living contra what comprises the dying or actual corpse is often lost in the shuffle. Frequently, the initial discounting of vibrant possibilities—for addressing current challenges—transpires into outright dismissal. In concurrence, the social context of imperialist hegemonic rule permits fossilized fragments to attain classical status and subsequently preserved as the fountain of cultural expression. For Mills, the aforementioned descriptive account accurately denoted Marxism.

From my appraisal, in stark contrast, this mapping is paradigmatic of capitalism and effectively locates bourgeois intellectual culture and its subsidiary white supremacy in all of its manifestations. The key point of departure between Mills’s direction and my location centrally reduces to diametrically opposed assessments on Marxism as philosophical compass.

Furthermore, I submit my accounting—with careful detailed inquiry—can eventually offer some degree of insight into why Black intellectual culture—and its attendant African American philosophical traditions—continually evaded Mills’s grasp. If follows, we must query, why did Mills not draw from the reservoir of Black intellectual culture? Expressly, when he decided that Marxist philosophy was
a moribund venture. Why did Mills assume that bourgeois philosophy could provide life to those under the yoke of class exploitation, imperialism, and white supremacy?

I contend that the source of the problem remained Mills's bifurcation on what he construed as global alternatives, where such options rested on either socialism—adjoined to Marxism—or capitalism affixed to liberalism, though shorn of white supremacy. With his departure from Marxist philosophy, Mills readily presumed that socialism was a failed option. Thus, he concluded that he had no other choice than return to capitalism and its accompanying bourgeois intellectual culture by way of political philosophy and ethics. Mills reached this conclusion by way of the idea that the failure of Marxism explicitly indicated that the only successful outcomes of a socio-political sort were affixed to capitalism and its adjacent liberal political theories.

Principally, Mills committed his wager from the viewpoint of engagement in a zero-sum game. Wherein, if Marxism fails, therefore it stands to reason that capitalism succeeds. It follows that since the former socialist (Marxist) Soviet Union collapsed, therefore we can readily confirm—and thus conclude—that US capitalism, along with the rest of the world capitalist system, decisively won the battle of contending social systems.

In a more direct fashion and practical (political) manner, Mills was formerly a member of the Jamaican Workers’ Party—with others such as his childhood friend Brian Meeks. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its allies, which formed the world socialist bloc, Mills apparently fell into the morass of despair and defeat. Notably, Mills never provided any biographical information about his former political association with—the Soviet aligned—Jamaican Workers’ Party.

However, he does point out the following: “My shift away from working on Marx, then, had several causes. Obviously, one macrocause was the demise of the left in the Caribbean, and the later global collapse of the socialist ideal. . . . So the collapse, as we all now know, did not lead to the rebirth of a cleansed and purified socialism, disassociated from Stalinism, but with the wholesale repudiation of left theory.” He continues, “increasingly I got a sense of talking, if not to myself, and maybe to a half dozen people around the country. I had been on the organizing committee for the 1994 APA Central Division Meetings in Kansas City, and help push for a market Socialism panel, as the only plausible form of socialism left.”

Yet, the silence about his past political work within the Jamaican Workers’ Party creates a considerable lacuna that cannot be addressed in this essay. Hence, a certain shroud of mystery hovers over our assessment of Mills’s departure from Marxism and how it specifically impacts on his resultant philosophical stance. Alas, our analysis must remain limited to strictly philosophical and broader intellectual matters.

However, Marxist and West Indian scholar Hilbourne Watson captures a salient point that is relevant to our analysis of Mills. Watson declares, “Defeatism becomes all the more comfortable to endure when Marxism is declared dead and reduced to nostalgia.” So therefore, Mills’s search for an alternative cultural framework—away from Marxism—could only result in returning to the clutches of bourgeoisie culture. Albeit, Mills’s cardinal proviso, accordingly founded on an idealist premise (that the complete realization of capitalism in regaining its full potential), pertinently demands the removal of white supremacy from its structural locus. In so doing the possibility emerges for developing a reconstructed liberalism—as the concrete alternative to Marxism—with its emphasis on capitalism and its adjoining political theory of liberalism.

In fact, as late as 2021, in a rather engaging interview, Mills queried, “What should progressives do with liberalism?” His following evaluation is instructive.

With Mills’s centralization of white supremacy as the pivotal structural problem and the congruent primary matter of systemic concern, he consequently decided to push capitalism away from serious analytical consideration. Since white supremacy is the prime structural and systemic matter of global importance, then its eradication becomes the springboard to Black liberation. In comparable terms, just as we witness that some have argued smoking can stunt healthy growth and development of human beings, Mills concludes white supremacy as structural impediment retards bourgeois society of its full development. Get rid of white supremacy and one can fully breathe in the air of bourgeois political culture. One that is stamped by contractual relations, which sequentially fosters individual freedom and democratic principles accordingly encapsulated in liberal political philosophy and ethics.

The entry of his “Racial Contract” into the professional philosophical discourse, Mills believed, was a foundational aspect on the way forward to fundamental social changes in the system of white supremacy. The notion of the Racial Contract, Mills claimed, effectively replaced Marxism and its critique of the capitalist system. This results since the prevailing hegemonic system was not capitalism and its imperialist stranglehold. Rather, for Mills, the hegemonic system is white supremacy as the global system of oppression that vampire-like haunts the world of people of color. Herein, we uncover that Mills believes that he can provide the needed philosophical solution for the problems at hand. Mills noted that

[The] related reason that the “Racial Contract” should be part of the necessary foundation for contemporary political theory is that our theorizing and moralizing about the sociopolitical facts are affected in characteristic ways by the social
From Mills’s perspective, the world—in its material reality—preeminent comprises the system of global white supremacy. Here it is transparent that Mills’s departure from Marxism comes about by exacting a method of substitution. Whereby Mills replaces capitalism as the material foundation of primary international importance with the global system of white supremacy. Mills’s method of substitution functions as a transformative action parasitic on the realignment of Marxist categories. He openly proclaims:

For illustration, I had never done a course of any kind, whether sociological, political, anthropological, or philosophical, on race. In retrospect, what I have come to recognize is that I unconsciously took the theoretical apparatus I knew best—Marxism—and shifted its terms from red to white and black. I don’t mean (to quickly exempt one natural misunderstanding) that I reduced race to class; rather, I took the Marxist way of approaching class and applied it to race.¹⁰

Prima facie, materialism persisted as an operational conceptualization vis-à-vis ontological questions in Mills’s project. Thus, Mills viewed his break from Marxist philosophy not in terms of an alignment with philosophical idealism. He considered the Racial Contract agenda as consistently materialist. He adamantly declares,

And the best tradition of oppositional materialist critique of hegemony idealist social theory, the “Racial Contract” recognizes the actuality of the world we live in, relates the construction of ideals, and the non-realization of these ideals, to the character of this world, to group interest and institutionalized structures, and points to what would be necessary for achieving them. Thus it unites description and prescription, fact and norm.¹¹

Hence, Mills’s method of substitution actually penetrates into and benigly draws from the Marxist theoretical framework including its materialist ontology. Pertinently, the most prevalent substitution is the replacement of class analysis—in its centrality—with a racist analysis or Black ideology as the decisive point of analysis. Thus, whatever the function that class had—as the key category within Marxism—Mills substituted the notion of racialist perspectives into the framework of white supremacy.

Noteworthy, Mills’s adoption of race as the surrogate for class did not necessarily entail fostering the idea of the social construction of race, fashionable among the postmodernist advocates. In Mills’s estimation, the implicit voluntarism associated with the idea “race as social construct” essentially undermined the materialist integrity of white supremacy as hegemonic structural framework. In accord, Mills’s departure from Marxism specifically eschewed joining the various trending notions such as post-structuralism associated with the subjective idealism fastened to the popularity of “cultural” politics. Mills comments,

The “culturalist” turn, or the “linguistic” turn, standardly associated with the 1980s’ rise of post-structuralism means that “construction” is reflexively opposed to (what is represented as) a hopelessly passé realism or materialism or naturalism (often blithely conflated together). Then, a decade or so ago, we had the advent of what was at the time depicted as the “new” materialism (which, to the more hidebound of us, didn’t actually seem very materialist at all).¹²

White supremacy is the overriding structural framework as global system. Thus, the process of being shaped or molded by the world effectively reduces to the hegemonic rule and structural dominance of white supremacy. Mills’s commentary on Marxism is instructive in this regard. He states, “What has been the most influential radical critique up until recently, the Marxist analysis of the state as an instrument of class power, so that the liberal-democratic state is supposedly unmask as the bourgeois state, the state of the ruling class.”¹³

The fact that Mills elects to italicize “bourgeois” as an adjective before “state” speaks volumes. The distance between class analysis and racist analysis is an important space that Mills renders in accord with his conception of the state. He grants that under the hegemony of white supremacy, it follows the “liberal-democratic state” readily functions as racist institution. Nevertheless, given his alternative Racial Contract paradigm—based on racial-orientation—the same liberal-democratic state can effectively (magically?) reside outside of its designated class function and ancillary social position as bourgeois in character. Hence, the liberal-democratic state comes to occupy a significantly different political space by simply changing the conceptual point of departure with regard to analytical framework. All that it requires—to use Mills’s terminology—comprises the appropriate “shift” from Marxist class analysis to the racialized concept of the state. Mills emphatically makes this point. He declares in no uncertain terms:

My claim is that the model of Racial Contract shows us that we need another alternative, another way of theorizing about and critiquing the state: the racial, or white-supremacist, state, whose function inter alia is to safeguard the polity as a white or white-dominated polity, enforcing the terms of the Racial Contract by appropriate means and, when necessary, facilitating its rewriting from one form to another.¹⁴

What are the normative principles that ground Mills’s alternative to Marxism? Under close inspection, Mills admits
he embraces contractarianism as his normative principle. He discloses that his particular take on the Racial Contract is that "commensurability of the graded norm and critique, and bring them together in an epistemic union. . . ." Mills continues:

Moreover, it is explicitly predicated on the truth of a particular metanarrative, the historical account of the European conquest of the world, which has made the world what it is today. Thus it lays clean the truth, objectivity, realism, the description of the world as it actually is. The prescription for a transformation of that world to achieve racial justice—and invite criticism on those same terms.

On my account—based on Marxist philosophical inquiry—the connection between capitalism and its bourgeois intellectual culture cannot be readily jettisoned from white supremacy sans foundational (revolutionary) transformation of bourgeois relations itself. The locus of Black intellectual culture is institutionally fastened—in a particular subordinate manner—to the edifice of capitalism and its corresponding ideological superstructure. Hence, its progressive aspect emerges as a dialectical dimension within any potential confrontation with white supremacy. Mills only partially comprehended this hard reality. He asserts,

If "Blackness" denotes a position of global racial subordination in modernity, as it does, then we would expect from the assumptions of standpoint theory that the racially oppressed are going to be better positioned to understand the true character of the Euro-imposed world order than the racial beneficiaries of that order. Social experience and collective group interest in social liberation will tend to have a jointly demystifying epistemic effect. Whose testimony on slavery is more likely to be reliable: Thomas Jefferson’s or Frederick Douglass’s?

Yet, this particular example did not provide a compelling reason for Mills to dig deeper into the intellectual and political economic terrain that issues forth this contradiction. Instead, we have the cursory nod toward Black intellectual culture and standpoint epistemology without the full measure of the philosophical import concerning, for example, Douglass with nineteenth-century African American philosophical traditions.

Mills’s twofold process cannot be overlooked when offering an assessment of his simultaneous departure from Marxist philosophy. Although Black and a professional philosopher, Mills publicly directed his announcement to the bourgeois scholarly establishment that the real foundation for his offering to the alter of legitimate scholarship was not restricted to Black intellectual culture, along with its attendant philosophical traditions. The matter of the legitimacy of Mills’s agenda entirely rests on the presupposition that approval is anchored in residence within bourgeois culture sans its white supremacy and racist proclivities.

What Mills fully appreciated is that if he was to openly link himself to African American philosophical traditions, then in no way would it be possible to gain a seat at the big table and what he conceived as its global stage. This conundrum sufficiently explains why Mills was caught in the quagmire of trying to escape identification with African American philosophical traditions; although, we discover that white scholars—firmly attached to the bourgeois academy—did not grant Mills a pass to exit out of African American philosophy. The litmus test was the virtual and continued neglect of his work by white bourgeois scholars. This perpetual neglect of his work he repeatedly lamented about over the years.

After his break from Marxism, Mills continued to emphatically declare he was not of the opinion that bourgeois intellectual and political culture was a dead dog that needed to be buried in the cemetery of past reactionary ruminations. Unfortunately, Mills encountered deaf ears among the philosophical establishment, with the exception of that segment of white liberals that were attracted to the message of Black radical liberalism.

This message contained vestiges of Martin Luther King’s “I have a Dream” speech and James Baldwin’s exhortations on racism and white hypocrisy. After all, Mills’s project eventually involves the reconstitution of liberalism with the aim of fighting white supremacy and racism. As one of Mills’s liberal supporters adamantly argues,

I urge Mills to stay his lonely course and press even harder to reconstruct liberalism into a political philosophy capable of adequately addressing racial injustice. I do not mean to suggest he is the only liberal political philosopher attentive to racial injustice. . . . None of them, however, seeks to infuse the entirety of liberal theory with racial reflexivity; none of them, in other words, seeks to attune rightwing libertarianism, leftwing Rawlsianism, and all the positions in between to (1) the historical depth and reality of white supremacy and (2) the imperative of developing conceptual tools to address it. It is this ambition that sets Mills apart.

Since Turner, as a fellow liberal thinker, shares the same ideological blinders worn by Mills, he cannot comprehend that the political distance between libertarianism and Rawls’s notions about contractarianism in reality considerably falls short of any viewpoint concerning the rightwing versus leftwing divide. As Stephen C. Ferguson astutely comments,

While Mills’ naturalized account of the contract is structurally different from Rawls’ idealized, hypothetical account of the contract, both Rawls and Mills adhere to a liberal political philosophy which occludes the reality of inequalities at the level of bourgeois productive relations. Hence, neither Rawls nor Mills comes to terms with the significance of the class structure of capitalism and the nature of capitalist exploitation in limiting the possibility for a just democratic society.
Notwithstanding that Mills lacked any inclination for critiquing capitalist class contradictions vis-à-vis the specter of white supremacy, he also failed to take the full plunge into Black intellectual culture. Such waters were too dangerous and threatening for mainstream philosophers and the subsidiary institutional networks that comprise the profession of philosophy. No longer a Marxist philosopher, Mills drew his map for entry into the gates of hegemonic legitimacy, which is only afforded to those that effectively demonstrate mastery of the mandatory rules of the game.21

One chief rule that Mills readily acknowledged was the stipulation concerning “do not get enmeshed in the insurgent movement to upend the primacy of bourgeois philosophy.” Given the fact that bourgeois philosophy remained perpetually encapsulated in European forms of racist adornment, then claims about Black intellectual culture serving as a viable alternative clearly present a considerable threat. This emerges as the cardinal point of contention because Mills’s entry onto the bigger stage of the white academy would be effectively impeded.

Mills very well understood what was at stake. Since his arrival in the United States, the question about the meaning of his own Black identity was indelibly inscribed into his formative West Indian consciousness as “Red” man. Furthermore, Mills’s brush with public criticism relating to his employment via affirmative action—early in his professional career—certainly provided sufficient evidence that embracing African American philosophy as the medium for professional expertise would not elevate him onto the big stage.

For illustration, although political theory and ethics allows for some measure of legitimate space regarding philosophy of race, nonetheless, specialization concerning the history of African American philosophers/philosophy primarily remains today largely disregarded in academic circles. Thus, this subject matter continues as an absent chapter in the canonical histories of philosophy.22

In view of this scenario, this crucial point respecting African American philosophical traditions remained as marginally existent on Mills’s own agenda. He viewed serious attention to this subject matter—African American philosophical practices or more generally the history of Black intellectual thought—as merely localized interventions, falling short of the major arena, which is situated on the global plane of the critique of white supremacy. He stated:

Those African American philosophers who do work in moral and political theory tend either to produce general work indistinguishable from that of their white peers or to focus on local issues (affirmative action, the black “underclass”) or historical figures (W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke) in a way that does not aggressively engage the broader debate.22

Although Mills identified as Black or African American—in the wider sense of the Americas and not in the limited manner of the United States—along with identifying as philosopher, he did not locate his corpus—broadly framed as the Racial Contract, Black Radical Liberalism, and even Black Enlightenment—as constituent with Black/African American philosophical traditions. Mills set out on a journey that erected detours so that he need not cross the path of African American philosophical ruminations; even the idea of an occasional intersection was adroitly avoided. Mills deftly created his philosophical map not only for departure from Marxist thought, but also in careful avoidance of any hint of admixture with Black intellectual (cultural) elements.

Simply put, the Racial Contract project was self-consciously not an exercise in African American or Africana philosophy. This is because the intended global dimension of Mills’s project excluded considerations on placing his philosophical agenda within the designated standpoint Black/African American philosophy. Despite all appearances, Mills’s sustained project—from the Racial Contract to Black Radical Liberalism—does not consciously share whatever the conventionally designated essential attributes that are associated with most other African American philosophical thinkers and their corresponding issues attendant with African American philosophy.

Foremost, Mills thinks his philosophical viewpoint particularly stands—in terms of requisite principles—on the grounds of a different kind of object of investigation where the object of investigation (subject matter) constitutes the liberal critique of white supremacy. Mills’s liberal critique was less a concern to uphold Black intellectual culture and its critical posture; more readily the concern was in resurrecting liberalism sans white supremacy. The eradication of racism from the discourse, he surmised, allowed for an open deliberation among like-thinking philosophers established on a firm commitment to liberal principles.

Therein, we observe that the Racial Contract/Black Enlightenment/Black Radical Liberalism continuum readily departs and openly excludes itself from belonging to the conceptualizations associated with African American philosophical traditions. While Mills often theorized about “white ignorance,” his solution was not in any manner an entry into Black intellectual culture. Mills’s mapping of his philosophical course was not a fortuitous step; rather, it was a well-calculated thrust on the path toward gaining a place in what he determined was the global stage of discourse.

Simply put, Mills’s precise execution (or should I say exclusion) of his works, significantly follows from his conscious design in reaching a suitable locus within professional (philosophical) circles. About this pressing concern, several decades ago, I stated,

My main criticism centers on Mills’ perspective on the typology of the African American philosophical tradition with regard to moral and political theory. Mills (correctly) views his own text as a global theoretical framework for the analysis of race and racism. This global focus in turn directly confronts the presuppositions of the dominant white political theory. Mills assumes that those African American philosophers doing moral and political philosophy either simply pursue mainstream philosophy or are more local in their focus. By local in focus he means addressing questions of affirmative
action, Black “underclass” or investigating African American philosophers (historical figures), e.g., Du Bois and Alain Locke, such that the broader debate is left undone.\(^4\)

I continued with the following remarks:

However, if we recognize Mills’ claim that the racial contract is central and not marginal to a conception of the global, then the examination of the history of African American philosophers must not be seen as local in focus but as the (particular) vehicle to rethink what constitutes true universality. Though white supremacy fosters false universality (a distorted conception of the global) universalism in and of itself is not false. Universalism if it is not reduced to an arid abstraction must be mediated via particularity.\(^5\)

Mills explicitly articulated that his “Racial Contract” formulation was far from a localized treatment of the Black experience. He presumed that his formulation occupied a more expansive intellectual terrain, which was closer to the main arena of academic discourse. He argued:

What is needed, in other words, is a recognition that racism (or, as I will argue, global white supremacy) is itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties. The notion of the Racial Contract is, I suggest, one possible way of making this connection with main stream theory, since it uses the vocabulary and apparatus already developed for contractarianism to map this unacknowledged system. Contract talk is, after all, the political lingua franca of our times.\(^6\)

Mills understood his own work via the initiative of The Racial Contract as global in character as well as in scope. In terms of its global character, it should not be overlooked, the socioeconomic dimension Mills identified with his formulation effectively replaces capitalism and its respective exploitative structures as the foundational system of or material basis for the internationalized forms of white supremacy. From the slave trade, slavery, and various types of colonialism to contemporary versions of neo-colonialism, for Mills, they all are reducible to global white supremacy. With respect to countering its global scope, he confidently presupposed his work could not be easily disposed into the “Black ghetto dustbin.”

Mills thought the way forward was to adopt the hegemonic terminology consistent with the prevailing “lingua franca,” expressly the language centering on contractarianism. Mills reasoned that the discourse of counter-white hegemony would gain a better reception by the philosophical establishment. The key was in the adoption of hegemonic terminology of contractarianism itself. After all, language is not merely a grammar or syntax, but also a conceptual framework.\(^7\) In essence, Mills’s suggestion is more than merely changing one’s linguistic expression within political theory. Crucially, it is his summons to adopt the conceptual framework of contractarianism. Having dispensed with Marxist philosophy, in Mills’s estimation, the notion of contract theory in regards to political theory is no longer problematic at its core.

In hindsight, we observe what resulted was a certain air of irony. Although Mills’s work was published by Cornell University Press—an Ivy League press to boot—it was ignored by most mainstream (read white) academics and scholars. In short, Mills’s initial text was treated in the same manner as works within the traditions of Black/African American philosophy. Mills’s intention of creating a substantial distance—from the presumed localized nature of Black philosophy—and thereby facilitating a common language with conventional mainstream liberalism, for his magnum opus, utterly failed to impress the powers that be within the white academy.

Nonetheless, Mills insisted that penultimately it was white academia’s loss. For his work—although critical of white supremacy—accurately belongs within the framework of bourgeois intellectual culture. Indeed, Mills’s entire corpus—he thought—at root provides the necessary enhancements for (and corrective to) bourgeois intellectual culture and scholarship. Crucially, Mills consistently (in fact, persistently) argued The Racial Contract comprises the needed idealization for realizing the full potential of the Western guiding principles of enlightenment, rationality, democratic rights, individuality, and so on. Mills unequivocally stated, “My response to unqualified criticisms of the Enlightenment has always been that what we need is not an oppositional anti-Enlightenment, but rather an Enlightenment that lives up to its ostensible norms and principles rather than systematically violating them.”\(^8\)

In conclusion, Mills’s statement establishes why the Racial Contract encapsulates his decisive break from Marxist philosophy. Also, it explains what he expected to pursue as committed philosopher, given his return into the fold of bourgeois intellectual culture. In my view, his departure from Marxism amounted to a detour, a wrong turn away from effectively giving life to the ongoing progressive journey, in the fight against white supremacy and its material grounding in international capitalism. Despite his noble intentions and dedication as an intellectual in the field of professional philosophy, he departed from “The Long March” in hopes that the restoration of enlightenment would provide the answers.

I have not—in this essay—ventured to speak about the nobility of Charles W. Mills. Undeniably, he was a noble person of high ideals and character. However, my essay is not in the fashion of a eulogy—although I have given quite a few over the years—rather, it is a rational consideration of Charles W. Mills based on my philosophical considerations. In sum, I have exercised my critical examination. I will leave it to the attentive reader to subsequently reach the necessary conclusions of its worth.
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NOTES
5. On the question of imperialism in juxtaposition with Marxism, Mills argued that although imperialism could be fastened onto Marxism, it was qualitatively different from that of capitalism respecting race. He states, “There are, of course, crucial differences. Marxism, at least in its imperialist phase, trying to be a self-sufficient theory of society and history, whereas it was certainly not putting forward race to fill such a role.” See Charles W. Mills, “Red Shift: Politically Embodied/Embodied Politics” in The Philosophical I, ed. George Yancy (Latham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 171.

Cornel West and the Pragmatist Subversion of Marxist Philosophy

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS
Philosopher, theologian, lay preacher, and cultural critic, Cornel West is arguably the most publicized personality among contemporary African American intellectuals. A renowned public lecturer, he frequently appears on the television airwaves, along with other forms of mass and social media. Likewise, West is a prodigious writer and his various publications are sometimes, if not often, intriguing, astute, insightful, and engaging. I will not assume, in this short chapter, the Herculean task of critiquing his vast corpus. Better yet, I embark on the rather modest aim that entails the critique of West’s conception of Marxist philosophy. Ergo, I submit my critical reflections on the text The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought.¹

The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought exemplifies West’s most comprehensive treatment of Marxist philosophy. This book—originally his doctoral dissertation—has a clearly formed thesis with accompanying sustained argumentation. Conceivably, this text represents one of West’s best philosophical endeavors, if not his most popularly acclaimed production. In regard to popular appeal, I think most pundits would venture that Race Matters continues as the most acclaimed among his body of work.²

In respect to the history of African American intellectual culture, no other non-Marxist philosopher, besides West, has been willing to tread—in a rather particularized manner—the content and contours of Marxist philosophy. Prima facie, one may even conclude that West is not only a Marxist philosopher but as well could surmise that he has substantially and creatively contributed to Marxist thought. Alas, one should not confuse appearance with essence, for things are not always what they seem; skim milk sometimes masquerades as cream.

I now offer six questions, which shall correspondingly frame our discussion about West and Marxist philosophy. First, how does West, as non-Marxist philosopher, conceptualize Marxist philosophy? Second, does this conceptualization diverge from Marxist philosophy? Third, if it’s the case that we have a departure, in what sense does it deviate from
Marxism? Fourth, can it be said that the extent of West's departure amounts to anti-Marxism? Fifth, what are Marx's actual notions about his own philosophical moorings? Sixth, how do we discern whether Engels shares the same philosophical conceptualizations, which we must anteriorly uncover as associated with Marx?

This aggregation of questions pertinently comprises our heuristic framework, hence effectively mapping our ongoing discourse. It follows we must sustain a thorough intervention respecting The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought. Correspondingly, we have the accompanying mandate that we rigorously investigate and subsequently compare this text vis-à-vis the relevant works of Marx and Engels. Importantly, our key concern (throughout this paper) goes beyond the fact that West is not a Marxist philosopher. Additionally, he harbors an anti-Marxist philosophical perspective. Paradoxically, West's anti-Marxism transpires within his very attempt to explain the theory and method of Marx, especially with his claims that identify Marx as radical historicist. Indeed, radical historicism functions as the lynchpin for West's depiction of Marx's philosophy.

Of primary concern, given that Marx embraces the historical method in his analysis of philosophy, we must not confuse radical historicism—which rejects the idea of the materialist foundation for social consciousness—with historical materialism and its genesis within the sphere of philosophical (dialectical) materialism. Marx's historical materialism provides a scientific critique of the material basis that grounds not only contradictory social (class) relations but also the manifold forms of social consciousness in view of determinate modes of production. By means of a requisite concrete analysis of this essential difference, I think my thesis about West's anti-Marxism will unfold as manifestly transparent, at least for most readers with a critical mindset.

PATHETIC PRAGMATISM AND KARL MARX: RADICAL HISTORICIST OR DIALECTICAL MATERIALIST?

Of special interest, West’s notion of radical historicism has an accompanying theoretical alignment directly with his own personalized form of neo-pragmatism. Noteworthy, West—in a previous publication—asserts that his neo-pragmatism is crucially linked to the “Prophetic Tradition” derived within the context of African American Christian thought. The notion “Prophetic Pragmatism” indicates that West is steadfastly committed to a religiously inspired form of idealism, regarding his general philosophical orientation. This orientation alternatively stands as oppositional to Marx’s philosophical position, customarily designated in terms of dialectical and historical materialism.

My examination centrally focuses on the philosophical thrust of Marx and Engels’s work, wherein the analysis comprises a comparative approach, rendering their collective authorship in contrast with West’s composite argumentation. The import of this comparison materializes as our pivotal methodological concern. Explicitly, our critical investigation decisively tackles what West would have us believe about Marx’s philosophical methodology.

In The Ethical Dimensions, West tenders that Marx’s philosophizing (i.e., Marx’s own philosophy) stands in sharp contrast to conventional notions about the nature of Marxist philosophy. For example, Engels claims that Marxist philosophy is none other than dialectical materialism. Significantly, this entails definitive features of Marxist philosophy inclusive of both its epistemological and ontological dimensions, with adjacent materialist foundational characteristics.

Sequentially, West submits that Marx—contra Engels—is foremost an idealist, wherein Marx’s idealism—as with West—is firmly within the parameters of neo-pragmatism, radical historicism, and its subsidiary anti-foundationalism. My critique attends to West’s own allegiance to idealism and how it prominently stands in sharp conflict with Marx’s adherence to philosophical materialism.

Marx and Engels establish that philosophical materialism remains as foundational vis-à-vis the inquiry on epistemological and ontological matters. Since West clings to anti-foundationalism, we discern that what correspondingly results is the overt rejection of any systematic approach to philosophical foundations. In conjunction with his anti-foundationalism, West argues that ethics transpires as the chief feature associated with Marx’s philosophy.

For West, the principal questions are not the ontological and epistemological foundations of Marx’s philosophy. Nor is it how Marx and Engels creatively founded a comprehensive research program aimed at the scientific critique of bourgeois social relations, institutions, and practices. Instead, West claims that Marx’s philosophy preeminently assumes the task of theorizing about ethics. On close inspection, West’s book title—The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought—conceals more than what it actually reveals about the ethical aspects of Marx’s thought. On first appearance, the emphasis on questions pertaining to moral judgments seemingly implies that while ethical concerns are primary, nevertheless, there remain other key dimensions to Marxist thought.

However, we must go beyond the apparent implication suggesting that West attends to multiple dimensions within Marx’s philosophy. Our critical inquiry discloses that the presupposition with regard to manifold dimensions only cryptically addresses the real locus of ethical matters. This is because West recommends that when we read Marx, it reduces to one key methodological issue. Namely, Marx’s thought boils down to the manner by which he theorizes about moral concerns. West’s concerted efforts evolve into his overriding and comprehensive justification. And this justification is based on a singular methodological approach, via the employment of ethical reductionism.

By means of ethical reductionism, West sets the stage for Marx’s grand entrance into the very realm of West’s own thought. Marx’s philosophy effectively becomes an ethical project, cemented within neo-pragmatism and radical historicism. In relation to West’s philosophical commitments, Marx holds an insider’s position and shares, with West, a common philosophical point of departure. West confidently
now assumes that his own philosophical vantage point remains sufficiently consistent with the philosophy of Marx.

Unequivocally, the specific combination of idealism, anti-foundationalism, and anti-systematic philosophical inquiry emerges as the prime buttress in West's explication of Marxist philosophy—an explication that continues as stringently anti-materialist and accordingly embodied within an equivalent anti-scientific framework. Undoubtedly, West's confirmation of idealism directly aligns with his broader presumptive reference point, which removes Marx from any connection to dialectical materialism and scientific socialism.

By means of counter-positioning—what West designates as—Marx's "theoretic" approach, we observe that "theoretics" consecutively stands in sharp distinction to conventional modes of philosophical inquiry. In adhering to theoretics, West asserts that Marx effectively discards the need for rational justifications—which are based on notions about objective and universal principles—respecting ethical concerns. It follows that historical context—via the method of radical historicism—eliminates all reliance on presumption about objectivity and universality as necessary foundations for theoretical inquiry.

Furthermore, West claims that the aim of philosophical investigation and its ancillary search for foundational certainty in epistemology and ontology can be readily dismissed, especially in light of his presumption that Marx travels along the road of radical historicism. Alternatively to embracing philosophical materialism as foundational in Marx's evolutionary formation, he argues that Marx remains strongly committed to radical historicism in all of his pragmatist glory. In sum, West concludes that Marx elementally sides with anti-foundationalism and its subsidiary idealism.

In opposition to West, I argue that correctly apprehending Marx's philosophical evolution points not to an ethical dimension, but rather to his evolving scientific research program in conjunction with studies in political economy. Marx's transition from philosophy to the critique of political economy comprises the logical outcome attached to his philosophical materialist frame of reference. Concomitantly, we uncover that the materialist underpinnings of scientific inquiry effectively correspond to and, moreover, continue as deeply inscribed within Marx's practice of political economic analysis. In other words, the scientific character attendant with Marx's critique of the political economy of capitalism issues from materialist ontology, which is integral to his emergent philosophical locus.

Nevertheless, this scientific characterization, attached to dialectical materialism and consecutively to the critique of political economy, does not require the eradication—from Marxist philosophy and political economy—of their specifically formed and determinately styled normative dimensions. This normative aspect gains particular relevance when concretely taking into account how the critique of capitalist political economy actually points in the direction of proletarian material interests, class consciousness, and class struggle.

The hallmark behind the Marxist notion of the social sciences is that scientific inquiry extends beyond merely providing descriptive accounts of the most immediate appearances. Unmasking the nature of definitive social (class) interests in accord with the underlying contradictions of a structural manner continues as paramount. Engels's observation concerning the importance of Marx's treatment of surplus value is one sterling example. Engels explains the nature of Marx's treatment on how profit emerges from surplus value. Marx scientifically rejects the idea that profit constitutes an attached revenue to capital as a factor of production. He demonstrates that capital when conceived not as a reified economic factor—in relation to land and labor—but as a definitive social relationship, gives rise to new possibilities. It becomes possible to discover—with this penetrating scientific concept—how the category of "capital" necessarily entails the exploitation of the working class.

With this discovery, Marx uncovers the prime social and political implications constituted as the normative guidelines adjoining with the proletarian class struggle. The material interests of the working class objectively stand in contradiction to bourgeois-class interests and thus confronts the very edifice of capitalism. The basis for socialism evolves from the contradictions within capitalism as mode of production. Moreover, this conclusion about capitalism and socialism does not render a moral judgment. The distance between West's radical historicism and Marx's historical materialism and its attendant political economy emerges as light years apart.

Instead of West's ethical thesis, we have Marx's scientific conclusions about bourgeois social reality. Additionally, we must not overlook that the accompanying and foundational philosophy of science—based on dialectical and historical materialism—issues forth a different sort of normative parameters. Consequently, what prevails with the Marxist pursuit of scientific examination cannot be equated with the positivist conception of science.

Positivism mandates—on principle—the removal of all axiologial issues and concerns as relevant to the scientific method. Hume's fork is prominently on display at the positivist/empiricist table. It follows that scientific analysis becomes descriptive in character. This reduces the overriding problems associated with value judgments, thus remaining as no more than emotive acts, sans factual importance.

Marx's critique of the political economy of capitalism is certainly a scientific value judgment of immense significance, and is thus rooted in revolutionary norms of the highest scientific character. What cannot be ignored is that dialectical materialism functions as the philosophical grounding for the scientific nature of Marx's political economic critique. Contra West, we must acknowledge that Marx does not approach capitalism from the standpoint of ethical dismay or moral consternation. Although it rejects an ethical assessment, the Marxist political economic critique of capitalism retains a normative aspect that is class driven. The dynamics of class struggle is the pivotal concern animated by the norms affixed to proletarian (class) interests.
Therefore, my elaboration on the normative dimension of Marxist philosophy stands far from sanctioning West’s ethical dimension thesis. Particularly, the thesis that Marxist philosophy stands paramount as an ethical project. The ethical project thesis, inter alia, functions to subvert the scientific qua materialist nature of Marxist philosophy. Thus, West’s premise—based on the ethical project thesis via radical historicism and anti-foundationalism—actually undermines Marx’s philosophical roots, within the grounds of dialectical and historical materialism.

It reasonably follows, if the claim about Marx—as radical historicist—has any warrant, West must suitably ascertain the precise trajectory of Marx’s philosophical evolution. I contend that West starts with dismissing the centrality of Marx’s dialectical materialist philosophy. This effectively takes place in locating radical historicism as the culmination of Marx’s philosophical concatenation. Such action results from discounting Marx’s philosophical projection from Hegelian (dialectical) idealism to (dialectical) materialism.

For illustration, the historical process of Marx’s materialist inversion of Hegelian idealism via The German Ideology West willfully ignores. Despite the fact that Marx readily and publicly acknowledges that The German Ideology is the key text in his evolution to philosophical materialism. Some readers are keenly aware that Marx co-authored this formidable text with Engels. The German Ideology plainly and affirmatively established how philosophical—dialectical—materialism crucially remained as foundational to their critique of German idealism. It follows that Marx and Engels’s collaborative efforts seriously challenge how West portrays The German Ideology as well as the philosophical worldview of these two comrades-in-arms.

When we inspect The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought, the first three chapters center on the evolution of Marx in relation to the disciplinary scope of philosophy. West claims that Marx ultimately rejects “philosophy” as a mode of inquiry and its encumbering foundationalism. Instead, Marx adopts “radical historicism” along with its “theoretic” modes of discourse. The import of this claim, with respect to the tradition of Marxist philosophy, is that it demonstrates how Marx stands apart from designated others within “Marxist” philosophical traditions. Wherein Marx pursues radical historicism, the other identified thinkers all follow “philosophical” agendas, which are quite distinct from Marx’s theoretics and radical historicism.

Specifically, West argues that Engels—antithetical to Marx—continues to be immersed in what constitutes the “Teleological Quest” (chapter four); Kautsky, in turn, has his “Naturalist Quest” (chapter five); and with Lukács there’s the “Ontological Quest” (chapter six). The concluding chapter is a summation of the fundamental divide between Marx’s radical historicism and all of the prior forms of Marxism. For in their misguided quests, which emanate from not embracing radical historicism, West tells us, they are all in some manner constrained by philosophical foundationalism and the pursuit—in some form—of its corresponding quest toward epistemological certainty.

Therefore, Marx’s theory is not only outside of philosophy tout court, but also more critically stands apart from what is generally acknowledged and depicted as various kinds of Marxist philosophical traditions. On West’s account, Marx is neither positioned within the classical tradition of Marxist philosophy (typically associated with Engels) nor the Social Democratic trend (the tradition of Kautsky) and not even “Western Marxism,” commonly associated with Lukács, among others.

Yet, West miraculously argues that closer to the “mark” (or should I say “Marx”) stands the pragmatist John Dewey, along with the prophetic neo-pragmatist himself, Cornel West. Paradoxically, our pragmatists encapsulate what is most significant in Marx’s philosophy than Marxists such as Engels, Kautsky, and Lukács. With this startling revelation, one does not know whether to jump with joy or instead cry out in pain. Unmistakably, if we have more to gain—by way of Marx and Marxism—in reading Dewey and West in contrast to scrutinizing the works of Engels, it certainly follows that seriously studying Engels—not to mention Lenin, which West excludes from any consideration—amounts to a great deal of wasted time and effort.

Transparently, West’s claim entails that our time and effort could have been more productively spent with learning from the advocates of pragmatism. For those of us that considered Engels and Lenin as foundational for comprehending Marxist philosophy, we can only cry out in pain that we missed a very important opportunity. However, among the consorted individuals not prone to wasting time on Engels and Lenin, they can now with certainty rejoice and rest comfortably knowing the road to Marx’s philosophy comprises the magic key of pragmatism.

On second thought, why stop with John Dewey as the other prime candidate (in addition to West) from the pragmatist camp? Most students of the pragmatist school know that Sidney Hook had more thoroughly examined Karl Marx than Dewey. In the introduction, West even states, “there is no doubt that my interpretation of Marxist thought is influenced by the works of John Dewey, the early Sidney Hook, and Richard Rorty.” Therefore, we ask, why not reclaim Sidney Hook along with Dewey?

Certainly, West is aware of Hook’s prior characterization of Marx as pragmatist. Furthermore, West is quite cognizant that Hook had been a student of Dewey. This comes as no surprise, since West previously published an entire work on pragmatism, The American Evasion of Philosophy. Going all the way back to the 1940s, Hook contends that Marx was essentially located within the pragmatist tradition. Incidentally, the 1940s was the time period just before Hook became a fervent anti-Communist, i.e., during the formative stage of “The Cold War.” In his capacity as bourgeois intellectual, Hook was a prominent voice, especially among liberal (anti-Communist) “Cold Warriors.” Although liberals debate conservatives on the efficacy of reforming capitalism, they still remain staunch defenders of capitalism and bourgeois culture.

When West decided to publish The American Evasion, lo and behold, the liberals bought into the efficacy of
pragmatist politics. Historically speaking—from Emerson to Dewey—there persisted a measured acknowledgement—in the United States—that pragmatism was a viable political instrument, albeit in liberal reformist terms. However, the liberal character of pragmatism was not an attractive feature for all concerned with changing the landscape of capitalism.

The American Evasion—West acknowledged—failed to attract some partisans on the left. Unlike the liberals, the left/socialist contingent did not buy into how pragmatism was a suitable philosophical weapon. Sequentially, West could not comprehend why they deemed pragmatism as undesirable. Clearly, the reason why they rejected his offer is that pragmatism, given its liberal reformist makeup, could not serve as either the theoretical guide or “practical” means for socialist transformation. Subsequently, he shouts out in frustration that his promotion of pragmatism, “as both a persuasive philosophical perspective and an indigenous source of left politics in America perplexed many people.”

Why is this the case? It is precisely because with The American Evasion, we have pragmatism without any Marxist façade. In short, we garner an unadulterated pragmatism, sans any Marxist admixture. For those in tune with Marxism, West’s pragmatist alternative just didn’t smell right; moreover, it failed to provide the correct political fit. In a nutshell, West’s liberal philosophy was not sufficiently proletarian in its class character. Not to mention that pragmatism lacked the revolutionary theory associated with the relevant political objectives, namely, the proletarian struggle against state monopoly capitalism.

On the left of the political spectrum, some activists and scholars very well knew that in an earlier period of mass struggle against capitalism, Franklin D. Roosevelt not only aligned himself with Keynesian economics, but as well wholeheartedly embraced the tenor of Dewey’s brand of pragmatism. Roosevelt discovered that instrumentalism suitably fitted the pressing need for reforming the political economy of capitalism. Roosevelt’s instrumentalist proclivities become most transparent when he sought to gather the necessary nuts and bolts for forging a new path—from the prevailing economic notion of laissez-faire—toward state monopoly capitalism.

In the midst of capitalist crisis, Roosevelt laid the foundation suitable for the putative “Welfare State,” which is far from the advancement of socialism. The notion of the Welfare State effectively legitimized state intervention as the vehicle for market regulations, while in unison sustaining the monopoly capitalists’ tight grip over the economy. This move efficaciously aborted the intensification of the working-class struggle and adjacent prospects for socialism.

From the critical period of the Great Depression and throughout World War II, the Democratic Party emerged as the liberal reformist engine of US politics. The pragmatist approach to political economy undoubtedly had a practical outcome in the interests of the bourgeoisie. Scholars such as Harry K. Wells insightfully point out how pragmatism is intrinsically linked to capitalism and its imperialist—monopoly capitalist—interests.

As a result, we note that West’s claims concerning the power of pragmatism—as witnessed in The American Evasion of Philosophy—remains a rather unconvincing choice as an alternative philosophy, which accompanies socialist—revolutionary—transformation. We must remain clear, in our judgment, Marx was chiefly and foremost an advocate for scientific socialism. He maintained that an appeal to ethics—for attaining socialism—was merely illusionary and utopian. Both Marx and Engels persistently criticized what they dubbed as “Utopian Socialism.”

Consequently, Marx argued that the prospects for scientific socialism vitally included assigning a revolutionary role to the proletariat, which sequentially must overturn (instead of reforming) capitalism. Respecting the viewpoint on political practice, Marx’s materialist dialectics is fundamentally different from pragmatism. Pragmatism views matters of practicality from within the restrictions of the status quo and accepts the inevitability of bourgeois reality. In contrast, dialectical and historical materialism uncovers the contradictions and limits of bourgeois material conditions and the objective basis for its revolutionary overthrow. What follows transpires as the material possibilities for the subsequent transition—on a scientific basis—toward socialism. Hence, the Pragmatist notion of “practicality” should not be conflated with the Marxist—dialectical materialist—position on this matter.

FROM NON-MARXISM TO ANTI-MARXIST: THE PRAGMATIST SUBVERSION OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

Given the later publication of The Ethical Dimensions—when the dust was blown off the covers of his old doctoral dissertation—West thought that there would be a better reception for pragmatism from the left. Perhaps with a book demonstrating how Marx essentially remains a pragmatist, the left could see the light at the end of the tunnel. So, therefore, West dusted off his doctoral dissertation and set out to prove that Marx was basically a closet pragmatist.

West’s claim about Marx as pragmatist additionally demanded a cogent demonstration as to why previous Marxist philosophers incorrectly understood the nature of Marx’s philosophy. Incredibly, we discover this involves Marx himself. In other words, West proclaims that Marx sometimes deviates from radical historicism, i.e., whenever he ventures to collaborate with Engels and thus engages in the putative “Teleological Quest.” Successively, West thinks if he can somehow demonstrate to the left how to get Marx right—no pun intended—then pragmatism emerges as more palatable.

West’s efforts in winning over a left contingency, he astutely reasoned, required some measure of credibility among designated Marxist-reading audiences. In obtaining such a readership, West turned to one of the most well-established and widely respected socialist presses in the United States, Modern Reader. In accord, Modern Reader
assumed the chief responsibilities for the rather extensive publication and wide distribution of his book.

Furthermore, Modern Reader went the extra mile via its subsidiary publication, Monthly Review. We observe that this Marxist (scholarly) journal—Monthly Review—devoted an accompanying special issue to The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought. Moreover, if he could possibly receive the sanction of a “Marxist” publishing house with all the trimmings—including a special issue of its journal devoted to his book—what better façade for his claim that he was a legitimate voice on the left? If the longtime Marxist/socialist trend (surrounding Monthly Review and Modern Reader) decided to jump on board, West assumed that others within the Marxist camp would follow suit. However, West’s hopes of shoring up pragmatism, under the guise of Marxism, hit an unexpected obstacle. Within the Marxist camp, the more perceptively inclined thinkers rejected any conversion into pragmatists.

For illustration, David Wood conveys that with The Ethical Dimensions, West strays from his previous allegiance to Marxism. Correctly, Wood duly notes how West’s characterization of Marxist thought is not consistent with a Marxist analysis. Unfortunately, Wood neglects that this work was—in reality—West’s first step toward scholarly attention to Marxist philosophy. Wood fails to see that what is before us is precisely West’s doctoral dissertation—now established as an officially published book. Nonetheless, Wood provides an important insight. West’s ostensible Marxism was simply a masquerade that willfully covered up his allegiance to pragmatism. Concurrently, The Ethical Dimensions ultimately functions as camouflage—in West’s attempt—for converting the leftist and Marxist partisans into the ranks of neo-pragmatism.

In his autobiographically styled introduction to The Ethical Dimensions, West candidly admits he is not Marxist. Yet, he thinks that this is not all bad nor any cause for alarm because West’s fundamental aim centers on demonstrating that even Marx is not “Marxist.” At least, not in the manner that Engels, Kautsky, or Lukács are so acknowledged. Noteworthy, given the absence of Lenin from West’s text, we can infer that accordingly Lenin and Leninism do not comprise an authentic representation of Marx’s thought. In an earlier published book, Prophesy Deliverance, West characterizes Leninism and Leninists by attaching the absurd tag of “Right-Wing Marxism.”

Nevertheless, West suggests that if we read Marx as radical historian, at root, what we have are the theoretic seeds of pragmatism lurking in the background. He is self reflectively aware of his own distance from Marxism. Ergo, West’s revelation—in the introduction—that he is a non-Marxist. The big kicker is that West thinks his own distance from Marxism, in leftist political terms, ought not be viewed as an aberration. Why is this the case? Because, we are persuaded to believe, West’s considerable distance from Marxism actually mirrors Marx. We must not forget our prior inspection of the conventional views about Marxist philosophy. Unmistakably, our inspection directly resulted in Marx’s philosophy as measurably different from Marxist philosophy.

West’s claim entails a subtle terminological shift, alongside the ambiguous use of the terms Marxist versus Marx’s philosophy. It is the latter term, which functions as the chief point of departure for West’s deliberations on Marx. However, West ambiguously employs both terms; thus we have The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought as representative of Marx’s philosophy and the resultant exclusion of Engels and Lenin, among others, from the Marxist equation. Herein resides the springboard for West’s pragmatist subversion of Marxist philosophy.

This springboard permits West to share a close affinity with Marx. An affinity that results from their common intellectual ancestry in radical historicism. We must not ignore how radical historicism—rather than historical materialism—serves as the common denominator for West’s relationship to Marx. West is most transparent, he is not a Marxist philosopher, yet there is no harm with this acknowledgment. West’s central thesis is that Marx is not a “Marxist” nor is he a “philosopher.”

This presumption about Marx’s relationship to “Marxist philosophy” explains why West sets out to discard all of the various traditions routinely associated with Marxist philosophy. Crucially, West’s accurate claim that he is more than non-Marxist and essentially anti-Marxist—in viewpoint—becomes the catalyst for the incorrect thesis on Marx, specifically, the thesis that Marx shares in the same radical historicism, which West advocates in his role as neo-pragmatist.

Importantly for our assessment, the matter of explicating the nature of West’s conceptual scheme is paramount. When we dig into its core, we unearth that his conceptual scheme relies heavily on Marx adhering to pragmatism. Accordingly, pragmatism is adjoined with a host of corresponding metaphilosophical presuppositions. This account for why and how such notions as radical historicism, anti-foundationalism, and the method linked to “theoretics” gain preeminence in his overall conceptual scheme. The combined force of these concepts collectively functions to push Marx away from any connections to dialectical and historical materialism.

For example, Marx and Engels’s foundational proposition about the contradiction between materialism and idealism successively comprises the primary metaphilosophical question within Marxist philosophy. Yet West’s anti-foundationalism emphatically rejects this proposition. Also, in its stead, West offers up “theoretics” as the prime candidate for Marx’s methodology. Theoretics stands in opposition to all forms of foundationalism including philosophical materialism.

In lieu of the idealism/materialism antithesis, theoretics bears the weight of metaphilosophical substitute for Marxist philosophy. Situated as a pedestrian of “theoretics,” West maintains, Marx willfully travels along the road to historical radicalism and pragmatism. On the basis of this metaphilosophical principle, we uncover the conceptual substance behind West’s anti-Marxism. For if we concede that Marx as dialectical materialist is not Marxist, then West can legitimately claim Marx as fellow traveler.
With that said, let us return to earth, to the material realities that Marx and Engels always have as their starting point. Where The Holy Family is correctly depicted as the material family in idealist distortion. Concomitantly, The German Ideology—comprehended in its historical context—is located in terms of its requisite concrete material conditions. In concert with the "radical historicism" prominently associated with the Left Hegelian tendency, we uncover that Marx and Engels subject to a relentless materialist critique.

It is imperative not to overlook the cardinal fact that the philosophical formation of Marxism—as a critical theory of materialist origins—gained its initial impulse by means of the critique of radical historicism. Particularly, the radical historicist tendency firmly linked to Left Hegelian idealism. Marx and Engels in their sojourn—relating to the critique of German idealism—recognized that Hegel's immense shadow on German intellectual culture (in the nineteenth century) resulted in two concurrent trends within Hegelianism. Left- and Right Hegelianism both claimed the mantle of the German master, with the Left Hegelian trend identifying as politically radical and the Right Hegelian forces committed to conservatism and the preservation of the Prussian state. Of prime importance, for our consideration, the Left Hegelian trend adopted precisely radical historicism as its point of departure.

Consequently, we cannot neglect how Marx and Engels collaborated to expose the pitfalls of Left Hegelianism, which they essentially considered as the primary philosophical and ideological detriment to forging a revolutionary worldview. The foremost danger, Marx and Engels thought, was not the openly reactionary position of the Right Hegelians. Instead, it was the pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric of the Left Hegelian trend. Developing a clear line on the philosophical underpinnings for progressive change in turn mandates confronting the obstacles attendant with Left Hegelianism and its fervently expressed "radical critique."

Despite all appearances, the so-called radical stance of Left Hegelianism was intractably enmeshed within the orbit of Hegel's idealism. Speculative idealism with its mighty roar—Marx and Engels demonstrated—was not an effective substitute for engaging in the serious task of scientific investigation, the object of which comprises material realities of a concrete sort. Hence, the worldview of scientific socialism—philosophically based on Marx and Engels's development of dialectical and historical materialism—stood in fierce opposition to German idealism. Crucially, this vitally included the materialist critique of Left Hegelian idealism via its propagation of radical historicism.

This stubborn (historical) reality regarding Marx and Engels's stance on radical historicism effectively exposes the gross distortion of West's narrative—a narrative that begins by constructing a sharp line of demarcation, which separates Marx from Engels. West's persistent claims concerning radical historicism—versus dialectical and historical materialism—transpires as the key signifier of the great divide. Given this state of affairs, we now uncover why West jettisons Engels from the Marxist equation. Subsequently, for our investigation, Engels's role in the formative stages of Marxist philosophical development emerges as decisive.

NOTES

REVIEW ESSAYS

Hoping in the Darkness of Necro-Being: On Leonard Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader

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When I began to write this essay on Leonard Harris’s A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader, excellently edited and curated by Lee McBride III, I did so naively. I say naively because reading what is essentially a distillation of four decades of scholarship has been illuminating, inspirational, shocking, moving, and humbling. I must confess that there are many pieces in this anthology that I did not know, mostly because they were published in what one can call, without derogation, “out of the way” places. Now, these pieces will become key points of reference for my own work moving forward. And thus, though naïve, I have learned so much. And most importantly, I have got a better sense of Leonard Harris’s own philosophy, a philosophy born of insurgency and ascendancy, a philosophy that is clearly not a scholarly, scholastic, professional performance, but a committed philosophy, a philosophy of and in partnership with a struggle, with a community in duress but also persistence and vibrant celebration of its resilience.

I would like to do these three things in this essay. First, I want to praise the structure of the book, and I want to offer a different way to read its territory. Second, I want to translate that territory into a philosophical map. Third, I want to focus on three key aspects of Harris’s philosophical project and conclude by raising some questions, queries, and quandaries for that project.

First: McBride has divided the book into five parts, each consisting of three to five essays. They move from Harris’s view of what philosophy should be; to racism; to honor and dignity; to an ethics of insurrection; to the question of tradition, canon, and building bridges to a different and more dignifying future. These divisions are felicitous and certainly give us a sense of the range of Harris’s contributions. When I had finished reading the book
and began writing notes on it, it became clear that this structure could also be mapped in terms of some headings of sub-disciplines in philosophy. Thus, the first part ("Part I: Prolegomenon") is really about “the philosophy of philosophy,” i.e., metaphilosophy. Every philosophy worth its name is also a reflection on what it is doing and what it should do. Harris's metaphilosophy is eloquently proclaimed in the subtitle of the book: *philosophia nata ex conatu*. I cannot refrain from making two comments on this beautiful expression, namely, that it evokes, at least for me, Baruch Spinoza's ontology, ethics, and epistemology. Yet, Harris is neither a Spinozist nor a Hegelian. So, in what sense is the “nata ex conatu” to be interpreted, if it is not from the striving of *natura naturans*, or Being beinging/eventing? Clearly, *nata ex conatu* means from the midst of a leaning forward into the future out of a struggle within and for a given community. Hence, my second comment. "Philosophy born of struggle, striving, yearning" is a cardinal orientation for any philosophy and theology of liberation. It places orthopraxis before orthodoxy. This has been read by most philosophers and theologians of liberation to mean that all reflection begins from a locus of engagement, that is, from a praxis of commitment and transformation, and only then and subsequently, we reflect on the efficacy of praxis. If this sounds like Alain Locke's critical pragmatism, so it is, and so much the better for the convergence.

The second part ("Part II: Immiseration and Racism (Oppression as Necro-Being)") is a combination of epistemology and axiology as they are refracted through the prism of “race/racism.” I think one of the virtues of Harris's work on racism is that he has taught us to see that "race" is a product of historically contingent, evolving, transforming, and institutionalized practices of racism: knowing and doing are linked in the production of the allegedly stable concept of race. Harris teaches us not to reify or make of race a fetish as an epistemic idol or icon. Prior to “race” is “racism,” and the former is a "conceptual" category that dissipulates, conceals, pacifies, and makes tolerable the violence, misery, immiseration, and despair that the institutions, practices, customs, habits, and traditions that gave birth to it. Here, I cannot refrain from a reference to Adorno's reflections on the violence that concepts do to subject and objects. But more than a mere epistemology and axiology of the "epistemic" uses and abused of the "unstable" concept of race, Harris's engagement with "race" is a virtue epistemology, i.e., an epistemology that is for living subjects and for subjects that assume ethical orientations towards the epistemic tools they avail themselves of. No knowledge is innocent, and ignorance is a crime, to paraphrase Toni Morrison and Barbara Christian.

The third part ("Part III: Honor and Dignity: Reason and Efficacious Agency") in my estimation is a combination of what we now call "moral psychology" and/or "virtue ethics." Harris’s work, however, brings a distinct and of what we now call "moral psychology" and/or "virtue ethics." Harris’s work, however, brings a distinct and

Against the moral psychology and virtue ethics of those who are responsibly ignorant of the violence of everyday racism, Harris calls for an ethics of righteous indignation, nay, outrage, and thus insurrection. In this insight, Aristotle, Mills, and Harris converge. Why be ethical, if to be ethical is not a "conatus," i.e., a task, an orientation, a praxis, a striving that demands a north star? Ethics, proper, is neither a modus vivendi nor a *stabilis ordum*, but a perpetual vigilance and alertness to failure, harm, and injury. Ethics is a form of insomnia and wakefulness, to paraphrase Levinas. But what keeps us alert and awake? Righteous indignation.

The *fourth* and *fifth* parts ("Part IV: An Ethics of Insurrection; or, Leaving the Asylum (Virtues of Tenacity)" and "Part V: Bridges to Future Traditions") have to do with the philosophy of history, writ large, or what we can call "futurology," i.e., that the future, and thus, what calls it forth and what it leaves behind, has a logos, although not a telos. Harris brings us here, as in the other sections, to another aporia: how to think of the future without telos. Harris is blunt: For him, we live in an amoral universe, and neither nature nor history have a telos, or at least not one that can redeem the incalculable and imponderable suffering of the victims of not just racism, but sexism, pedophilia, and all forms of exploitation, subjection, derogation, vilification, and violence. For Harris, the question is how do we think of a future that is open to radical transformation that at the same time offers no guarantees of redemption, absolution, repair, and hope? For Harris, as for Camus, we should be the Sisyphus that laughs at the malevolent and absent gods of history. All meaning, joy, transformations, and moving forward (where forward is measured by how we abolish a social system of racist immiseration) is our effort and accomplishment.

For Harris, there is no "arch of the moral universe that nonetheless bends towards justice," as Martin Luther King, Jr. believed. There is no moral universe, period. Yet, there are the practices of honoring that build up honor, practices of dignifying that build up dignity, and critical tradition making that transform how we think about our pasts and our possible communal futures. Indeed, we honor and dignify people in order to expand the circle of those to whom we own respect, loyalty, and solidarity. We also engage in these practices to transform our traditions, even dismantle and reject them, so as to "invent new traditions" with new heroes, archetypes, and role models. Every iteration of an ever-transforming tradition is a moral portrait of the generation that foolishly settled on that version of the tradition. Conversely, as Arendt notes, tradition is what has withstood the test of the process of transmission, i.e., rejection and preservation. Every tradition is a ship of Theseus: it is not the same as when it was launched, yet it retains some of its original characteristics, perhaps some of its original animus and orientation. Traditions, for Harris, do not have teloi, but they have orientations, which we afford them through our practices of honoring and dignifying. Thus, Harris’s philosophy of history is linked to a politics. His is a politics of liberation with a dignifying intent that opens up the future. For Harris, then, an insurrectionist ethics is a way of opening up the horizon of the future to what Ernst Bloch called the *humanun*, i.e., a politics of creating human and humane futures.
Thus far, perhaps too obnoxiously and arrogantly, I have offered a different map of Harris’s four-decade-long philosophical itinerary. I have done so, however, in the spirit of hermeneutical generosity and, above all, gratitude. Let me now turn to some questions for Harris’s philosophical project. Before I do so, however, I want to highlight a couple of discussions in the book that were particularly revealing and generative. Harris has a style. His philosophy is “jazzy,” to quote an expression he uses in some of his writings. It is certainly not a Miles Davis kind of jazz, but a jazz that is inflected by the spirituals. This kind of jazz is the one spoken about by James Cone, Amir Baraka, Cornel West, and Angela Davis; it is a Blues Jazz, or a Jazzed Blues. It is fascinating to read nearly four decades of philosophizing that oscillates between red-hot outrage and cold analytical dissecting. I never knew what to expect as I read A Philosophy of Struggle: Was it going to be Carnap and Quine or de Beauvoir and Davis? Part of Harris’s style is also moderated by a philosophical playfulness. All cannot be anger or despair. In between them, there is irony, irreverence, and Rabelaisian carnival. Harris does this when he reverts to, or makes use of, his, what I would call, “philosophical fictions.” I cannot celebrate enough Harris’s genre irreverence. If we are to philosophize “ex conatus,” then we must also create different ways to say, write, and transmit that, which is our conatus, our striving.

Among the many striking aspects of Harris’s work, I must highlight what he calls his “actuarial” account of racism. In his 2018 essay, “Necro-Being: An Actual Account of Racism,” Harris juxtaposes theories that try to explain racism as either virtue or epistemic failures, which in one way or another presuppose what he calls “methodological individualism.” Methodological individualism is the view that individuals are responsible for how they view race and how they may or may not be motivated to act in racist ways, over against “descriptions/depictions” of race. An actuarial account of racism is not an explanation, but a depiction of racism. I found this particular chapter extremely powerful, moving, illuminating, and inspirational. What is noteworthy about this chapter is that it was written before the COVID-19 pandemic, during which we have learned about the “pre-conditions” and/or “co-morbidities” that render some more vulnerable to the virus than others. Not surprisingly, race is a major indicator of “co-morbidities” that spread across a wide spectrum of circumstances and situations: from chronic unemployment, to no or minimum healthcare, to employment precarity, to health preconditions having to do with enduring immiseration. I think that Harris’s project of offering an “actuarial” account of racism potentiates both Foucault and Mbembe’s respective ideas of biopolitics and necropolitics by introducing a “temporal dimension” on racism. Racism is not what one individual does, and it is not what institutions do at any given time and space: it is about determining when someone dies and when someone does not die, how short someone lives and how long someone else does. Race is not simply a chronomorphic and dermatological Manicheanism, it is also a chronotope of life, i.e., race as a chronotopology—as I have argued in some of my work. Life expectancy has become a way to gauge the justice of a society, and racist societies like ours do not do well on that measure, or alternatively, the disparities in life expectancy reveal how racist our society is.

The other fascinating contribution in Harris’s work is his counter to Foucault’s idea that the “panopticon” is the paradigmatic dispositif/apparatus of modernity. Harris offers a different paradigmatic apparatus, the barricado, namely, the barricade that slave ships were outfitted with to deal with the inevitable and frequent slave insurrection that would break out on their decks. The barricado would separate and protect the crew from the slave cargo, creating a quasi-moat that divides those that must live and those that must die or could die without too much expenditure. As someone who has said, what if instead of philosophizing from Sartre’s glass in front of him or Heidegger’s broken hammer or rural stone bridge, we were to philosophize from the deck of a slave ship? I find Harris’s offering of the barricado as a profoundly generative philosophical “tool” to think through how racism made modernity and how modernity created ever more modern racial regimes.

I want to close by raising two related questions. One has to do with Harris’s critical and challenging discussion of the role of Martin Luther King, Jr. in what we can call the ethics and politics of honoring. Harris notes that there are many other Black Americans who could and should have been raised to a special pedestal of collective honor. Perhaps King eventually earned the honor that he was granted/awarded by White America because his work was exemplary of a certain kind of attitude that one could easily read as those of acquiescence, patience, tolerance, and subservience, i.e., all those virtues and qualities that are the opposite of outrage, indignation, insubordination, i.e., all those virtues we associate with Malcolm X. Strikingly, Harris notes that while Martin Luther King, Jr. may have been awarded the honor and dignity by White America, such honor and dignity was not afforded to Black Americans. Here, I would have to ask whether Harris is not wrong. King was elevated to the pantheon of “American” and “global” heroes in part to give birth, or to give nurturance, to a new developing tradition and political mythology in the US. To that extent, in honoring King, “America” was honoring the indispensable role that Black Americans have played in “making of Americans” the better of versions of ourselves, as Obama put it. The question turns on a methodological distinction Harris makes that revolves around “methodological individualism,” i.e., King was the representative of both a movement and a “raciated ethnicity” that appealed to the better aspects of certain traditions that have defined the US. In tandem, I would have wanted to ask about Harris’s conception of dignity, which in large respects I embrace, for it is related to my own conception of “dialogical/communicative dignity.” All dignity is relational, and thus neither monolithic nor stable. Every struggle against insult, derogation, humiliation, dehumanization, pillage, and immiseration is a struggle for the dignity of every human being; and thus, conversely, assault on the dignity of one is the violation of the dignity of all. In this, we must follow Cicero, Pico della Mirandola, Kant, and Nussbaum.

The last question, or rather quandary, is related to the two prior concerns, but it has to do with a statement we can
find in the first sentence of the last paragraph on page 151: “Democracy does not provide a modus operandi for deciding what counts as appropriate forms of dignity.” This statement is echoed in the next page where Harris advocates for a critique of the state, the discourse of rights, and the institutions of citizenship. I take it that there is a bit of semantic work to be done here. Democracy is as much a descriptor as it is an aspiration; it is as much a tradition as it is a form of thinking about political power; it is as much a perversion of institutions as it is a normative critique of that perversion; above all, democracy, at least in the case of the US, is a shorthand for “constitutional democracy.” I could, but will not, quote the Federalist Papers on the imperative to disaggregate the powers of government. Nor will I refer to Thomas Paine, Tocqueville, or Habermas on the co-originality of the role of the people and the rule of law by which people are governed. Does not “constitutional” democracy contain the seeds of what we could call “democratic dignity,” a dignity that one could say is spelled out in the Bill of Rights, where we can read an inchoate promise of subjective and symbolic dignity, and the promise of bodily integrity, or at least the constraint on undue, cruel, and unjustified suffering and pain, and all those other rights that derive from constitutional review of the thirteenth through fifteenth amendments and the subsequent amendments that derive from the constitutional constructivism that reads the US Constitution as a living document, rather than a dead parchment held in the Library of Congress? Isn’t this the case especially today in the wake of decades, even centuries, of police brutality and state sanctioned violence, i.e., lynching and Jim and Jane Crow, and the “anger,” “indignation,” and “insurrection” of White Supremacists that attempted to take over, desecrate and do violence on the Capitol, which was built by slaves and on the swamps drained by slaves and former slaves? Especially today in the shadow of January 6, 2021, an exemplar of a certain type of insurrection, indeed, especially today, don’t we have to take recourse to, appeal to, remember, and recall the democratic dignity promised by our Constitution? And, finally, can we hope to construct a future that is antiracist without the dignity promised by constitutional democracy? Indeed, there is no democratic hope without democratic dignity.

NOTES

2. See Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 133–34 and 245n3.
3. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 238–39.
4. For an explanation of what Harris means by “raciated ethnicity,” see Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 224–29.

“Philosophy Is Not an Algorithm but a Walkway”: A Review of A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader

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Leonard Harris has relentlessly challenged established philosophical traditions. Although Harris’s rigorous rejection of various canonical philosophers has often made his work difficult to read for those unfamiliar with his new ideas such as “necro-being” “ethics of insurrection,” “slavocracy,” and “eternal pluralism,” this collection of essays makes significant strides in explicating Harris’s critical reading of Western philosophical traditions. It also communicates to readers Harris’s call for philosophers to pursue the future of life-centric philosophy of struggle in their own work. Throughout his over forty years of work, Harris has sought to create new fields for epistemologies, metaphysics, and aesthetics based on “the voices of real people” who are “entrapped in their bane temporality, particularity, singularity, encrusted in their inferior race, trapped in their gender gowns, and forged in the wrong religion, nation, language, or culture.” Harris wants philosophers to engage with the struggles of the oppressed people and provide a voice to their social condition. Human life should be the content of philosophy, not a conceptual theorization: “Philosophy should provide tools of poetry, imagery, evidential reasoning, inclusion of real people, and norms incommensurable with philosophy as a science.”

The aim of philosophy is not to look for “wisdom (end state perfection), truth (absolute, foundations), simultaneity, ultimate self/no-self, absolute reason’s reason inclusive of corporeality/the least of us.”

For Harris, this means that philosophers ought to treat other human beings in terms of “strife, tenaciousness, organisms striving,” and not in terms of concepts and abstractions. For him, philosophers ought to talk about the real corporal existence and its struggle, domination, exploitation, and potential liberation in their philosophies. He rejects any foundations or absolutes, any transcendent idealisms and idealisms in philosophy that try to essentialize human realizations.

In fact, abstract idealist quests for metaphysical truth, relations, principles, self, being, nothingness, and transcendence are not hopeful sources of knowledge. These are conceptual sophistries that make impossible to see the real realizations and experience of real beings and listen to the voices of real people. Harris is against such conceptual sophistries because “[they make] impossible real beings; the voices of real people cannot be heard. . . .” He is also against representationists whose philosophical thoughts essentialize the idea of “self” because he thinks that “it is dangerous to pick a sample of the voices considered representative of a kind—the sample necessarily excludes voices that, on reflection, may have been included, ad infinitum.”

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Some may contend that Harris’s philosophy of struggle, with its imperative to liberate oppressed peoples from their concrete oppressive conditions, risks reducing philosophy to the status of an ameliorative and activist social science. I, nevertheless, see much need for philosophers to heed the Harrisian call for philosophy to provide oppressed people with the tools to liberate themselves and show them how to escape from oppression as an attempt to redirect philosophy for the service of the human needs. Philosophers should heed this call even though they may need to study the actual conditions of oppressed people and traverse the terrain of the social sciences.

Throughout this collection, Harris takes the reader through what a proponent of his version of a philosophy of struggle would say in response to the false affirmation of liberation promised by traditional philosophy. It shows how a philosopher of struggle in the Harrisian vein would negate essentialist conceptions of race and racism and reject the very idea of race itself. It also shows how a philosopher of struggle in the Harrisian vein would reject the modern Western incarceration regimes such as prisons because they put life into death prematurely. A Harrisian philosopher of struggle would additionally be open to creating multiple reasons and realizations advocating for liberation of oppressed peoples, based on their specific conditions and circumstances. This would require such a philosopher of struggle to adopt an “eternal pluralism”—a pluralistic understanding of human realities!

Reading Harris’s A Philosophy of Struggle makes me feel like the twenty-first century will be the Harrisian Century for African American philosophy. His philosophy inspires social activism for the freedom for the current and future generations of the oppressed.

NOTES
2. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 33.
3. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 33.
4. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 22.
5. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 32.
6. Harris, A Philosophy of Struggle, 273.
LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

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In this fall 2022 issue of the APA Studies on Teaching Philosophy (formerly the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy) we present to readers one article, a review of the newly translated Aristotle work, De Caelo, and a poem.

The article, by Professor Mitchell-Yellin, is entitled “Generating Ownership of Learning and Community in the Classroom Through an Interconnected Sequence of Assignments.” As the title indicates, Professor Mitchell-Yellin argues that we can help students come to truly understand and fully appreciate the philosophical significance of the positions presented in the course by having the students engage in various classroom assignments, some in conjunction with fellow classmates and some in competition with other classmates. Helpfully, Professor Mitchell-Yellin not only presents detailed descriptions of some of the assignments that he himself has given in his classroom but offers readers general samples of these assignments so that readers might apply his methods to undergraduate philosophy courses of their own choosing.

The book review that we present in this issue is by Thomas Moody and is of C. D. C. Reeve’s new translation of Aristotle’s De Caelo accompanied by Reeve’s Introduction and Notes. Given that until the mid-seventeenth century the views expressed by Aristotle in De Caelo had extensive influence on Western thinking about our place in the universe, it is most welcome to now have Reeve’s English translation of this important book. (The last complete translation of De Caelo, by W. K. C. Guthrie, appeared in 1939.)

To conclude this issue, we have the pleasure of presenting Rich Eva’s poem, “Thinking Time.”

As always, we encourage readers of our publication to write of their own experiences as teachers—whether as constructers of philosophy syllabi for their classes, as promoters of classroom discussion, as examiners of what students have learned, or of anything else that might interest and be helpful to fellow teachers of our subject.

Additionally, we encourage readers to write articles that respond to, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.

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We welcome our readers to the fall 2022 edition of the newly renamed APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy, now called APA Studies in the Teaching of Philosophy. We offer in this edition one article, a review, and a poem.

Professor Mitchell-Yellin’s concept of the ownership of learning surprised some of our reviewers. Does it mean mastering some given body of knowledge? Mastery is, after all, a kind of ownership. Such an interpretation would have its own problems: What is it to master philosophy, and how does a person recognize herself or someone else as having the skills of a master philosopher? The author’s interpretation of the term takes in a large swath of what teachers recognize as central to philosophy teaching. For students to take ownership of their learning, they must be self-motivated to learn, able to set specific goals for themselves, able to build their confidence through teamwork with their peers, and capable of metacognition and persistence. If these conditions are met, we are told, students become invested in what they are learning, know why they are learning it, how they are learning it, and how well they are learning it. Professor Mitchell-Yellin’s paper presents an account of a complexly structured course with these ends in view. Students are organized as “teams,” each having learning goals, and are encouraged to achieve those goals through cooperation with their teammates and a certain measure of competition with the other teams. He concludes his paper with student handouts that convey the general rules they must follow as they learn but from which has been abstracted any specific content. Readers may therefore adapt and apply the general structure of the course to whatever standard undergraduate philosophy courses they may be teaching.

We encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other material (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use. Reviewers are welcome to suggest material for review that they have used in the classroom and found useful. However, please remember that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues. This should be borne in mind not only when writing articles for our publication but also when reviewing material for our publication.

Those of our readers to would like to write of their experience as teachers for our publication are welcome to do so. We are also glad to consider articles that respond,
comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

All papers should be sent to the editors electronically. The author’s name, the title of the paper and full mailing address should appear on a separate page. Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear in the body or the footnotes of the paper. The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself.

Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA. For example, in writing your paper to disk, please do not use your word processor’s footnote or endnote function; all notes must be added manually at the end of the paper. This rule is extremely important, for it makes formatting the papers for publication much easier.

All articles submitted to *APA Studies* undergo anonymous review by the members of the editorial committee:

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**ARTICLE**

*Generating Ownership of Learning and Community in the Classroom through an Interconnected Sequence of Assignments*

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SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Here I describe a course structure I’ve been developing and refining over the past several years that has engendered robust student ownership of learning in my classes and, as a result, promoted collaborative, engaged classrooms and increased student success. My plan is to describe the course structure, explain some of the key motivations behind the various interlocking elements, and share some anecdotal evidence of its effectiveness as well as comments about modifications and challenges. My aim is to share with others something that has worked incredibly well for me and my students; my hope is that something in here will work for you and your students.

I will be describing the course structure as it has applied to my own face-to-face courses, so I’ll begin with some brief comments about context. I regularly teach several writing-enhanced philosophy courses at Sam Houston State University, a regional state university about an hour north of Houston, in Huntsville, TX. Some of these courses are upper-division, such as Philosophy of Crime & Justice and Philosophy of Death & Dying, while others are lower-level core curriculum courses, such as Contemporary Moral Issues and Introduction to Philosophy. All these courses have caps of thirty-five students, though the upper-division courses often have enrollments of around twenty-five students. None of these courses requires or presumes previous coursework in philosophy, and the students come from a wide variety of majors. My Crime & Justice course, for instance, is cross-listed with a Philosophy section and a Criminal Justice (CJ) section and serves mainly as a writing-enhanced, upper-division elective for CJ students. We cover philosophical concepts and methodology, but it’s aptly thought of as an applied philosophy course, as opposed to a course intended to introduce students to the discipline, such as Introduction to Philosophy. I typically teach these courses on a MWF schedule, where we meet for fifty-minute sessions each day, but I have taught them on a TTH schedule with seventy-five-minute sessions. My classrooms reflect my university’s demographics more broadly: majority first-generation, majority woman-identifying, majority identifying as members of races/ethnicities underrepresented in philosophy, many students coming straight out of high school and also many returning to their education after some time off, and almost everyone working full time in addition to taking a heavy course load and having various family obligations. My students are, overall, great! They’re intellectually curious and hungry to learn. When things go well, they feed off each other’s enthusiasm; the rising tide really can lift all boats. My aim in designing this course structure has been to leverage my students’ curiosity and enthusiasm to benefit their learning.

Most courses have several learning objectives. In philosophy courses, in particular, these typically involve some mix of identifying arguments in often difficult texts, critcally assessing those arguments, and communicating all of this orally and in writing. Anyone who has taught philosophy knows this is a tall order—and not just for introductory students. As many of us have discovered, the development of these overlapping skills often goes more smoothly when the subject matter is gripping. A spoonful of interest helps the argument go down. It goes down even more smoothly when the audience—the ones for whom you’re articulating the arguments and voicing the critiques—is made up of one’s student-peers. And the real magic happens when the (primary) goal is not a high grade, but rather making sure you don’t let down your classmates or yourself.
The trick is to structure classes so students step up to the plate, not because they have to, but because they want to. As with so much else that goes into teaching a good course, one key to pulling off the trick is to have a clear structure that is appropriately attuned to relevant goals. Students need to know what you’re asking them to do and why you’re asking them to do it. And the reason should never be simply because that’s what the rubric requires. You want your students to take ownership of their learning. This involves self-motivation, goal-setting, confidence-building, metacognition, and persistence. It pushes the envelope at the intersection of active learning—where knowledge is attained through participation and contribution, where students are “doing things and thinking about what they are doing”—and student-centered learning—where students have some control over the content, manner, and pace of learning. A class that engenders student ownership of learning is one in which students are invested in what they’re learning, why they’re learning it, how they’re learning it, and how well they’re learning it.

This article seeks to describe one way of facilitating all of this that centers, in particular, on the intentional construction of an intellectual community of peers. I will describe a way of structuring a philosophy course that provides students with the freedom to pursue their own interests, asks them to be accountable to each other, and provides them with a range of activities and assignments that serve familiar learning objectives.

The first step is to split the class into three “teams.” I suggest posting the team assignments on the class site (my university uses Blackboard as its web-based instructional platform, and I use this as the course site) as well as sending it out to students through a mass email and/or announcement. The idea is to have the same number of students on each team (or roughly the same number, since some class sizes don’t divide evenly by three), to have rough equality between teams in terms of demographics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, major, standing, etc.), and to have rough equality in terms of personality (e.g., talkativeness, shyness, etc.). Since the groupings are not random and it takes some time to get to know students in all these respects, I have found it best to wait until a few weeks into the course to create the teams. This has the added benefits of allowing all students in the class to get some basic course material under their belts and of creating a cohesive classroom atmosphere. Basic trust and understanding will be important underpinnings of the rotating activities these teams will go on to perform.

The second step is to distribute clear descriptions of the three assignments students will perform as members of their teams. Again, I suggest posting these to the course site and sending them out electronically to all students. (Passing out printed copies is good, but electronic copies are less wasteful and harder to lose.) Typically, I include short descriptions of the assignments in the course syllabus, along with a schedule that lists their due dates. The separately distributed descriptions, however, give much more detail, including clear grading criteria (see appendix for samples). I also typically spend most or all of a class period walking through the three assignment descriptions with the entire class, making sure students have time to ask questions. And I explain that all students will complete each assignment, since the teams rotate through them. Every student is invested in learning the details of each assignment, even though not all students will complete them in the same order.

The three assignments are (1) the supplementary readings assignment, (2) the in-class debate, and (3) the position paper. It’s possible to use just one or two of them in a class, but the combination of all three is designed to enhance peer accountability and class cohesiveness; it also provides students with a scaffolded series of lower-stakes assignments that introduce them to the elements that go into writing a polished research paper of the sort that is often a staple of, especially, upper-division philosophy courses. Indeed, this sequence of assignments can be coupled with a final term paper, making explicit to students that the earlier assignments are preparation for the later one. The discrete assignments in the sequence can also work on their own, independently of the others—though, I’ll say something below about limits to this. Flexibility is the theme. Here, I’ll describe each assignment in some detail and as part of an interconnected sequence. But all of this really is ripe for modification.

(1) The supplementary readings assignment asks students to find two readings from outside the course syllabus on the topic of that unit and then distribute and summarize them, both orally and in writing, for their classmates. The objectives for this assignment include learning how to find appropriate scholarly sources, identify the author’s thesis and argument, write an academic abstract, orally communicate the main ideas to an interested peer, and confidently answer questions. The assignment requires research and writing time outside of class, as well as participation in a highly engaging in-class activity. Depending on how prepared one’s students are, it may be important to provide them with explicit instruction on how to find scholarly resources. At the very least, I suggest requiring that students clear their resources with you before distributing them to the class. This step allows for targeted instruction on how to conduct research for those who need it. And it’s essential that students be provided with examples of the sort of write-up you’re asking them to produce. As I go on to mention below, I do this by providing them with write-ups in this style for the readings I have chosen to assign to the class, which I call “core readings.”

Here is an example of how this might go. In my Contemporary Moral Issues course, we might have a unit on the permissibility of vaccine mandates. For the first two weeks of the unit, I provide the class with some core readings on the topic (e.g., the chapter on immunity passports from Bramble’s Pandemic Ethics), which we all read and discuss together. This provides us with a common foundation. Then, those students in the group of students completing this assignment, call them Team A, find two readings that are both distinct from the core readings and also distinct from each other’s. They can find op-eds, scholarly articles, and so on, just so long as they address the ethics of vaccine mandates. Members of Team A must
clear their proposed supplementary readings with me by a certain date, so I can make sure none of them duplicate each other’s and also that they are all appropriate (e.g., on topic and from a reputable source). They are also asked to produce a short, structured summary of each of their readings and print a copy of each summary for each member of the class, including me. (The printed copies are important, as they allow their classmates to make notes during the presentation activity.) I provide examples of these summaries for each core reading, and the specifics of the structure are included in the assignment description and rubric (see appendix). On a particular class day listed on the syllabus schedule, students come prepared to distribute their summaries to their classmates in a very lively manner that leverages short, repeated interactions with a rotating cast of people.

Here’s how that looks. Before class begins, students in Team A are to email their readings to the entire class (typically, we use the email all users function on Blackboard for this.) When the students show up to class on sharing day, the desks in the room are arranged such that there is a circle of “pods,” with each pod consisting of one desk facing two others. The presenters sit in the single desk, and their classmates (those on the debate and paper teams, Team B and Team C) pair up. Each pair then travels around to each group of three desks to hear a short pitch from each presenter. The activity is highly structured and timed. For each segment, the presenter has one minute to pitch the two readings they’ve found to classmates. Since the classmates that are being addressed are themselves preparing to either engage in a debate or write a short paper on the topic, they are motivated to find resources to help them in their own assignments. Calling this a “pitch” gamifies the activity a bit, suggesting that the presenters are eager to have their readings included as sources in the papers and debate. And it works! Students are often very excited to see their classmates using the readings they’ve provided in the debate and paper assignments; sometimes, students even compete with each other to see whose readings are used more by their classmates in the debate. After the pitch, the paper writers/debaters have two minutes to ask questions about the readings—such as whether they are for or against mandates, whether their arguments are convincing, etc. I keep time for the class, and after the pitch and Q&A are through, the traveling pairs switch to the next pod. (Typically, I have them travel clockwise around the circle, so there’s a clear pattern and no one gets confused.) We repeat this until every traveling pair has had a chance to talk with every presenter.

There are a number of benefits that come from this activity. All of the students in the class have the chance to meet each other in small groups, really learn each other’s names, and get a chance to interact in a manner that fosters familiarity and facilitates dialogue throughout the rest of the term. There are several added benefits for those on Team A. Through repetition, students gain confidence in their ability to succinctly summarize their readings. One minute goes by fast. But they get repeated practice, and they can see their improvement. Typically, the students present ten or eleven times during one class period, and there is often a break time during the session, where they have no one at their pod for one of the rotations. This is a great time to check in with the students and ask how it’s going, prompting them to explicitly reflect on the exercise. They also gain confidence speaking with their classmates. They learn they can answer questions and come to see themselves as experts on the readings they’re presenting. This helps them gain confidence to ask questions during the debate, provide feedback during the essay workshop (more on this soon), and even chime in more during whole-class discussions on this and other topics. Finally, this activity helps to bring the entire class together. It’s a class meeting during which I, the instructor, say almost nothing while my students talk constantly. I have found that our class sessions take on a different character after our first time going through this activity. They become more lively, previously quiet students speak up more, they all know each other’s names, and they look to me much less to carry on dialogue, feeling more comfortable in their own ability to do so.

(2) The in-class debate typically follows the supplementary readings assignment after we have met a few times as a class to integrate the fruits of our classmates’ research into our discussions of that unit’s topic. Students are instructed to use only the sources provided to them in this class (i.e., my core readings and their classmates’ supplementary readings) in preparing for the debate. I intentionally wait until one or two class periods before the debate is scheduled to take place to let members of Team B know which side of the debate they’ll be on. Continuing with the vaccinations example, I split the students on Team B into two sides: (a) vaccine mandates are impermissible or (b) vaccine mandates are permissible. Since they don’t know until late in the unit which side they’ll be on, all students on Team B will have prepared some arguments for both sides. This helps them to sympathetically inhabit the opposing point of view. But it’s also important that they have some time in class to prepare for the debate, exchange contact information, and formulate a plan to meet outside of class to prepare some more. Students are to come to class on debate day prepared to begin right away, as the debate itself takes the entire class period.

The description of the assignment posted to the course site (see appendix) has clear instructions regarding the format the debate will take, including descriptions of the formal speaking roles (e.g., opener, interrogator, respondent, closer) and comments about how students who do not perform one of these roles can earn full credit on the assignment (e.g., take notes and confer with the team during conference periods). Each student is evaluated individually, and though the members of Team A and Team C will each vote on a winner, this does not factor into anyone’s individual grade on the assignment. I also leave plenty of time towards the end of the debate for the audience to ask questions. This is always the liveliest part, and it increases the sense of accountability of each student to another. I’ve seen folks get called out for misrepresenting one of their classmates’ supplementary readings! Towards the end of class, I pass out ballots on which members of the audience indicate which side they think won the debate and why. I then have a volunteer tally the votes on the whiteboard. The justifications students give for their votes are an important
aspect of the exercise, and I always point out that many students state that they voted against their own opinion because the other side had the better arguments.

The objectives for this assignment include improving (i) one’s skill at working on a team; (ii) succinct oral communication of ideas and arguments; (iii) anticipation of objections and impromptu responses to them; and (iv) sympathetic understanding of opposing points of view. Many of these same skills are required to write a good position paper or final essay, but embedding one’s practice in the context of an engaging team competition, such as a debate, can lead to less anxiety and increased peer-to-peer engagement with each other as resources. The result is often greater personal growth and learning through a structured collaborative activity.

(3) The position paper is perhaps the one of these three assignments that is most familiar to philosophy instructors (though debates are also a disciplinary mainstay). The assignment is to write a four- or five-page paper arguing, essentially, for one side of the debate over the other. Students are to argue for a thesis that takes a stand on the topic of that unit (e.g., whether vaccine mandates are morally permissible). I require that students consider at least one objection and respond to it, and they can only use sources from the core and supplementary readings. It is a nice capstone assignment for the unit, and I typically set a due date of a few days after the debate. The objectives for this assignment include improving (i) one’s skill at succinct written communication of ideas and arguments; (ii) anticipation of objections and responses to them; (iii) sympathetic understanding of opposing points of view; and (iv) execution of citation practices and other elements of formal academic writing.

One important part of the position paper assignment is the essay workshop that occurs, typically, one or two class periods before the due date. The workshop serves two important functions, in addition to allowing members of Team C to receive feedback. The first is that it affords an opportunity to clearly demonstrate to students that writing is a process. Members of Team C are required to come to the essay workshop with an outline of their essay. Since an outline is not the same as a rough draft, students get a concrete demonstration of discrete stages in the process of writing a paper; requiring students to construct an outline also scaffolds the assignment in a manner that precludes them banging out their papers the night before they’re due. During the in-class workshop, they engage in a number of activities individually and in a small group (e.g., a one-minute summary of their thesis and argument, a brainstorming session on potential objections, drafting and sharing aloud an introductory paragraph). The groups typically include one member from each team, and this serves the second function of creating an atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration among members of the class. Those students who found supplementary readings and debated on the topic provide feedback on the work of those crafting written defenses of one or the other position. This benefits the members of Team C, as the students on that team get a range of peer feedback on their ideas, the structure of their papers, writing mechanics, etc. It also benefits the members of Teams A and B. They improve their own skill set as writers by providing feedback to those of their peers who are completing the writing assignment.

Once members of Team C turn in their papers, they receive written feedback from me. Some of this is summative, including both comments and scores on a rubric. But this is also an opportunity for formative feedback, especially as it comes to their ideas. And this brings me to a final comment about this sequence of assignments. They are interconnected in a manner that helps students to appreciate the relationship between (1) research, (2) dialogue, and (3) writing. By assigning different groups of students to perform these different tasks all on the same topic, the stakes for any particular student are lowered for that unit. I’m not throwing them in the deep end and asking them to research, rehearse, and write a paper on the topic of that unit. Instead, I’m asking them to perform one of these functions. And the neat trick is that by distributing the workload in this way, I’m asking the class as a whole to collaborate. Team A is doing the research, Team B the dialogue, and Team C the writing. Then, for the next unit, they rotate roles. And they do so again for a third unit. By the end of the term, everyone has had a chance to perform each role. For lower-level courses, I often leave it at this. For upper-division courses, I may ask each of them to pull it all together and write a thought-out research paper as a capstone assignment. Of course, this assignment sequence is compatible, also, with a final exam or experiential capstone project to round out the term (e.g., one could pair it with a service-learning project that asks students to engage with community members outside of the classroom and university).

I’ll close with some brief reflections on benefits and challenges I’ve experienced in classes where I’ve utilized this sequence of assignments. I’ll begin with the benefits, which run along a number of dimensions. For one, it has increased student engagement and student ownership of learning. This has led to improved class discussion—more people speaking more often and at greater depth—as well as improved written work. It is also evident that students enjoy the collaborative atmosphere this creates in the classroom; many of them have said so in their course evaluations. Once we get through the first supplementary readings presentation, the tenor of the class noticeably changes. More people show up more of the time excited to learn together. They feel like they don’t want to let their classmates down, so they do more of the reading ahead of time. In general, they take ownership of the class and their own learning, and they support each other in ways big and small. It can seem like a lot of work, especially up front, to set up a sequence of interconnected assignments like this. But it’s well worth the effort.

And that leads me to two challenges worth reflecting on, especially as you think about the suitability of something like this for your own courses. One challenge is that it takes some time to get a handle on how this is supposed to go. Students aren’t sure what to expect, and they end up feeling much more at home once they’ve been through a round of supplementary readings, debate, and position paper. This can be a teachable moment, where I point...
out their growth to them. But it can also be a source of frustration, especially for those students in Team C, who write the position paper in the first go-round. I’ve had students tell me that they wished they’d been able to write their papers in the second or third round, because they felt more prepared after seeing how things went. Oftentimes, they’re voicing frustration about their grade; they feel they would’ve scored higher had they been assigned to a different team. This raises issues of fairness.

There are two things to say in response. One is that, in my experience, students tend to score higher on all three of these assignments in the second and third rounds. So, it’s not as if members of Team C are uniquely disadvantaged. But since I often make the position paper worth a bit more than the debate or supplementary readings assignments, concerns about fairness remain. This brings me to a second point, which is that, in my experience, students tend to score highest on the debate assignment. And this is especially true for high-achieving and highly motivated students who didn’t do as well as they’d hoped on the position paper. The end result is that they tend to “make up points” on the debate assignment (and, to a lesser extent, the supplementary readings assignment, too).

One way to obviate these concerns about fairness is to structure the course so that students are split into two teams, where Team A does the supplementary readings assignment and Team B the debate assignment, and then they switch. The position paper assignment may then be assigned either as a capstone for the course, say, in finals week, or it may be that students can choose whether to write a position paper on unit 1 or on unit 2, but they must choose one. Either way, all students complete each of the three assignments, just not in the rotating fashion I’ve been describing. This has the advantage of making it so that no students are assigned a position paper at a time when they feel it may be unfair to have them complete it. But there is a trade-off involved. One key benefit of the course structure I’ve described is that it promotes student ownership of and collaboration in producing and sharing knowledge. The entire class comes to function as a team; they are all helping each other learn. It’s a special dynamic fed by the fact that each is playing a different role in relation to others’ exploration of a shared topic. In my experience, this dynamic is more robust when the course is structured around all three assignments, but it can work when just two are involved (something I’ve done several times, mostly in upper-division courses). It’s difficult, though, to develop the same sense of intellectual community when just one of these assignments is used in a class. This is something to keep in mind as you think of potential ways to adapt this course structure for your own purposes.

My hope is that by describing this sequence of assignments I have provided you with some food for thought. Perhaps you’ve found something in here that is directly applicable to your own courses; perhaps you’ve found a useful tidbit or two among other elements that won’t work for you; or perhaps, though nothing described here will translate directly to your own teaching, it has generated some thoughts about ways your own assignments can evolve. For what it’s worth, this way of structuring a course is a result of trial and (repeated) error. I don’t do things the same way each time and in every course. I hope you feel motivated to try some of this out and that it works well for you too.

NOTES

Appendix

(1) SUPPLEMENTARY READING WRITE-UPS RUBRIC

You will find two outside readings and provide a one-paragraph write-up to the class for each one—due by the beginning of class on the due date in the schedule.

Finding your materials: The readings must be cleared with me first, and the process is first come first served (i.e., if two people propose to provide the same reading, I will give preference to the one who contacted me first). In order to propose a reading, you need to email me a link to the reading (e.g., for web articles) or attach a pdf (e.g., for journal articles or print magazine articles/book chapters). I will respond as soon as I can.

Some research tips: You may want to chase down footnotes from our core readings or search for pieces that cite them. You may also want to look for other pieces by these same authors.

When searching for appropriate readings, you may want to utilize scholarly databases (e.g., the SHSU library’s article database) or else restrict your search (i.e., on Google) to scholarly articles on the relevant topic.

Reasons your proposal of a reading may be denied: I will be looking for scholarly comments on the relevant topics we are discussing in class. Thus, personal opinion pieces (e.g., blog posts) by nonexperts are not suitable. Neither are pieces with inflammatory language or without any argument whatsoever (even if these are written by experts!). Also, if you are not the first person to propose the reading, then you will need to find something else.

Length: Your supplementary readings need to be substantive enough to contribute to our investigation of the topic, but they also need to be short enough for others to profitably read them in conjunction with the other supplementary readings. Thus, I think a reasonable target is anywhere from approx. 800–10,000 words (approx. 3–30 pages).
Write-ups: You must produce ONE paragraph on each supplementary reading you provide. Your paragraph must contain the following:

(1) Full bibliographic information in Chicago Style (see here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). (2 points)

(2) A single sentence stating the main thesis of the article (e.g., the conclusion of the argument the author is making). (3 points)

(3) The main reasons the author gives in support of her/his thesis (e.g., the premises of her/his argument). (5 points)

Disseminating your materials: You need to provide each member of class with (i) a printed copy of each reading and (ii) a single page that contains both of your write-ups.

(2) DEBATE RUBRIC

As one of your graded assignments in this course, you will participate in a 50-minute in-class debate. What follows is a description of the structure of that debate, the roles that need to be assigned for each side, and grading criteria for each individual completing the assignment.

Note: It may be a good idea for the debate teams to plan a meeting outside of class time to determine who will be playing which roles and so on. If a meeting is not possible, then an online chat may be a good idea. Please let me know if you need assistance.

Structure: The debate time will be structured as follows—time limits will be strictly enforced.

Team 1: Opener presents Team 1’s opening argument. (3 min. max)

Team 2: Opener presents Team 2’s opening argument. (3 min. max)

Two-minute break for both teams to prepare

Team 2: Examiner asks critical questions of Team 1. (2 min. max)

Team 1: Team can confer together and then Respondent answers for the team. (5 min. max)

Team 1: Examiner asks critical questions of Team 2. (2 min. max)

Team 2: Team can confer together and then Respondent answers for the team. (5 min. max)

Team 1: Closer presents Team 1’s closing arguments. (4 min. max)

Team 2: Closer presents Team 2’s closing arguments. (4 min. max)

Open question period: The class, professor, and either team can ask questions of either side; anyone on the team may respond. (10 min. max)

Determining the winner: Those students not on Team 1 or Team 2 will vote on the winner. (8 min. max) (No one’s grade will be affected by the outcome of this vote.)

Roles: As you can see from the above, there are four distinct roles on each debate team.

Opener: This person will provide the opening argument for the team. This will consist in (a) a clear statement of the team’s position on the relevant topic (e.g., the retributive model is preferable to the restorative model) and (b) one or more arguments in support of this position.

Examiner: This person will ask specific questions (at least two, preferably more) of the other team in response to their opening argument. These questions should target identifiable claims made by the other team and present critical challenges to these claims (e.g., “You say that the restorative justice conference has the potential to further harm victims, but why think this burden outweighs the benefits of this model?”).

Respondent: This person will respond on behalf of their team to the questions asked by the opposing side’s Examiner. These responses must target the questions asked, and the Respondent should try to cover all of the questions asked in the time allotted (this will require some discipline!).

Closer: This person will provide the closing argument for the team. This will consist in (a) a clear restatement of the team’s position on the relevant topic, (b) a summary of the team’s main argument for that position, (c) a recap of the team’s rebuttal to the most serious objections offered by the other team (and audience).

Participation: As you can see, not everyone on the debate team will be playing a speaking role during the debate (though those who are not in one of the four speaking roles may speak up during the open question period). Thus, participation points will be awarded for things other than speaking during the actual debate. Some examples are as follows:

- You may show that you are participating by taking notes for the Respondent and Closer during the debate.
- You may actively engage in planning the team’s deliberations during the break.
- You may actively participate during the Q&A by answering audience questions.

Grading: Each person will receive an individual grade on the assignment, out of a possible 20 points. The criteria will depend on what role, if any, they play. Grades will be posted to the Bb gradebook. There is no way to make-up this assignment. An unexcused absence on your debate day
will result in a zero for the assignment. Excused absences, after discussion with and at the discretion of the instructor, may result in alternative assignments.

(3) POSITION PAPER RUBRIC (CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES VERSION)

Assignment: Your paper should be between 4–5 pages (no shorter, no longer), double spaced, 12-point font. It may use any or all sources from the core and supplementary readings for this unit. Reference and/or title pages don’t count towards the max/min page count.

Your paper should contain the following:

1. An introductory paragraph that summarizes the argument to come in approx. 2–3 sentences. (/2 points)
2. A concluding paragraph that summarizes the argument that preceded it in approx. 2–3 sentences. (/2 points)
3. An argument for a particular moral thesis related to the course topic (e.g., an argument for a claim of the form ‘X is wrong’ or ‘X is permissible’). This will include (a) a clear conclusion and (b) a line of reasoning in support of that conclusion. (/12 points)
4. At least one objection to this argument. (/5 points)
5. At least one response to this objection. (/5 points)
6. A list of references taken only from the core course readings or the supplementary course readings (in Chicago Style: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html) (/4 points)

Total points: /30

BOOK REVIEW

De Caelo


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De Caelo is a 2020 entry in the New Hackett Aristotle series, translated by C. D. C. Reeve, which aims to enable "Anglophone readers to study Aristotle's work in a way previously not possible" (Hackett Publishing, back cover). On the whole, Reeve achieves this goal in this translation, and the text is a worthy adoption for any reader of De Caelo.

Reeve's translation of De Caelo comprises an introduction (37 pages); the translation itself (pp. 1–91) with superscript numerals indicating the corresponding notes; a comprehensive Notes section (pp. 92–242); an appendix with an excerpt of Plato's Timaeus (pp. 243–53); and a thorough index (pp. 256–67). The translation includes both traditional sets of divisions of Aristotle: book-chapter divisions on the inside header and Bekker numbers on the outside header. In-line Bekker numbers are printed continuously on the outside of the text. As a minor criticism, the decision to print the letters in Bekker numbers as superscripts, e.g., 268¹ rather than 268a1, sometimes makes passages rather difficult to locate. Otherwise, all commentary and discussion is limited to the Notes section, which leaves a clean, readable presentation of Aristotle's text in the main body of the work.

In evaluating this edition, it is worth considering who is likely to read this work, and Reeve does so in his Preface. De Caelo is an unlikely starting point in the study of Aristotle, and Reeve is right therefore to serve “the resolute reader that Aristotle most repays” (Reeve, xi). At the same time, the book’s lucid organization should not scare off any reader and makes the text readily usable. In fact, this translation should increase the appeal of De Caelo among Anglophone readers and educators.

Reeve devotes the final six pages of his Introduction to the question of De Caelo’s audience. There he opens with the famous passage of Nicomachean Ethics which cautions that the inexperienced are not a suitable audience for an investigation of politics (1094b25–1095a4). Metaphysics, Reeve points out, offers a similar proviso in the case of science (995a12–16). While Aristotle makes no such comment in De Caelo, his reliance on arguments advanced in the Physics makes it clear that De Caelo is intended for an experienced audience. Reeve therefore acknowledges that he does not intend this translation for readers entirely new to Aristotle, but the New Hackett Aristotle series on the whole aims at a general audience, and Reeve serves such readers well.

The remainder of Reeve’s Introduction (pp. xix–l), which explains the subject matter and types of argumentation employed in De Caelo and situates the text in the Aristotelian corpus, goes a long way to accommodating a general audience. Reeve includes generous quotations of relevant passages in other treatises and lays out the questions and assumptions that underlie the De Caelo. The introduction is no substitute for reading the Physics and other texts that come to bear in the De Caelo, but Reeve nonetheless acclimates his audience well enough to have a clear understanding of the ground De Caelo covers. Reeve’s Notes likewise are not specifically aimed at the beginner but succeed in making the text’s difficult passages comprehensible and citing key passages elsewhere in Aristotle and beyond.

De Caelo has been translated into English far less often that Aristotle's more popular works. Prior to Reeve’s new edition for Hackett, three translations had been produced in the past century. J. L. Stocks's 1922 edition for Oxford has entered the public domain and is therefore freely available online. While scholars of Aristotle may find value in an open-source edition, however, students and readers new to the De Caelo will find such resources, which lack...
an introduction and commentary, frustrating. The situation demonstrates why modern editions of the classics remain essential. Next came W. K. C. Guthrie’s 1939 translation for the Loeb Classical Library. Like all Loeb editions, Guthrie’s presents the reader with the Greek text and corresponding English translation on facing pages. Stuart Leggatt’s 1995 edition for Aris and Phillips likewise provides the reader with the Greek text and facing translation. Leggatt’s edition, meanwhile, contains only the first two of the De Caelo’s four books. Leggatt justifies this division of the text because Books I and II deal more properly with cosmology while Books III and IV turn to terrestrial matters.

The use of the facing-pages translation format in both Guthrie and Leggatt again raises the question of audience. While students of Greek, or readers of Aristotle with a good command of Greek, will find these editions useful, a general audience will likely find that the Greek text (and, the case of Guthrie, accompanying notes of textual criticism) gets in the way of comprehension. Reeve, by contrast, chooses to restrict discussion of Greek to select technical terms, and even then acknowledges them only in the notes and index. Thus, for example, we read at 292a20 that “we should conceive of [stars] as participating in action and life” and are directed to note 327, which provides a thorough discussion of the Greek term praxis, which corresponds to “action.” Without referring to the notes continuously, it can easily escape the reader’s notice that “action” is a significant term. The use of asterisks could help call attention to these key terms without cluttering the pages.

One rather puzzling element of this book is the awkward way in which it incorporates an excerpt from Plato’s Timaeus as an appendix. Throughout De Caelo, Aristotle refers to the Timaeus and offers direct critiques of its cosmology, so including relevant passages of it for comparison is a service to the reader. Reeve also points his reader to the appendix in the relevant notes. However, the omission of any contextualizing comments in the appendix itself may well leave the reader wondering why the particular passages are included and what their relationship to the De Caelo is. While this may be obvious to the advanced student the De Caelo assumes as its audience, a brief note would be helpful for Reeve’s more novice readers.

At $29 for the paperback, De Caelo is consistent with Hackett’s affordable offerings in philosophy; Reeve’s 2021 translation of Eudemian Ethics, for example, is priced at $23. New copies of Guthrie and Leggatt are widely available at a similar price point and are a worthwhile purchase for those readers who want the Greek text at hand. English readers eager to engage with the entire De Caelo—which, I suspect, includes most students—will find the most value in this new offering from Reeve.

POEM

Thinking Time

Rich Eva
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A question asked in ethics class;
They’re champing at the bit.
To slow them down, to be profound,
I tell them, “Think, and sit.”

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